READING DRILL #1

The First Environmentalist: Rachel Carson

Rachel Louise Carson received her degrees in marine biology from the Pennsylvania College for Women and in zoology from the Johns Hopkins University. Her true calling turned out to be much broader in range than the academic study of wildlife, however. As Carson's career as a scientific writer progressed, she became interested in the effects of artificial chemicals on the natural environment. Through her published research, she was the first to direct public attention to the environmental damage caused by the indiscriminate use of pesticides in agriculture. She is thus regarded as the public figure who launched the environmentalist movement.

Upon enrolling in college, Carson had initially intended to major in English and become a journalist or novelist. Her attentiveness to presentation allowed her to convey even rather dry facts in an evocative prose style that held the attention of the general reader. **Wedded to her extensive academic training in biology, Carson's talent for expressive writing positioned her ideally to bring scientific findings about ecology to a mass audience.** She published a famous trilogy about the delicate and complex ecology of the sea, beginning with *Under the Sea-Wind*. That first volume took a large-scale approach, describing the living systems of the ocean in everyday, easily understood terms. *Under the Sea-Wind* was only a moderate commercial success, but it, along with Carson's writings for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, set the stage for her second volume, published ten years after the first. *The Sea Around Us* made Rachel Carson a household name. It became not only a bestseller but also a National Book Award winner. In it, Carson examined more explicitly than before the effects of human action on the creatures of the ocean. The last book in the trilogy was *The Edge of the Sea*, in which Carson trained her writerly and scientific gaze on the shoreline of the East Coast to examine the endangered organisms that populated it.

➤These books established Carson as a public figure who advocated respect for the environment, but the work that would be her most lasting legacy was yet to come. She began to examine data on the effects of agricultural pesticides, spurred in part by a letter from two friends who owned a farm in Massachusetts and expressed concern that sprayed pesticides were causing harm to local wildlife. Carson's research convinced her that high exposure to pesticides such as DDT threatened not only beneficial insects and birds but also people. She put her conclusions in a landmark fourth scientific volume, *Silent Spring*. In the famous image that gave the book its title, Carson hypothesized about an ecosystem in which the calling of birds had been silenced by poison in soil and groundwater.

Carson alleged that the regulations governing use of these chemicals were inadequate, though her positions were not as extreme as they are sometimes now characterized. She did not support the outright banning of pesticides. Rather, she objected to "indiscriminate" use, which is to say, use without any thought for caution and moderation. Eventually, Carson's views were taken seriously at the highest levels of government. President John F. Kennedy's Science Advisory Committee solicited her advice on how to improve rules about pesticide use. She also testified before Congress. Through her influence, she assisted in bringing about far stricter controls on toxic chemicals such as DDT, which deteriorates slowly and thus remains in soil and groundwater for very long periods of time.

Although Carson's fame meant that she was in demand as a public speaker, she much preferred the solitude of research and writing. She employed assistants but frequently did even tedious archival research herself to avoid wasting time reviewing material with which she was already familiar. The same concern with clarity and elimination of waste characterized her writing itself. Though Carson died in 1964, two years after the publication of *Silent Spring*, that book is still frequently cited

LIVEWORKSHEETS

in environmental policy recommendations by analysts and regulators. Her best-selling work, it also remains a staple of high school and college science classes. Indeed, more than one major publication has deemed Carson one of the most influential figures of the twentieth century.

1. The word launched in the passage is closest in meaning to

   (A) wrote about
   (B) reorganized
   (C) began
   (D) researched

2. The author uses the word dry in the passage to indicate that the facts discussed are

   (A) not interesting
   (B) not related to marine life
   (C) not difficult to explain
   (D) available in the works of other scientists

3. Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the boldfaced sentence in the passage? *Incorrect* answer choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

   (A) Carson felt it necessary to choose between becoming a scientist and becoming a popular writer.
   (B) People were surprised at the large-scale damage Carson's writings brought to their attention.
   (C) Carson initially found it difficult to write about ecology for a mass audience.
   (D) Carson was able to popularize her views by combining her writing talent and knowledge of biology.

4. The author uses the phrase a household name to indicate that Carson

   (A) became famous
   (B) wrote very slowly
   (C) did not socialize much
   (D) was already planning her third book

5. The word trained in the passage is closest in meaning to

   (A) questioned
   (B) studied
   (C) reviewed
   (D) aimed

LIVEWORKSHEETS

6. According to paragraph 3 of the passage, Carson was influenced to write *Silent Spring* by

   (A) observing the use of pesticides at her farm
   (B) a letter from friends
   (C) the public reaction to her first three books
   (D) her illnesses caused by DDT

   Paragraph 3 is marked with an arrow [➤]

7. It can be inferred from the passage that DDT is especially dangerous because

   (A) it is the most commonly used pesticide
   (B) its taste attracts birds
   (C) it does not disappear quickly
   (D) it takes a long time to kill insects

8. The "silent spring" in the title of Carson's fourth major book refers to

   (A) the long gap between her two books
   (B) people's unwillingness to speak out against pollution
   (C) the death of wildlife from agricultural chemicals
   (D) the hidden dangers of pesticides

9. The word alleged in the passage is closest in meaning to

   (A) ruled
   (B) argued
   (C) disproved
   (D) limited

10. The word indiscriminate in the passage is closest in meaning to

    (A) ineffective
    (B) uncontrolled
    (C) illegal
    (D) funded

11. Which of the following is NOT mentioned in the passage as evidence of Carson's influence on the regulation of pesticides?

    (A) She spoke before Congress.
    (B) She served on a presidential committee.
    (C) Her work is still cited by regulators.
    (D) She wrote the first set of pesticide regulations.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

12. **Directions:** An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. ***This question is worth 2 points.***

Rachel Carson was a pioneering environmentalist who helped draw public attention to the effects of human activity on wildlife.

•
•
•

Answer Choices	
Carson at first considered majoring in English and becoming a nonscientific writer.	Carson's three books about ocean ecology increasingly focused on the dangers humans posed to marine life.
The government considered Carson a valued expert and invited her input on ecological policy.	Many scientists doubted Carson's conclusions, causing her to write more books to support them.
The book ***Silent Spring*** has had both immediate and long-term influence on environmentalism.	Carson did much of her research by talking to people with everyday experience using pesticides.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

READING DRILL #2

National Flags

➤The flag, the most common symbol of national identity in the modern world, is also one of the most ancient. The traditional flag of fabric is still used to mark buildings, ships, and diplomatic caravans by national affiliation, but its visual design makes it adaptable for other roles as well. Most flags have a compact, rectangular shape and distinct visual symbolism. Their strong colors and geometric patterns are usually instantly recognizable even if miniaturized to less than a square centimeter. Images of flags can thus serve as identifying icons on airliners, television broadcasts, and computer displays.

Despite its simplicity, the national flag as we know it today is in no way a primitive artifact. It is, rather, the product of millennia of development in many corners of the globe. Historians believe it had two major ancestors, of which the earlier served to indicate wind direction. ■ Early human societies used very fragile shelters and boats. ■ Their food sources were similarly vulnerable to disruption. ■ Even after various grains had been domesticated, people needed cooperation from the elements to assure good harvests. For all these reasons, they feared and depended on the power of the wind, which could bring warmth from one direction and cold from another.

Ascertaining the direction of the wind using a simple strip of cloth tied to the top of a post was more reliable than earlier methods, such as watching the rising of smoke from a fire or the swaying of field grasses. The association of these prototypes of the flag with divine power was therefore a natural one. ■ Tribes began to fix long cloth flutters to the tops of totems before carrying them into battle, believing that the magical assistance of the wind would be added to the blessings of the gods and ancestors represented by the totem itself.

➤**These flutters may seem like close kin of our present-day flags, but the path through history from one to the other wanders through thousands of years and over several continents.** The first known flag of a nation or ruler was unmarked: The king who established the Chou Dynasty in China (around 1000 B.C.) was reputed to have a white flag carried ahead of him. This practice may have been adopted from Egyptians even further in the past, but it was from China that it spread over trade routes through India, then across Arab lands, and finally to medieval Europe.

In Europe, the Chinese-derived flag met up with the modern flag's second ancestor, the heraldic crest. The flags used in Asia may have been differentiated by color, but they rarely featured emblems or pictures. European nobles of the medieval period had, however, developed a system of crests (symbols or insignias specific to particular families) that were commonly mounted on hard surfaces; shields to be used in battle often displayed them especially prominently.

➤The production of these crests on flags permitted them to be used as heralds, meaning that they functioned as visual announcements that a member of an important household was present. While crests began to appear on flags as well as shields, the number of prominent families was also increasing. They required an ever greater number of combinations of stripes, crosses, flowers, and mythical animals to distinguish themselves. These survived as the basic components of flag design when small regional kingdoms were later combined into larger nation-states. They remain such for many European countries today.

Some nations, particularly those whose colors and emblems date back several hundred years, have different flags for different official uses. For example, the flag of Poland is a simple rectangle with a white upper half and red lower half. The colors themselves have been associated with Polish nationalism since the 1700s. They originated as the colors of the Piast family, which during its rule displayed a crest bearing a white eagle on a red field. Homage is paid to the Piast Dynasty in the

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Polish ensign, the flag officially used at sea. Unlike the familiar plain flag flown on land, the ensign has a red shield with a white eagle centered on its upper white stripe.

1. Paragraph 1 of the passage describes the design of the typical flag as

   (A) unfamiliar to people from other countries
   (B) likely to change as technology improves
   (C) suited to many different uses
   (D) older than the country it represents

   Paragraph 1 is marked with an arrow [➤]

2. The word miniaturized in the passage is closest in meaning to

   (A) publicized
   (B) colored
   (C) made brighter
   (D) made smaller

3. The word primitive in the passage is closest in meaning to

   (A) ancient
   (B) unsophisticated
   (C) identifiable
   (D) replaceable

4. The word they in the passage refers to

   (A) grains
   (B) people
   (C) elements
   (D) harvests

5. The earliest ancestors of the flag were associated with divine power because

   (A) they were flown as high in the sky as people could reach
   (B) they were woven from valuable field grasses
   (C) they moved with the wind
   (D) tribes that flew them always won battles

LIVEWORKSHEETS

6. The word fix in the passage is closest in meaning to

   (A) create
   (B) respect
   (C) attach
   (D) blow

7. Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the boldfaced sentence in the passage? *Incorrect* answer choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

   (A) Despite the obvious similarities between the two, ancient flutters developed very slowly and indirectly into modern flags.
   (B) Despite the widespread use of modern flags, flutters in the ancient style are still used in some parts of the world.
   (C) Historians are slowly discovering evidence of how the flutters used on ancient totems developed into modern flags.
   (D) Ancient flutters are still sometimes used instead of modern flags to represent a country over official journeys.

8. According to paragraph 4 of the passage, the first known national flag in history

   (A) was not carried into battle
   (B) is still used in China today
   (C) was copied by the Egyptians
   (D) was not colored or patterned

   Paragraph 4 is marked with an arrow [➤]

9. As discussed in the passage, a crest is

   (A) the most important member of a household
   (B) the color of a particular flag
   (C) the symbol of a particular family
   (D) a European noble

10. According to paragraph 6 of the passage, the number of flag designs increased because

    (A) fewer shields were being made for battle
    (B) nation-states were becoming larger
    (C) artists had greater freedom in creating flags
    (D) more families wanted their own symbols

    Paragraph 6 is marked with an arrow [➤]

LIVEWORKSHEETS

11. The word them in the passage refers to

(A) crests
(B) families
(C) hard surfaces
(D) shields

12. The word components in the passage is closest in meaning to

(A) styles
(B) makers
(C) countries
(D) parts

13. The two flags of Poland mentioned in the passage differ in that

(A) they do not use the same colors
(B) they originally represented different families
(C) only one is used officially
(D) one does not have a crest

14. Look at the four squares [■] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.

Therefore, strong winds could easily tear roofs from houses or cause high waves that imperiled travelers.

Where would the sentence best fit?

Click on a square [■] to add the sentence to the passage.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

15. **Directions:** An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. ***This question is worth 2 points.***

There were many historical steps in the evolution of the national flag as it's known today.

-
-
-

Answer Choices	
A Chinese king's practice of having a flag carried ahead of him spread across Asia to Europe.	Ancient tribes respected the power of the wind and began to carry totem poles with flutters for good luck in battle.
Many countries have followed Poland's example and used an eagle on their flags to symbolize strength and power.	Heraldic crests and colors combined with a standard rectangular shape to make a symbol with many uses.
Early humans lived lives that were vulnerable to disruption by natural forces.	Some flags used in Asian countries may have been colored in distinct ways.

LIVEWORKSHEETS