

Sharks in Balance: Healthy Sharks, Healthy Oceans

A creative challenge for students in the United States, from kindergarten through grade 12.

Posters must be received by February 12, 2027. A postmark by that date is not sufficient. Submit a physical poster with the completed entry form; there is no online submission.

The Challenge

Create original artwork showing how sharks contribute to a healthy, connected ocean. Entries should communicate an idea about shark ecology or conservation—not simply portray sharks as creatures to fear.

Grade Divisions

Grades K-2 | Grades 3-5 | Grades 6-8 | Grades 9-12

Entry Principles

- Artwork must be the student’s original work and respond directly to the contest theme.
- Students may research sharks and discuss ideas with educators or family members, but the creative decisions and finished artwork must remain their own.
- AI-generated imagery will not be accepted as student artwork.
- A submission by a minor requires a parent’s or legal guardian’s approval of the entry and publication permissions. Adult entrants may provide their own approval.
- Names, artwork, school information and photographs are published only with appropriate permission.

Judging Considerations

Connection to the Theme

Does the artwork express how sharks and healthy oceans belong together?

Originality

Does the student present an individual and imaginative response?

Clarity of Message

Can viewers understand the conservation or ecological idea?

Age-Appropriate Craft

Does the work show care and effective visual choices for its grade division?

Recognition	
Recognition	Award
Regional first place in each grade division	Medal; advances to national judging
Regional second and third in each grade division	Certificate
Discretionary regional honorable mention in each grade division	Certificate
National first place in each grade division	\$100
One overall grand prize, selected from the four national first-place winners	Additional \$100
Teacher award: The teacher of the overall grand-prize winner will receive a trip award. Full details, including travel arrangements and conditions, will be announced.	

Poster Requirements and Eligibility

Artwork and Materials

- **One artist, one poster:** one artist per poster and one poster per artist. Create original work reflecting the artist's interpretation of the theme.
- **Include a slogan or phrase:** use your own words to show how the poster connects with the contest theme. The official theme title does not need to appear. Check spelling.
- **Size and border:** 18 × 24 inches, horizontal or vertical, with a one-inch border.
- **Paper:** use a single sheet of unruled, unlined paper; poster paper is preferred. No firm or rigid backing. Do not mount the poster.
- **Permitted materials:** color or black and white, using pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, crayons, watercolors or acrylic paints.
- **Not permitted:** charcoal, oil paints, pastels, chalk, glitter or sand. No paste-ons, stenciling or tracing. The student must do the artwork freehand.

Preparing and Sending the Poster

- **Entry form and packing:** download the [printable entry form](#) from BeneathTheSea.us/ocean-pals/poster-contest/ under "Enter the contest." Complete and sign the form, then attach it firmly on all four sides to the back of the poster. Mail flat; no tubes or rolled posters.
- **Received-by deadline:** February 12, 2027. Posters must arrive by that date; a postmark by the deadline is not sufficient.

Who Can Enter

The national contest is open to students in kindergarten through grade 12 in the 50 states, the District of Columbia and the five inhabited U.S. territories, subject to these rules.

School Entries and Advancement

Students enter through their school or homeschool setting. Each school or homeschool setting may submit its top four posters in each grade division. A homeschool setting may be a household or a cooperative. A cooperative selects from all its participating students; its households do not receive separate entry allowances. Each student may enter one poster. Send all entries to the assigned regional contact.

Only the first-place winner in each regional grade division advances to national judging. Regional second- and third-place winners and honorable mentions do not advance.

Repeat Winners

Students who win first place in a regional or national division may enter the following year's contest, but are not eligible to receive any award in that contest. Grand-prize winners are also ineligible to receive another grand prize in either of the following two years' contests.

Staff and Family Eligibility

Officers, directors and staff of a regional or national Ocean Pals contest, and their families, are not eligible for contest prizes.



Judging, Delivery and Permissions

Judging and Award Selection

Regional judges select first, second and third within each region and grade division, assessing connection to the theme, originality, clarity of message and age-appropriate craft. They may also award honorable mentions. Only regional first-place winners advance; second, third and honorable mention do not advance. National judging considers the same posters alongside the other two regional first-place winners in each grade division. No new artwork, application or separate contest is required. One national first-place winner is selected in each grade division; there are no national second- or third-place awards. The four national first-place winners are then considered for one overall grand prize.

Regional Assignments and Delivery

Contest regions: Western — Carol Rose; Central — Gail Tucker; Eastern — Maria Hults. DC belongs to Eastern. Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands enter through Eastern. American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands enter through Western.

Send the poster to the receiving address for your region. For school-affiliated entries, use the school's location to determine the region. For homeschool entries, use the location where the student receives instruction. The contact's postal location does not determine which region you enter. Find the receiving address at BeneathTheSea.us/ocean-pals/poster-contest/ under "Where to send your poster."

Compliance and School Exceptions

Posters that do not meet the specifications may be disqualified. A regional director may authorize a rule modification when needed to meet a school system's requirements.

Agreement and Permissions

The entry form records the following agreement with the student's and, where required, adult's signatures:

I have read and accept the contest rules. I certify that this poster is my original work, created by me, and meets the originality requirements. AI-generated artwork is not permitted. I retain copyright in my artwork.

The physical poster becomes the property of Beneath The Sea, Inc. and will not be returned. BTS may retain, display or donate it. I give BTS nonexclusive permission, without further payment, to reproduce, publish and distribute the artwork in print, online, in film/video and other media for Ocean Pals education, exhibitions and promotion. BTS may credit the artist by name, grade and school. Contact details supplied on this form are for contest administration, not publication.

For an entrant under 18, a parent, guardian or educator authorized by the parent or guardian must also sign. The adult confirms permission for entry and the uses above, and affirms the student's originality statement to the best of their knowledge.

Winner Notification and Award Delivery

Regional and national winners are notified in writing; winners are announced in March. A teacher or parent may be asked to confirm an award winner's eligibility. Join the Ocean Pals program on Sunday, April 4, 2027, during the Beneath The Sea exposition.

