

National History Day Process Paper

When the theme for this year, Debate and Diplomacy, was announced, my teacher gave us a website with potential topics. While perusing the website, I found out about Rachel Carson and *Silent Spring*. With some more research, I concluded that this topic fits the theme perfectly. *Silent Spring* sparked intense debate between the chemical industry, the general public, the federal government, and Carson over man's role in nature. This topic was something I was passionate about because I have done research about environmental issues such as water pollution.

Trips to a local library were beneficial for my research. Additionally, the library held an event on useful resources for NHD. I used the research learning module from Thinkport Inquiry Kits for my thesis statement. I watched a documentary about Carson, which included historians and people who knew her personally. Reading *Silent Spring* was crucial to understanding pesticides from Carson's perspective. Two main books I used were *Understanding Rachel Carson's Silent Spring* and *On a Farther Shore: The Life and Legacy of Rachel Carson*. I also found a recording of the 1963 "The *Silent Spring* of Rachel Carson" TV broadcast, with fantastic quotes and clips, and "The Rachel Carson Center's Environment and Society Portal" website, which discussed the impact of *Silent Spring*. I could not find copies of letters from the public, but I found quotes that addressed the public outcry. Finally, I had an email interview with Fred Krupp, the president of the EDF, about the legacy of *Silent Spring*. I had always known that pesticides are hazardous, but these resources truly opened my eyes to the harm pesticides could cause.

I enjoy making websites, so I thought that making a website would be more familiar and exciting to me than the other presentation choices. There are many quotes from *Silent Spring* and

the opponents of pesticides, so placing them side-by-side on the website effectively showed the claims made by both sides. I used a packet that my teacher gave us about website fundamentals. Example websites provided by NHD gave me ideas for my website.

Carson used eloquent writing to show the public the threats of pesticides like DDT. Pesticides hurt humans' health and food chains. Carson understood that when pesticides were used, the insects that were targeted would become resistant to them, leading to an escalating cycle of more pesticides and resistance (Darwin's Principle). Because of *Silent Spring*, America was led into a heated environmental debate, which continues to this day.

Silent Spring received backlash from the chemical industry. The public was torn between either believing the chemical industry or Carson's book. The president (John F. Kennedy) and Congress initiated investigations and hearings because of it. Despite all the chaos, many environmental acts were passed because of *Silent Spring*, including the National Environmental Policy Act. We might still be using DDT if Carson didn't warn us. Climate change is a huge problem currently, and environmental activists are inspired by what Carson did for America to recognize the dangers of DDT.