

Silent Spring's Argument

Track how an author turns evidence into a public argument.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.10 "By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 12..."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one sentence in each paragraph that most helps you understand Carson's purpose. Number the paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 to track how the author develops that purpose.

Making Hidden Costs Visible

- ① In 1962, Rachel Carson prepared *Silent Spring* for publication. The book did not begin with laboratory tables or a list of regulations. Instead, Carson imagined a town where birds had vanished, children fell ill, and orchards stood silent. Her opening was fictional, but its warning rested on years of reporting about pesticides, especially DDT. By asking readers to picture an ordinary community changed almost beyond recognition, Carson made an invisible chemical problem feel immediate. She also risked criticism, since some readers might mistake the imagined town for a literal report.
- ② Carson's argument gained force because she did not portray pesticides as a simple villain with no useful purpose. Farmers had adopted DDT after World War II because it killed insect pests and helped control diseases carried by insects. Yet Carson traced consequences that were easy to overlook. Chemicals sprayed on crops could move through soil and water, enter the bodies of small organisms, and become more concentrated in animals higher in a food chain. The question beneath her prose was not whether people should value health or harvests. It was whether a nation could call a practice successful while refusing to measure its delayed costs.
- ③ Her method mattered as much as her facts. Carson combined scientific studies, public records, and scenes rendered in precise, memorable language. That combination invited readers to examine evidence while also feeling the stakes of decisions made far from their homes. Chemical companies attacked *Silent Spring*, and some critics questioned Carson's competence, but the book intensified public debate about pesticide use. The United States banned DDT for most uses in 1972, after reviews documented environmental and health concerns, although Carson did not live to see that decision. Her achievement was not a single law. She altered the terms on which the public asked scientific questions.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What central idea does the passage develop about Carson's achievement?

2 Why does the author describe Carson's fictional town at the start of the passage?

3 How does paragraph 2 make Carson's argument more complex than a simple attack on pesticides?

4 What does the author mean by saying Carson "altered the terms" of public scientific questions?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write exactly four sentences that explain the passage's central idea. Include one specific detail from two different paragraphs and explain how the passage's arrangement helps develop that idea.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline one sentence in each paragraph that most helps you understand Carson's purpose. Number the paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 to track how the author develops that purpose. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What central idea does the passage develop about Carson's achievement?	Carson helped the public judge pesticide use by considering its wider, delayed consequences, using both evidence and vivid language.
2	Why does the author describe Carson's fictional town at the start of the passage?	The town makes an invisible chemical problem immediate and concrete for readers, though it could be mistaken for a literal report.
3	How does paragraph 2 make Carson's argument more complex than a simple attack on pesticides?	It acknowledges that DDT had useful purposes, then asks readers to weigh those benefits against delayed environmental and health costs.
4	What does the author mean by saying Carson "altered the terms" of public scientific questions?	Carson changed the public discussion so that people considered evidence about pesticides' broader consequences, not only their immediate benefits.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The passage presents Carson as a writer who made a complicated environmental issue understandable without reducing it to a simple choice. Its opening imagined town turns an unseen danger into a scene readers can picture. The next paragraph acknowledges DDT's benefits before examining delayed costs. This arrangement supports the idea that public decisions should be tested against evidence about their wider consequences.

Accept responses that identify Carson's use of scientific evidence and vivid scenes to broaden public understanding of pesticide consequences. For the open task, require exactly four sentences, details from two paragraphs, and an explanation of how the structure develops the central idea.