

U.S. History
Silent Spring Viewing Guide

1. Why is Rachel Carson's book (and then the film) called "Silent Spring"?

2. Why does she suggest that chemical insecticides and herbicides be called "biocides"? What idea is she expressing by using this word? Is Carson opposed to the use of all toxins?

3. What is uniquely problematic about DDT and other chlorinated hydrocarbons?

4. How do toxins contribute to water pollution?

5. "In nature nothing exists alone." Why is this an important part of Carson's critique? How would you characterize her view of the many relationships in nature: between human beings and their environments, between plants and animals, between water and earth?

6. What alternatives does Carson propose to the use of chemicals to control unwanted pests and plants? Do you think these alternatives make sense in the context of agribusiness?

7. Her description of chemical spraying suggests that moral dilemmas are involved in the use of toxins as well as technical problems of environmental management. What moral dilemma is Carson worried about? Do you share her view?

8. Why is runoff in rivers and the ocean such a serious problem?
9. What lessons does Carson extract from the stories about spraying for the gypsy moth and the fire ant?
10. What was the role of local activists? Of government officials? Of the chemical industry?
16. Do you agree that the project of controlling nature is arrogant, foolish, and dangerous, as Carson argues? Why or why not?
17. After seeing *Silent Spring*, how would you characterize its author? Is she a science writer? An environmental activist? A philosopher?