

**A Sense of Wonder on the Shoreline:
Rachel Carson's Philosophy of Environmental Education for Children**

In 1956, seminal environmentalist Rachel Carson published "Help Your Child to Wonder" (posthumously reissued as *The Sense of Wonder*, 1965), a personal essay broaching a philosophy of environmental education for young people. Throughout, Carson—a marine biologist conscious of the life-giving properties of water—draws attention to the contemplative and developmental possibilities afforded by encounters with shoreline, ocean, and rain. Her gist is that, though children have a "clear-eyed vision" and "true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring" in the world, such vision and instinct often falter in the course of growing up. Hence her essay's purpose: to encourage adults to nurture (and adopt) the child's sense of wonder at nature—to strive for "a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life."

Best known for *Silent Spring* (1962), the pesticide study that influenced the rise of the modern environmental movement and the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Carson figures prominently in contemporary children's non-fiction, most notably in biographies by Amy Ehrlich and Wendell Minor (2008), Joseph Bruchac and Thomas Locker (2009), Sarah Fabiny and Dede Putra (2014), and Laurie Lawlor and Laura Beingessner (2014). At this pivotal moment in American history, when the EPA has fallen into the hands of an avowed enemy of environmental protections, poised to roll back regulations on corporate pollution, it seems timely to discuss the ways in which such books invite young readers to identify with Carson's environmental imagination. Foregrounding authors like Bruchac and Lawlor who trace Carson's environmental ethics to her own sense of wonder in contemplating the Atlantic Ocean, in this paper, I explore how contemporary children's authors prime young readers for that wondrous capacity to sustain a feeling of connection with the natural world. In particular, I consider the extent to which such authors are conscious of the radical possibilities of Carson's philosophy of environmental education—of being sensitized enough to the wonder of nature so as to act against those who endanger it.