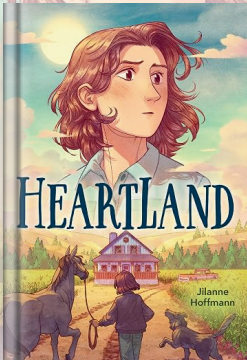


DISCUSSION GUIDE: HEARTLAND



This guide was created by Afoma Umeh and Evelyn Khoo-Schwartz.

ABOUT THE BOOK

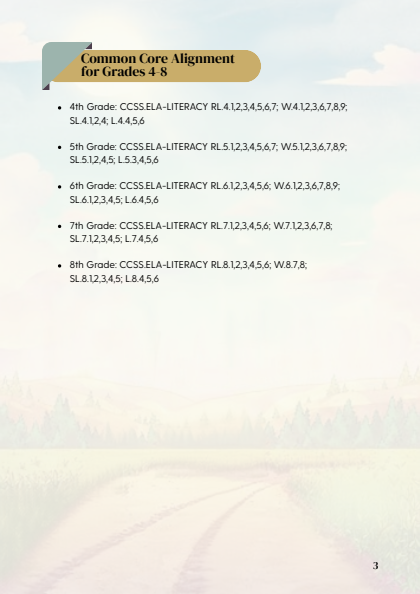
Out of the Dust meets *Me and Marvin Gardens* in this coming-of-age novel about a young misfit searching for the truth of her family's past, set against the backdrop of an environmental cover-up.

Twelve-year-old Xyla is sick of two things: working on her family's sixth-generation Iowa farm and her mother's nagging words, "Pay attention!" But Xyla can't help getting lost in the thoughts that fill her head, which sometimes leaves a wake of costly mistakes. If only her mom would tell her something—anything—about her dad, who left when she was little. Then maybe she could run away to live with him.

Xyla's world gets even messier as a new family begins renting a vacant house on the farm, and the daughter is the kind of kid Xyla's mom clearly prefers—focused and motivated. But when the girls stumble across an environmental disaster right next door, Xyla must learn to trust her new friend and her own complicated mother to figure out how to stop it.



Told in alternating timelines between the past and present, this heartfelt story brings to life a funny, hopeful, unforgettable narrator as she unravels the mysteries of her family and farm.



Common Core Alignment for Grades 4-8

- 4th Grade: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL.4.1,2,3,4,5,6,7; W.4.1,2,3,6,7,8,9;
SL.4.1,2,4; L.4.4,5,6
- 5th Grade: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL.5.1,2,3,4,5,6,7; W.5.1,2,3,6,7,8,9;
SL.5.1,2,4,5; L.5.3,4,5,6
- 6th Grade: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL.6.1,2,3,4,5,6; W.6.1,2,3,6,7,8,9;
SL.6.1,2,3,4,5; L.6.4,5,6
- 7th Grade: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL.7.1,2,3,4,5,6; W.7.1,2,3,6,7,8;
SL.7.1,2,3,4,5; L.7.4,5,6
- 8th Grade: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL.8.1,2,3,4,5,6; W.8.7,8;
SL.8.1,2,3,4,5; L.8.4,5,6

Discussion Questions

Use these questions as you read the book. Please note that all page numbers are from the hardcover version of this book. In this section, you'll find:

- Pre-reading Questions
- Chapters 1-7 (pp. 1-33)
- Chapters 8-12 (pp. 34-75)
- Chapters 13-16 (pp. 76-128)
- Chapters 17-22 (pp. 129-220)
- Chapters 23-29 (pp. 221-298)
- Chapters 30-37 (pp. 299-364)
- Chapters 38-44 (pp. 365-405)
- Reflection Questions

Pre-Reading Questions

Answer these questions before you begin reading the book. They will help prepare readers for the plot and main themes, pique interest, and create personal connections to the main characters.

1. Look at the choice of images and color scheme of the book cover. What do you think this story will be about?
2. Think about the title of the book, HeartLand. What do these two words, "heart" and "land," convey? How does this add to what you think the book will be about?
3. This book is told in a mixture of concrete poems, narrative prose, and first-person diary entries. Have you read books like that before? What do you think of these different forms of writing?

Chapters 1-7

Readers meet Xyla in the summer of 2023 (present day) and learn how she views the world while being at odds with her mother and missing her father, a man she barely remembers.

4. The novel opens with poems from the perspectives of Time and Weather. Why do you think the author chooses to let two inanimate characters speak first? (pp. 1-3)
5. Xyla says she and her mom are “two broken, out-of-sync hearts.” In what ways are Xyla and her mom out of sync? Why is this word choice particularly apt, given what each of them loves to do? (p. 6)
6. Part of Xyla's bedtime routine is to play the music box with the song “Daddy's Little Girl.” Why do you think she does that? (p. 20)
7. Before we meet Xyla's father, the author has us read a poem from his perspective. What does it make you think about him? What clues does the poem give you about Xyla's parents' relationship? (p. 22)
8. Xyla calls herself a horologist, someone who studies clocks and timekeeping. Why does she call time her “frenemy”? (p. 30)

Making Connections

Time and Weather open the novel by speaking for themselves, and The Farm joins them later. Giving a voice and a personality to something that isn't alive is called personification. (pp. 1-3)

Pick one object or idea from your own daily life. It could be your alarm clock, your school bus, your phone, homework, or winter.

- What kind of personality would it have? Is it patient, bossy, tired, sneaky?
- Write three or four lines in its voice, speaking directly to you.
- Read it aloud to a partner and see if they can guess what you chose.

Chapters 8-12

Xyla finds her mother's diary, and readers learn more about Cassie's perspective on growing up on the Alkorn farm in the late 1980s. Readers also get their first impressions of Alegria.

9. What does Gramps explain to Cassie about mushroom hunting? (p. 53)
10. What is Cassie's reaction when she discovers Xyla reading her diary? Are you surprised by her reaction? (p. 62)
11. Xyla initially calls Alegria an intruder, then later describes her laugh as a "fizz-giggle" and seems to warm toward her. How would you describe Alegria's personality? Do you think she and Xyla will get along? (p. 66)

Making Connections

Gramps teaches young Cassie how to hunt mushrooms, including how to tell a safe one from a dangerous one. Gramps' knowledge doesn't come from a book. It comes from years of paying attention to one particular place, and from someone older passing it down. (p. 53)

- What does Gramps know that a visitor to the farm would not?
- Think of someone in your life who knows a place, a skill, or a craft deeply. What do they notice that you don't?
- Interview that person with three questions about how they learned it. Write down one thing they told you that surprised you.

Chapters 13-16

Xyla learns more about Alegria's history and her desire to have a quinceañera. The girls find Cassie's xylophone and other objects mentioned in the diary, see for themselves the effect of the CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations), and visit Mr. Lanski, the librarian. Alegria and Xyla manage the push-and-pull dynamics of their burgeoning friendship.

13. Weather's winter poem ends with the lines, "I have no interest in your opinion. / Nothing personal." How does this contrast with the way The Farm is portrayed? Why do you think the author gives these inanimate characters such different personalities? (p. 94)

14. Cassie's Pops refers to "waiting for Persephone to return / and dry her mother's tears." What myth is this referring to? What does it mean? (p. 104)

15. In the poem "The Only Thing I Want to Escape," what image does the last line create? What type of poem is this? Why do you think the author chooses this image and this line to showcase Cassie's feelings? (pp. 106-107)

16. Xyla says, "my brain 🤖 in the most spectacular way." How does the author's use of emojis highlight Xyla's voice and her time period, especially in contrast to Cassie's diary entries from 1989? (p. 117)

Making Connections

When Cassie asks Alegria to work alongside Xyla on the farm and says Alegria will help Xyla stay focused, Xyla describes the way she feels as "my quills pointed at her." (p. 88)

- What animal is Xyla comparing herself to, and what does that comparison tell you about how she feels?
- Why is "my quills pointed at her" more powerful than simply saying she was annoyed?
- Write your own image for a time you wanted someone to back off. Compare yourself to an animal, an object, or a kind of weather.

Chapters 17-22

Xyla and Alegria find out more about young Cassie through the yearbooks in the library. In Cassie's diary, Ryder's father is injured. In the present day, Alegria gets sick.

17. Alegria says Xyla is her No. 1. Why does she call her that? Why does this make Xyla so excited? (p. 133)

18. We hear the perspective of Earl Butz, a real historical figure who was one of the architects of the agricultural policies affecting the Alkorn farm. What is his argument for those policies? Why do you think the author includes this poem? (p. 138)

19. In the poem titled, "TANK MAN-JUNE 1989," Pops says the man is on a fool's errand but is a hero. Cassie wonders, "Is someone with guts / A HERO? / or / A FOOL?" Why do you think this incident resonates with Pops and Cassie? What do you think of Cassie's question? (p. 142)

20. Young Cassie trips and breaks the eggs. How does her mother respond? How does that mirror the way Cassie responds when Xyla trips during the storm and fails to secure one of the tunnels? Why do you think the author places these two moments so close together? (p. 174)

21. Young Cassie thinks about her father, "we are so alike, / and I'm not even a boy." What does she mean by this? How do you think it has shaped her outlook and behavior? (p. 205)

Making Connections

Young Cassie thinks about her father, "we are so alike, / and I'm not even a boy." Xyla and her mother, on the other hand, seem convinced that they have nothing in common. (p. 205)

- List three traits Xyla and Cassie share. Use evidence from the story so far.
- Which do you think causes more conflict between people, being too alike or being too different?
- Write about one way you are similar to a parent, sibling, or close friend, and one way you are different. Which of the two causes more friction between you?

Chapters 23-29

Young Cassie learns that the Alkorn farm is in financial trouble. She has to sell her horse, Twiggy, to Billy and give him riding lessons. Xyla discovers her father's name and finds a picture of him on the Porca Miseria website. She also discovers the pollution at the creek.

22. Young Cassie says, "the more they say it's not your fault, / the more I'm sure it is." What happened to make her feel guilty? Do you agree with that statement? (p. 237)

23. Even though Xyla's father is still alive, Mr. Lanski talks about him in the past tense, saying, "He was a man of the people." What do you think Mr. Lanski means by his use of the past tense? What does Xyla believe about her father? (p. 252)

24. Who gave young Cassie the clay birds in the bin? Why do you think they were saved? (p. 266)

25. In another "Time Will Be the Judge" poem, Cash Kane explains why he and Cassie divorced. Why do you think these poems, from Cash Kane and Earl Butz's perspectives, are titled and written this way? (p. 275)

Making Connections

Xyla finds pollution in the creek. She notices the problem long before she tells anyone about it. Scientists call this kind of careful noticing observation. A useful observation records what you actually see, not what you assume caused it. (p. 243)

- What exactly does Xyla observe at the creek?
Separate what she sees from what she concludes.
- Write the report Xyla could have filed that day.
Include what she saw, where she saw it, when, and what she thinks it means. Keep the observations and the conclusions in separate sections.
- What would make an adult take that report seriously?

Chapters 30-37

Young Cassie shares her farm troubles with Lupine's family, and the two families partner to move toward organic farming. In the present, Xyla meets her father, Cash Kane.

26. Why do you think Alegría shushes Xyla when Cash Kane is on the phone during their visit? (p. 306)

27. What does young Cassie mean when she thinks, it's "Our mushroom. /And we have picked a good one"? (p. 335)

28. What convinces Xyla to finally report the spill? Why do you think she has been delaying? (p. 364)

Making Connections

Xyla thought: "Maybe friendship had its own kind of math. Sharing things added up to more, not less." (p. 364)

- What does Xyla mean? What has she shared that left her with more instead of less?
- Most math doesn't work this way. If you split a sandwich, you have half a sandwich. Name three things that actually grow when you share them.
- Write about a time you shared something and ended up with more than you started with.

Chapters 38-44

Xyla finally tells her mother about the polluted creek and discovers that her father has erased her phone. Alegria's father, Lucas, talks about his wife and tells the girls about quitting the hog operation, Porca Miseria. Xyla suggests that her mother go into partnership with Alegria's family.

29. Who or what is Xyla named after, and why did her mom choose it? (p. 370)

30. Xyla realizes that “keeping stories to yourself never let anyone know you or what you cared about.” Which characters in this story have been doing that? How has it affected their relationships with others? (p. 390)

31. Mr. Lanski’s shirt reads, “BOOKS: FRUIT FROM THE TREE OF LIFE.” How does it echo the themes of this section and of the novel as a whole? (p. 402)

32. Xyla thinks, “I guess I’m glad you can’t go back in time, because you might get stuck there wallowing in the gravity well of a black hole.” Which characters have learned from time’s passage? (p. 405)

Making Connections

Chapter 40 is titled “Reversing Entropy.” Entropy is a scientific concept: left alone, systems tend to fall apart and become more disordered over time. A room gets messy. A machine wears down. Soil loses what it needs to grow things. Reversing that decline is possible, but it always takes energy from somewhere. (p. 377)

- Find three things in this novel that were falling apart. Who spent energy to reverse each one, and what did it cost them?
- Why do you think the author gave this chapter a science title instead of an emotional one?
- Name something in your own life, your family, or your community that is drifting toward disorder. What would reversing it take, and who would have to do the work?

Reflection Questions

After reading the book, reflect on the questions below:

33. Cassie and Xyla's relationship grows significantly throughout the novel. How does Xyla's discovery of Cassie's diary shape their interactions? How do their stories echo each other's? How does TANK MAN relate to both of their stories?

34. Xyla's many interests and personality quirks provide strong thematic currents that thread throughout the novel, such as her interest in time, her unusual phrases, and her love of LEGOs and reading. Which of these did you find most compelling? How did her strong personality drive the plot?

35. The voices of Weather, Time, and The Farm are very distinct. What narrative format does the author use for each voice, and how does each one capture the essence of that inanimate character?

36. HeartLand doesn't separate the health of the land from the health of the people living on it. Trace one character whose wellbeing changes along with the land around them. What is the author arguing by linking the two?

Vocabulary Words

Dive into the enriching vocabulary that brings Xyla and Cassie's stories to life and learn some new words to improve your reading and writing skills.

Chapters 1-7

Sagging (p. 5) · Gobsmacked (p. 7) · Exasperation (p. 11) ·
Germination (p. 12) · Entropy (p. 23) · Flitted (p. 27) ·
Nanosecond (p. 31)

Chapters 8-12

Wolfing (p. 35) · Nefarious (p. 39) · Constellation (p. 44) ·
Ruminate (p. 47) · Dawdling (p. 52) · Conspired (p. 55) ·
Pronked (p. 71)

Chapters 13-16

Gap-toothed (p. 77) · Baffled (p. 85) · Chirped (p. 87) ·
Souped-up (p. 92) · Bootstraps (p. 101) · Ante (p. 105) ·
Bristled (p. 113)

Chapters 17-22

Myriad (p. 130) · Tartness (p. 139) · Grimy (p. 149) ·
Coaxing (p. 154) · Ornery (p. 171) · Curdled (p. 206) · Eddy (p. 207)
· Auger (p. 209)

Chapters 23-29

Pandemonium (p. 227) · Gumption (p. 229) · Delinquency (p. 232) ·
Stew (p. 236) · Stagnant (p. 243) · Posse (p. 261) ·
Exuberance (p. 267) · Ricocheted (p. 270) · Brittle (p. 281)

Chapters 30-37

Dormant (p. 300) · Flinched (p. 303) · Delegating (p. 309) ·
Petrifying (p. 311) · Kaleidoscoped (p. 315) · Crooks (p. 331)

Chapters 38-44

Apoplectic (p. 365) · Whistleblower (p. 368) · Misguided (p. 373)
· Remediated (p. 377) · Smitten (p. 379) · Benevolent (p. 385)

Major Themes & Curriculum Connections

Explore the book's major themes and find ways to incorporate them into your curriculum or build a curriculum around them.

Main Themes

HeartLand features several relevant and highly discussable themes, but this guide highlights the four most prevalent themes below.

Keeping Secrets

In this novel, almost every character is protecting a secret. Cassie won't tell Xyla about her father and doesn't want her reading the diary, Xyla delays reporting the polluted creek, Pops and Cassie's mom hide the farm's financial trouble, and Lucas won't talk about Alegria's mother. Each of these silences is meant to protect someone, built on the idea that what people don't know can't hurt them. As the novel progresses, that protection starts to cost more than it saves. The plot pushes each character toward telling the truth, and the story argues that honesty is what finally lets these families and this community share the burden and hold each other accountable.

Supportive Friendships

Both Cassie and Xyla have strong friendships in the novel, and these secondary characters provide substantial support to our protagonists, while also showing how Cassie and Xyla have to grow in their own abilities to be good friends. Cassie has Ryder, and then Lupine, who share common interests and defend and support Cassie when she needs it, so much so that when she loses them, Cassie is bereft. This theme is especially evident in the emotional connection between Alegria and Xyla, the way Alegria explains what it means to be a No. 1, and the way the girls can bicker but still have each other's backs.

Rural Life

The novel's heart is in the farming community that Cassie grew up in and Xyla inherited, and it brings to life both the joys and challenges of farm life—from the endless to-do lists and the

backbreaking work to the love of nature and strong independent spirit that comes with the lifestyle. This full picture of farm life is juxtaposed with the stereotypes of farm kids, as seen in Cassie's diary entries, which make her and other characters like Ryder and Hank the target of bullies like Billy.

Similarly, the defensive poems written from the perspective of Cash Kane and Earl Butz show how the discrimination and difficulty of farm life can shape the adults they become. Alegría's family provides another view of agricultural communities and the impact of the large corporate farms, in contrast to the organic farming that Lupine's family starts and Cassie is hoping to continue.

Environmental Justice

Both *Weather* and *The Farm* are distinct, personified voices in this novel, speaking both to the characters within the book and directly to the reader. Farmers are incredibly dependent on weather, and a farmer's agricultural practices—whether it is using harmful chemicals, not allowing the land to lie fallow, or not planting a diversity of crops—are all intertwined and have a significant impact on the lives of farmers. This theme is woven throughout the novel and also impacts the social and emotional well-being of its characters: how Alegría, Lupine, and Xyla all get sick from pollution, the bullying that the farm kids experience at school, as recounted in Cassie's diary, and even the reasons behind the corporate farms' policies.

Curriculum Connections

Find links between Xyla's story and your curriculum with these insightful curriculum connections.

English Language Arts

HeartLand features many forms of figurative language and diverse writing formats.

- **Concrete Poetry and Emojis:** Have students define and identify the concrete poems in the novel. Analyze how the author's deliberate choice to have Cassie's concrete poems contrast and complement Xyla's emojis in prose. Then, discuss how the visual element anchors the story in a specific setting and adds to the sense of place in the novel, with its intense focus on the land. Students can write an essay comparing and contrasting the specific poems and emojis that highlight the characters' voices and the novel's setting.
- **Personification:** Time, Weather, and The Farm have all been given voices and personalities in their poetic entries in the novel, using the literary device of personification. Students can practice identifying personification in poetry, analyze how this device creates texture and contrast in a novel, and see how it highlights the underlying themes the author is trying to convey.
- **Etymology and Word Creation:** Energetic, word-loving Xyla comes up with many unique and creative epithets when she is startled or stressed. The words she uses are often archaic

words or synonyms for more common slang, such as skirling or bum-farts. Using a dictionary, thesaurus, or digital sources, pick a few of these epithets to find out the meaning and etymology (history of words) of each word. Write an essay about the language and time period that the word was most commonly used in, why it might have fallen out of favor, and why Xyla might have used it during that particular scene in the novel.

History and Social Studies

- *HeartLand* is set against a backdrop of real events, and Cassie's 1989 diary entries place readers in a specific moment in American farming history: the 1980s Farm Crisis. The Author's Note provides brief descriptions of how government policies led to the rise of large factory farms and affected lives in small towns and farming communities. Students can deepen their understanding by using both primary and secondary sources, including the words of the specific historical figures involved. They can then write essays or create multimedia presentations or newscasts about their learning. [Iowa PBS](#) and the [State Historical Society of Iowa](#) both have strong starting points.
- The labor rights movement and the role of the unions and union-breaking is a quiet but steady drumbeat in the background of this novel. Older grades might be interested in exploring more about Lucas and Mateo's role in the farmworkers' unions, and especially the historic contributions of Latin-American workers, in these resources at the [Library of Congress](#) and the [National Museum of American History](#).

Environmental Science

- The novel doesn't keep pollution in the background. Farming chemicals, animal waste, and the health of the people living beside them are all connected in the plot, and the Author's Note gives students a starting point for the science. Have students research the step-by-step impact of DDT, Roundup, or animal waste, then create an explainer video about the harmful effects and what could be done about them.
- Wendell Berry and Earl Butz are real farmers with opposing views on how land should be worked, and students can build a side-by-side chart of their positions on questions the novel raises, such as farm size, chemical use, and what a farmer owes the land. Have them quote each man in his own words, then write a short response on which argument the novel itself makes and how it makes it. Butz's views are documented in his [oral history for the Nixon Presidential Library](#); Berry's work is collected at [The Berry Center](#).

Extension Activities

Complement your reading of *HeartLand* with some of the following hands-on activities to build a greater appreciation for the story.

Design a Mr. Lanski T-shirt

Mr. Lanski, Xyla's favorite librarian, wears a different bookish themed shirt every time she sees him! Pick your favorite book tagline and design what it would look like. Remember to use images or other font choices that would highlight the theme of the tagline. Go even further and incorporate a scene from the novel that highlights the essence of that book tagline.

Step 1: Choose your favorite T-shirt tagline from the book

My Favorite Tagline: _____

Step 2: Brainstorm your best illustration ideas for the tagline

My Ideas: _____

Step 3: Draw your design on the front and back of the shirt



Concrete Poetry

Throughout Cassie's diary entries, her concrete poems highlight how she's thinking and feeling. Pick YOUR favorite place and write down words and images that you associate with the place. Then, write your own concrete poem, choosing one image to anchor your thoughts and words.

Part 1: Choose a Place

Think of a place that is special to you.

Part 2: Brainstorm Words

Write words, feelings, memories, and images you connect with this place.

Things I See 

Sounds I Hear 

Feelings I Have 

Memories I Remember 

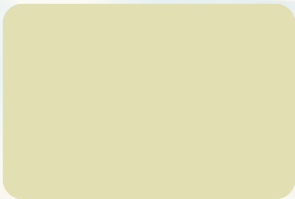
Part 3: Choose Your Shape

Pick an image that represents your place.

My image/shape:

Now arrange your words into that shape.

My Concrete Poem:



Part 4: Poet's Reflection

Cassie uses poetry to share feelings she may not say out loud.

What does your concrete poem reveal about your connection to this place?

Quinceañera

Alegria's commitment to convincing her father that she should have a quince motivates both Alegria and Xyla, and shows Xyla a way to be proactive and argue for something she believes in. Alegria's declaration of Xyla as her first *dama*, or maid of honor, cements their growing friendship. Using reliable print and digital resources, research and explore the multiple rituals of a quince, their symbolic meaning, and their impact on a community.

Part 1: Quinceañera Tradition Detective

Research different quinceañera rituals using reliable sources. Complete the chart below.

Tradition/ Ritual	What Happens?	What Does It Symbolize?
 Quinceañera Dress		
 Changing of Shoes		
 First Dance		
 Tiara/Crown Ceremony		
 Candle Ceremony		
 Bouquet		

Part 2: Culture & Community Connection

A quinceañera is not only about the birthday person—it involves family, friends, and the community.

Answer the questions:

1. Why do you think celebrations like quinceañeras are important to families?

2. How can traditions help people feel connected to their culture?

Mushroom Growing

The theme of growing and picking your own mushrooms, being careful not to pick the poisonous ones, is a thread woven throughout the novel. With an adult's help, try growing your own mushrooms at home using a mushroom growing kit and eating your own produce! Remember: never eat wild mushrooms unless you know what is safe.

Part 1: Mushroom Research

Research and answer:

What is a mushroom?

Where do mushrooms grow?

Why are some mushrooms dangerous to eat?

What makes edible mushrooms different from poisonous mushrooms?

Part 2: Create a Mushroom Guide

Design a mini guide called:

"The Smart Mushroom Explorer's Guide"

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ✓ Mushroom facts | ✓ How mushrooms grow |
| ✓ Safety rules | ✓ A drawing of your favorite mushroom |

Interview Rachel Carson

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* changed how the world thinks about chemicals and the land, and the Author's Note will point you to why. Read part of the original text, then write and record an imagined interview podcast between Carson and one of the characters in *HeartLand*, such as Cassie, Pops, Lucas, or Cash Kane. Use specific quotes from her text and specific examples from the novel.



VOICES FOR THE EARTH

A Rachel Carson & HeartLand Podcast

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* changed how people think about protecting nature. In *HeartLand*, characters also learn how human choices affect the land and the environment.

Create an imagined podcast interview between Rachel Carson and a character from the book (Cassie, Pops, Lucas, or Cash Kane).



Part 1: Explore Rachel Carson's Ideas

Read an excerpt from *Silent Spring*.

Important quote:

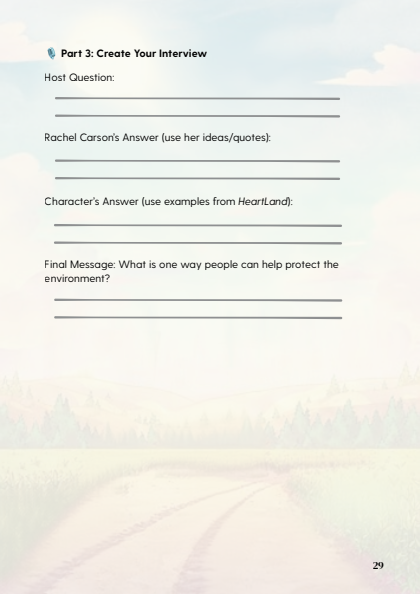
What does this quote mean?



Part 2: Connect to HeartLand

Character I chose: _____

How would this character respond to Rachel Carson's ideas?



Part 3: Create Your Interview

Host Question:

Rachel Carson's Answer (use her ideas/quotes):

Character's Answer (use examples from *HeartLand*):

Final Message: What is one way people can help protect the environment?

Additional Reading

Dive into these books about environmental justice, farm life, historical fiction, and alternating perspectives:

- *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse
- *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan
- *Echo Mountain* by Lauren Wolk
- *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park
- *Hoot* by Carl Hiaasen

About the Creators of This Guide

Afoma Umesi is the founder and editor of the Reading Middle Grade website, an invaluable resource for all things middle grade literature. She curates book lists and reviews books for readers ages 8-14. Afoma loves realistic contemporary middle grade fiction and will never say no to a graphic novel.



Evelyn Schwartz is a teacher and librarian and is never happier than when she is nestled in a cozy armchair with a good book and a warm cup of hot cocoa. She loves to read historical mysteries and is always keen to get lost in an immersive fantasy world.