

Student: Sarina Cooper (11<sup>th</sup> grade)

School: Western Albemarle High School

Principal: Mr. Darah Bonham

For most of my life, I've taken for granted the natural world around me, and the fact that I live in an area that has clean water, air, and soil. *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson increased my awareness that this is not always the case for everyone. I now realize to a further extent how susceptible the balance of ecosystems are when it comes to human activity. *Silent Spring* exposes the harmful human health and environmental effects of various chemical pesticides and, according to Carson, the consequences of not taking precaution with or testing out chemicals and products before using them. *Silent Spring* made me realize that I cannot make assumption about the intentions and results of human activities on the environment. I admire Carson for her bravery in writing a book that faced heavy criticism from powerful chemical companies that were producing substances like DDT and other chlorohydrocarbons. Although *Silent Spring* was published fifty-eight years ago, it is still relevant to environmental injustices faced today. Runoff of fertilizers and other chemicals into the Chesapeake Bay has created dead zones, and damaged the health of a once-thriving ecosystem. Millions of citizens in the United States still do not have access to clean drinking water. There is still a lot of progress to be made by current and future generations. Not only did Carson's book encourage me to appreciate the natural world and its beauty, but also to take action on the issues that I care about. Recently, my friend and I designed two rain gardens for our school. With the help of our Horticulture II classmates, we are currently digging out two big gardens where a variety of native plants will be planted to mitigate and filter runoff from our school's greenhouse roof and to serve as a pollinator habitat. We are hoping to share our success by encouraging students from other schools in Albemarle County to start rain garden projects of their own. In this way, Dr. Carson's activism and motivation to solve environmental issues still lives on in my generation.