

## Reading Questions for *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson

1. Carson's first chapter explains the title of her book. Why is it 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" (p. 51). 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. Carson's discussion of Dutch Elm disease leads her to advocate "the conservation of variety." What does she mean by this?
9. Why is runoff in rivers and the ocean such a serious problem?
10. What lessons does Carson extract from the stories about spraying for the gypsy moth and the fire ant? What was the role of local activists? Of government officials? Of the chemical industry?
11. What is Carson referring to when she writes that there is a "human price" for the use of toxins? Why is it so crucial that human beings begin to see themselves as an essential part of the natural world? Why did she believe that people resisted thinking about themselves in those terms?
12. Carson invokes the term "ecology" (p. 189) to describe "the web of life—or death..." What role does this concept play in her analysis?
13. Do you agree that the project of controlling nature is arrogant, foolish, and dangerous, as Carson argues? Why or why not?
14. After reading *Silent Spring*, how would you characterize its author? Is she a science writer? An environmental activist? A philosopher?