

CLASSROOM GUIDE

RACHEL CARSON'S WONDER-FILLED WORLD: How the Scientist, Writer, and Nature Lover Changed the Environmental Movement

Written by Kate Hannigan

Illustrated by Katie Hickey

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eBook

Grades: 2-5 • Ages: 7-10

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This STEAM picture book biography highlights how scientist and writer Rachel Carson became the author of the groundbreaking book *Silent Spring* and the mother of the modern environmental movement.

Rachel Carson wasn't always the Rachel Carson, renowned environmental activist. From her earliest years, Rachel had a passion for nature—to her, it was a fairyland, and she loved to write about her adventures and the creatures she saw. Encouraged by teachers, Rachel wanted nothing more than to study the ocean and its inhabitants. Though unable to finish her PhD due to financial constraints, Rachel found work in science and success as a nature writer.

In the course of her work, Rachel learned about the harm caused by recently developed pesticides and chemicals that made their way into the environment. Desperate to protect nature for future generations even as her health declined, she penned the famous book *Silent Spring*—a call to action against the threat of the deadly chemicals. The book is anything but quiet, selling more than 2 million copies and leading directly to changes like the Clean Air Act of 1963 and the Clean Water Act of 1972.

Kate Hannigan, the author of several award-winning children's books, joins her talents with Katie Hickey, a longtime illustrator of popular picture book biographies, to bring the mother of the environmental movement to life for a new generation of readers.

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PRAISE FOR RACHEL CARSON'S WONDER-FILLED WORLD

"A soaring tribute to the perceptive naturalist and writer who jump-started the modern environmental movement... (v)ivid and perceptive."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"This inspiring picture book biography of environmental activist Rachel Carson will stir the inner conservationist in all readers. Born on a family farm in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Rachel grows up close to nature. When her dream of becoming a doctor of biology is cut short by the Great Depression, she pivots to writing freelance pieces. Eventually, she becomes a renowned author with a focus on chemical pesticides; her work is instrumental in the banning of DDT."—*Foreword Reviews*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Look at the book's cover. What details do you notice in the illustrations?
- Read the title and subtitle. What do you think the story is about? Make some predictions. What questions do you have?
- Rachel Carson loved getting outdoors and observing the birds, animals, flowers, and trees all around her. Do you make time to play outdoors?
- Have you ever watched the sun rise? Or set? Or gazed up at the stars at night?
- Have you ever played outside in the rain? In the snow?
- Have you ever listened to birds singing? Or the wind through the leaves?
- Rachel encouraged everyone—young and old—to have a sense of wonder about the natural world. What does having a sense of wonder mean to you?
- We have five senses. Can you name them?
- How do you use your five senses when you are outside? Can you name things in nature that you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste?
- Have you waded into the ocean? Swum in a lake? Climbed a mountain? Hiked a trail? Where is your favorite place in nature?
- What do you like to do when you're outdoors?
- If you could go anywhere in nature, where would it be? Climbing a mountain? Swimming in the ocean? Walking in a desert? Hiking through the woods? Share your thoughts with your class.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

- The author shares quotations from Rachel Carson's writing. Many of them include references to fairies, like this one: *"If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life."* Why do you think the author selected them?
- The author talks about Rachel Carson using all five senses to take in the natural world. Why do you think the author did this? What does she want the reader to think about?
- The Great Depression was a period when many people lost their savings, and jobs were hard to find. Do you think it was a hard time for Rachel Carson when she had to leave school so she could work to support her family?
- Rachel Carson loved poetry and books, and she brought that love to her writing about scientific things. She describes tuna fish as having "the speed of torpedoes and the strength of tigers" and small fish "darting away like a shower of silver meteors." How would you describe fish swimming through the water? Can you think of lively language to use in your writing example?
- Rachel Carson believed chemicals used to kill pests like mosquitoes were being sprayed recklessly and without enough concern for health risks to animals and to people. How would spraying to eliminate mosquitoes hurt songbirds?
- Rachel Carson's books won national awards for informing readers about the natural world. But her last book wanted to do more than just inform. What did Rachel Carson want to do by writing *Silent Spring*? Why did she call her book *Silent Spring*?
- After Rachel Carson's book was published, people began to look at the balance between the help and the harm of using chemical pesticides. Laws were enacted to keep the air clean, as well as rivers and waterways, and to protect the wilderness and more. Though she died not long after her book came out, why do you think Rachel Carson became known as "the mother of the environmental movement"?
- Marine biology. Ecology. Zoology. If you love nature, what are some other subjects you could study to help animals, oceans, and the natural world?
- Take a notebook and pencil with you outside and engage your senses. Write down five things that you observe:
 - See:
 - Hear:
 - Smell:
 - Feel:
 - Taste: