Reading the Word and the World: From *Silent Spring* to “Forever Chemicals”[1]

CORE TEXTS[2]	“The Obligation to Endure”–Chapter two of Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*, originally published in 1962. Suggested additional texts: ● “Requiem for Nest”–a poem by Wanda Coleman (published in her collection *Ostinato Vamps* in 2003 but also available online through Poetry Foundation) ● “What are PFAS? Everything You Need to Know about The ‘Forever Chemicals’ Surrounding Us Every Day”–an article by Linda Geddes published online by The Guardian. ● “California Farms Applied Millions of Pounds of PFAS to Key Crops, Study Finds”–an article by Tom Perkins published online by The Guardian.
POSSIBILITIES TO TEACH FOR CHANGE	In “The Obligation to Endure,” Carson critiques the abuse of pesticides and argues that citizens have a right to know the facts about pesticides and to participate in decisions about their continued use. The article by Tom Perkins critiques the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) recent actions–under the Biden administration, the EPA tried to discredit the author of a study of harmful chemicals in pesticides and perhaps even mislead the public about which chemicals are used in pesticides, and under the current Trump administration, the EPA is increasing the number of potentially harmful “forever chemicals” allowed for pesticide use. The three informational texts encourage students to ask questions about "forever chemicals” and to demand more transparency from the EPA.

[1] Any teacher may use this lesson plan. Feel free to adjust it as needed. This is an example lesson based on the Teaching ELA for CHANGE Lesson Plan Template.
[2] This lesson fits naturally within units on rhetorical reading, research, and argumentative or expository writing and can also be taught alongside a novel such as *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck.

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	Wanda Coleman's poem highlights the unseen dangers that threaten wildlife (and human lives). Together, these four texts help students think about ways they can act to address the injustices and issues related to pesticides.
LEARNING OBJECTIVE(S)	• Students will analyze Rachel Carson's chapter to determine its central argument and identify Carson's rhetorical techniques. • Students will evaluate how Carson's argument applies to contemporary issues related to PFAS in pesticides and water supplies.
ASSESSMENT	In groups, students will create posters (digital or physical) documenting Carson's central arguments as well as main rhetorical techniques and explaining how Carson's chapter connects to current concerns about forever chemicals[3].
LEARNING ACTIVITIES & STRATEGIES	1. Introduce the lesson by reading Wanda Coleman's poem "Requiem for a Nest." Facilitate a brief discussion about the theme and warnings this poem offers. 2. Review with students rhetorical techniques like logical, emotional, and ethical appeals. 3. Introduce Carson's chapter. You may want to share these details: a. This chapter comes from *Silent Spring,* a book that was compiled from nonfiction essays in the early 1960s and published in 1962. b. At the time, Americans were terrified of nuclear war and fallout; Carson used the threat of nuclear fallout to help her audience envision the dangers of pesticides and chemical pollution (Lear, 2022). c. After the book was published, the use of the pesticide DDT was banned in the United States. d. Though the works of other authors also played significant roles, this book is credited with sparking the environmental movement in the U.S. and with inspiring the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970. 4. Print copies of the chapter for each student. Then, facilitate a whole-class reading of Carson's chapter. As the class reads, pause and ask for volunteers (or call on non-volunteers) to identify

[3] I suggest students read articles published online by The Guardian or NPR because these articles are usually freely accessible (i.e., you won't have to worry about a paywall).

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	examples of Carson's rhetorical techniques. Support students as they annotate their copies of the chapter. 5. Reread the final paragraph with students and collaborate with the class to summarize Carson's argument in this chapter. 6. Revisit the lesson's introduction by asking students to connect Carson's chapter to the poem "Requiem for a Nest." 7. Place students in groups and make sure they have devices with access to the internet. 8. Explain the group poster assignment and share your requirements (e.g., how many rhetorical techniques should students record on their poster?) 9. Either provide links to online articles for students to read or support them in conducting their own research. 10. Support the groups as they research, compare and make connections, and complete their posters. During a future class period, display students' posters in the classroom and engage the class in a gallery walk so they can learn from other groups.
LESSON CONCLUSION	Ask students what they think Carson would say about PFAs today and if citizens can exercise their right to know and participate in decisions about pesticide use. To continue to reinforce the critical emphasis of this lesson, when you teach a writing unit that requires research and argumentative or expository writing, encourage students to research PFAs and the EPA further.

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References & Resources

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