

Convince Me!

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SUMMARY

In this activity, students will examine examples of persuasive writing from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, then compose their own persuasive statements about an environmental cause.

WHY

Persuasive rhetoric is used in many forms of writing, from advertisements to opinion articles. Students must practice identifying and using persuasive tactics in order to decode the perspective of the author, make their own decisions, and convey their messages to others.

TIME

- 25 minutes

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best with children in grades 4 through 6.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **abundant:** in plentiful supply
- **beguiling:** tricky; surprising; attractive
- **conceive:** imagine; have an idea of
- **concentration:** clear presence of a type of plant, animal, substance, or activity
- **coverts:** hiding places
- **down:** fluffy feathers
- **forefathers:** ancestors
- **lethal:** deadly
- **residues:** left-over parts
- **scarcely:** hardly; almost without
- **sinister:** especially bad or evil
- **visitant:** one that visits

GET READY

- Read the book *Rachel Carson and Her Book That Changed the World* to learn about one of America's most famous biologists and her work in the environmental

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/environment/>.



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movement. A reading guide is available at http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/environment/environment_read.pdf.

YOU NEED

- *Student* sheets (*attached*)
- *Step Back in Time* sheets (*attached*)

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- Read and compose persuasive writing using ethos, pathos, and logos.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Correctly identifies text examples of each persuasive tactic.
- Exemplifies each tactic in writing about another environmental issue.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 History Content Standards

- 4C: The student understands historic figures who have exemplified values and principles of American democracy.

5-12 Historical Thinking Standards

- 2C: Identify the central questions.

5-12 U.S. History Standards

Era 9: Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

- 1C: The student understands how postwar science augmented the nation's economic strength, transformed daily life, and influenced the world economy.

IRA/NCTE Language Arts Standards

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

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4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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Rachel Carson used her books to get people to think carefully about the ways people change the environment. In *Silent Spring*, she used persuasive writing to get people to stop spraying man-made insecticides all over the place, and instead think carefully about the impact of using dangerous chemicals in our environment.

There are many different kinds of persuasive writing, but here are some of the most common:

Do the right thing!

Writers use moral or ethical arguments to convince people that their idea is the right thing to do.

I can prove it!

Writers use facts or logical arguments to convince people that their idea is a smart thing to do.

You want to do it!

Writers use emotional arguments to show how the reader should feel proud, scared, or sad about the idea.

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Take a look at these short pieces of *Silent Spring* and think about what kinds of persuasive writing Rachel Carson uses.

If the Bill of Rights contains no guarantee that a citizen shall be secure against lethal poisons distributed either by private individuals or by public officials, it is surely only because our forefathers . . . could conceive of no such problem. (Pages 12–13)

Is the Bill of Rights something most people in America agree to?

If Rachel Carson thinks the right to avoid the insecticides would have been supported by the writers of the Constitution, does that make it seem like the right thing to agree with?

One of the major sinister features of DDT and related chemicals is the way they are passed on from one organism to another through all the links of the food chains . . . the hay, containing residues of 7 to 8 parts per million, may be fed to cows. The DDT will turn up in the milk, in the amount of about 3 parts per million, but in butter made from this milk the concentration may run up to 65 parts per million. Through such a process of transfer, what started out as a very small amount of DDT may end as a heavy concentration. (Pages 22–23)

If you have already read that DDT is a poison that affects people, would you want to eat the butter described here?

Is this a fact or an opinion, or a little bit of both?

At Clear Lake the western grebe is a breeding bird and also a winter visitant, attracted by the abundant fish of the lake. It is a bird of spectacular appearance and beguiling habits, building its floating nests in shallow lakes of the western United States and Canada. It is called the “swan grebe” with reason, for it glides with scarcely a ripple across the lake surface, the body riding low, white neck and shining black head held high. The newly hatched chick is clothed in soft gray down; in only a few hours, it takes to the water and rides on the back of the father or mother, nestled under the parental wing coverts. (Page 47)

From this description, does the bird sound beautiful, nice, or interesting? What words make you think that?

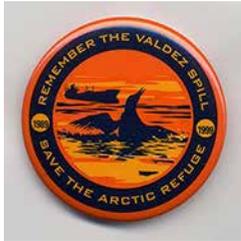
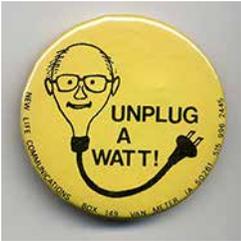
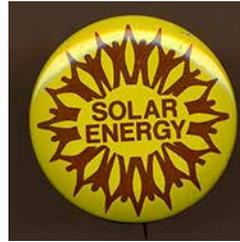
If you like this bird because it is beautiful, nice, or interesting, does that make you want to protect it from insecticides?

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Pick one of the messages from this collection of environmental buttons and write an ethical, logical, and emotional argument for why someone should support that message.

Ethical: What could you say about this message to make someone feel like it is the right thing to do? For example, what respected person might think the Grand Canyon should be protected? “If we don’t protect the Grand Canyon, we will let down the dreams of our great president Theodore Roosevelt.”

Logical: What fact could you say about this message to show that it is important to take action? For example, how many people go to the Grand Canyon each year? “If we don’t protect the Grand Canyon, over 4 million visitors each year will be disappointed.”

Emotional: What could you say about this message to make someone feel sad? For example, what might a person lose if he doesn’t protect the Grand Canyon? “If we don’t protect the Grand Canyon, we can never share its beauty with our children.”



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For more information, visit the National Museum of American History website <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/environment>.

Rachel Carson's love of nature started when she was a young girl. Beyond her mother's love of nature, Rachel's frequent trip outdoors were also motivated by a nature-study movement in the early 1900s, with books and articles advising parents to help children understand nature and want to protect it. Rachel's favorite magazine, *St. Nicholas*, included nature-study articles and illustrations and when she was only ten, Rachel published her first piece of writing in *St. Nicholas*.

In school, Rachel worked very hard and encouraged her classmates to take their studies seriously as well. In addition to top grades, she also worked on and wrote for her school newspaper. Her teachers were important role models who encouraged her to grow up to be a writer or a scientist—and she ended up becoming both!

Although it was very hard for women scientists to publish their writing in the 1930s and 1940s, Rachel's scientific research and storytelling skills helped her become well known for books and articles about the oceans. But in the late 1950s, Rachel felt that she needed to share the newest science about how widespread use of man-made pesticides hurt the environment. She did a lot of research in libraries, wrote to other experts on the topic, and spoke to other authors to get ideas on the best way to share her research. In 1962



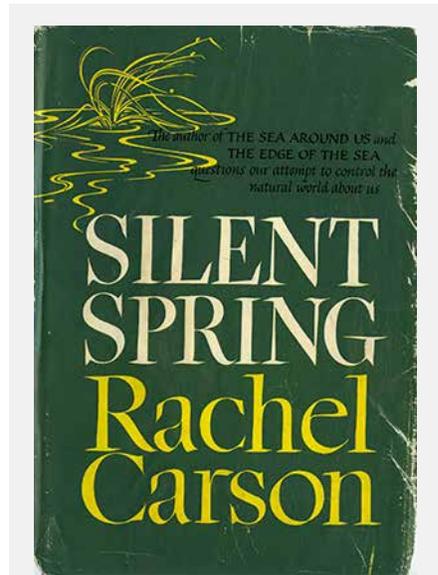
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she published the book *Silent Spring*, which brought a lot of attention to pesticides and other ways that people change the environment.

Some people think that the modern environmental movement might not have started without *Silent Spring*'s wake-up call. Today, the environmental movement has made great changes in the ways everyday people, companies, and governments think about balancing the needs of people with nature's needs. Some topics that environmentalists today think are important include: how people change the places animals live, what chemicals people put in the air or water, and how people make and use energy. What environmental topic is most important to you?

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Cover of the book *Silent Spring*

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