

Things to think about: Silent Spring

What is the function of the brief "fable" with which Carson begins?

What does Carson think of the "goal of the conquest of nature" (85)?

Whom does Carson mean when she refers to "the citizen"? Whom does she not mean?

What was the role of science in the destructive pesticide programs of the 1950s? Why were different groups of scientists at odds with each other over this issue?

Sometimes Carson seems to suggest something like a conspiracy theory. Who were the conspirators and what were their motives? Is this theory persuasive?

How does Carson explain the official preference for heavy pesticide use over other methods of insect control?

Why does she repeatedly mention the small amount of money available for certain kinds of research?

What alternatives to pesticides does Carson propose for insect control? What kind of evidence does she use to support her arguments that these alternatives are equally or more effective?

Carson tells many individual pesticide stories that all have the same moral. What is it?

What does Carson suggest about the actual and appropriate role of expert advice in governmental policy making?

What explains the behavior of the federal Department of Agriculture in many of the episodes Carson describes? Why did it persist in insect eradication programs requiring massive pesticide applications after many such programs had proved ineffective? Why did it resist that pesticide applications caused widespread poisoning?

Would you consider Carson's position with respect to pesticide use to be moderate or radical? What arguments can be made for each characterization?

What is the effect of Carson's recurrent metaphorical connection

of the effect of pesticides to that of the atomic bomb and other instruments of war?

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