

Carson Worksheet

Chapter 2 “*The Obligation to Endure*” (p 5-15)

Overview: Focus of Critical Inquiry:

Our focus of critical inquiry into *Silent Spring* is fourfold. Note: each of these topics is an option for your Term Paper:

1. To identify Carson’s thesis (focus of her analysis/argument) and document the diverse ways in which she develops that thesis (hopefully, as an example of best-practices to apply to your own critical/analytical writing).
2. To analyze and assess the literary, scientific, and polemic merits of her writing in *Silent Spring*;
3. To analyze/assess the defining elements of her style.
4. To conduct a *problem, effects, and solution* analysis/ inquiry into one or more of the environmental impacts on which she focuses.

I. Free Write: In your reading response/writing journals, free-write for 5-10 minutes on the following quote: “The obligation to endure gives us the right to know” (Jean Rostand 13)

Prompts:

- Why would Carson end her chapter with this quote? Why does she use it for the title of the chapter?
- What is the connection between “enduring” and “knowledge,” between the ability to endure and knowing?

- What conditions might have prompted her to cite this quote, to give it such emphasis?

What problem, if any, might she be calling the reader's attention to?

- What do you think she hopes to achieve by drawing our attention to this quote?

Follow-Up: Post your free-write with your discussion group.

Follow-up: Add on to your free write, addressing any of the prompts not addressed in your initial response.

Worksheet

Instructions: Make an entry in your journal which you record responses to the following, as directed):

II. Thesis & Evidence

1. What is Carson's thesis in this chapter? What claim does she make about the activities of humans? What does she contend is the "central problem of our age," in addition to the possibility of extinction raised by the nuclear arms race? (8).
2. Underline the sentence on p. 8 in which her thesis is most succinctly and forcefully stated?

Thesis Review: To be effective, a thesis must have two qualities

- Succinctness
 - Forcefulness
3. Circle the most forceful words in Carson's thesis.
 4. Post your responses with your discussion group, and see if you can reach a consensus on which sentence is her thesis?

III. Thesis Development/Evidence: (Respond to 2, 5, 6, 7, 9 and any other question of your choice)

1. Make lists of the various categories of evidence Carson provides to develop her thesis.

2. List at least three scientific facts Carson cites to make her argument.
3. List at least three sources she quotes:
4. Find examples where she appeals to logic, emotion, and ethics (logos, pathos, ethos).
5. What are five things that are dangerous or disturbing about the nature of this pollution:
6. Explain how Carson's theory of biologic contamination of the environmental food chain works ("Biologic Magnification" (6)
7. What, according to Carson, is problematic about the use of DDT?
8. How does it evidence Darwin's theory—of survival of the fittest through inherited adaptive capacity to the environment?
9. List four problematic effects of DDT
10. Which of the three appeals is she using here (logic, pathos, ethos)?
11. Make notes in margins, noting different kinds of evidence (facts, quotes, logic,

Questions for Reading/Discussion: Respond to 1, 6, and any two of the rest (2-5).

1. What is the "most alarming" proof of her thesis?"
2. List two ways these insect species are at odds with humans.
3. How does she problematize the legacy of WWII? What are the agricultural uses she cites?
4. Where are these chemicals applied? Implications?
5. How does she contrast the "pace of nature" and these man-made changes? Which of the three appeals is she using here?

6. Why does she believe these chemicals should not be called “insecticides,” but “biocides?” Which is the more accurate term given their intended use in WWII? Why might the petro-chemical industry favor one over the other?

IV. Refuting the Counter-Arguments (respond to both questions):

The Pro Arguments/ Question for Inquiry:

1. What is the central argument used to justify the use of chemical contaminants?

The Con Argument/ Question for Inquiry:

2. How does Carson counter the economic argument? (list four counter-arguments she makes):

Questions for Depth Analysis (Respond to any 4):

1. What policy does she advocate regarding these chemical methods of control?
2. What arguments does she use to counter the rationale for using these chemicals?
3. What man-made farming practices created the need for pesticides (explain with sufficient detail)? How did these practices subvert nature’s built in checks and balances that control insects?
4. What example does she use to reinforce her case?
5. What lesson might be drawn from this historical farming practice? How is the Dust Bowl environmental crisis related to this one?
6. How does nature control insects with “built in checks and balances,”

Invasive Species (Respond to 1, 8, 9 and any two of your choice)

1. How has the importation (witting and unwitting) of invasive species contributed to the problem?
2. How are these species introduced?

3. What examples does she cite?
4. What sources does she cite: Eaton's *The Ecology of Invasions*.
5. What facts does she cite?
6. What metaphor does she use to compare them to:
7. What is ironic about this?
8. What economic logic does she use to destroy the logic of use?
9. What constitutional argument does she use? (p 12)

V. Solutions/Action Plan

Carson concludes her chapter with a comprehensive critique of the practices that are contributing to the problem of chemical contamination of the environment (p 12-13). **Respond to 1, and any two of the rest).**

1. Make a list of her criticisms (see if you can find 10).
2. What practices of the government does she criticize?
3. How is she critical of industry?
4. What criticism makes an ethical appeal?
5. How is she critical of scientists?

Reflective Free Writes

1. How might the crisis have been fueled by our stereotypic fear of insects? What works of art (literature, film) might reinforce our fear of insects? What recent events might have reinforced this fear? What historical examples can you cite where a native species was exterminated because of the fear it generated? **Post your response to your study group.**

2. Should use of pesticides be contingent upon public consent and knowledge? Should “advance investigation” of a chemical’s effects be mandatory? Should industrial practices be held to a higher standard, which include criteria other than economic effects, related to the public good, in which the profit motive is balanced against the public good? What governmental practices have contributed to the problem, where the public good is trumped by economic considerations?

VI. Analysis of Literary Merit/Style:

Question for Inquiry/Analysis/ Assessment (Respond to any two):

What are the elements of Carson’s writing style that help develop her thesis?

1. How does Carson use *syntax (strong language)* to heighten the effect on the reader?
Find examples (at least 7):
2. How does Carson use *irony* to develop her thesis? What is ironic about the crisis? (Find at least 5 examples of irony):
3. How does Carson use *metaphor* to make her meaning clear and heighten the effect upon the reader? (find at least 5 examples):
4. Miscellaneous elements of style: alliteration, parallel constructions (find an example of each). What sounds are being alliterated in these examples? What appeal does this literary device reinforce?

VII. Capstone Activity/Zoom Discussion:

1. What aspect of this chapter did you find the most disturbing?
2. Any personal experience with these issues?

3. What do you think should be done to solve the problem? Were you a judge, how would you resolve the conflict between the interests of the economy/employment and the environment, Big Chemical and The Public Safety? Which is more important: the interests of Free Market Capitalism or Public Safety?

Preparation: Jot down some responses to each in your journal and have them handy for the Zoom discussion.

Ground Rules for Discussion:

- Don't interrupt another speaker;
- Make your point quickly, get in and get out; don't go on and on;
- Don't take another's disagreement with your view personally, and refrain from making personal attacks;

VIII. Term Paper Options: (Source: One or more of the 4 Carson Chapters from *Silent Spring*:

1. Problem, Effects/Impacts, Solution Paper
2. Close Textual Analysis of Carson's style;
3. Close textual analysis of Carson's argumentative strategies;
4. Comparative analysis of either 2 or 3 with one or more of the following: Lane Deer, Muir, Abbey, or Leopold.