

English 2201
The Literary Essay - Worksheet #4
The Enduring Sea
by: Rachel Carson

In a well-developed multi-paragraph essay, explain how Rachel Carson's tone is developed. You may wish to discuss her use of literary elements such as diction, point of view, and imagery.

1 Now I hear the sea sounds about me; the night high tide is rising, swirling with a confused rush of waters against the rocks below my study window. Fog has come into the bay from the open sea, and it lies over water and over the land's edge, seeping back into the spruces and stealing softly among the juniper and the bayberry. The restive waters, the cold wet breath of the fog, are of a world in which man is an uneasy trespasser; he punctuates the night with the complaining groan and grunt of a foghorn, sensing the power and menace of the sea.

2 Hearing the rising tide, I think how it is pressing also against other shores I know - rising on a southern beach where there is no fog, but a moon edging all the waves with silver and touching the wet sands with lambent* sheen, and on a still more distant shore sending its streaming currents against the moonlit pinnacles and the dark caves of the coral rock.

3 Then in my thoughts these shores, so different in their nature and in the inhabitants they support, are made one by the unifying touch of the sea. For the differences I sense in this particular instant of time that is mine are but the differences of a moment, determined by our place in the stream of time and in the long rhythms of the sea. Once this rocky coast beneath me was a plain of sand; then the sea rose and found a new shore line. And again in some shadowy future the surf will have ground these rocks to sand and will have returned the coast to its earlier state. And so in my mind's eye these coastal forms merge and blend in a shifting, kaleidoscopic pattern in which there is no finality, no ultimate and fixed reality-earth becoming fluid as the sea.

4 On all these shores there are echoes of past and future: of the flow of time, obliterating* yet containing all that has gone before; of the sea's eternal rhythms - the tides, the beat of the surf, the pressing rivers of the currents-shaping, changing, dominating; of the stream of life, flowing as inexorably* as any ocean current, from past to unknown future. For as the shore configuration changes in the flow of time, the pattern of life changes, never static, never quite the same from year to year. Whenever the sea builds a new coast, waves of living creatures surge against it seeking a foothold, establishing their colonies. And so we come to perceive life as a force strong and purposeful, as incapable of being crushed or diverted* from its ends as the rising tide.

5 Contemplating the teeming* life of the shore, we have an uneasy sense of the communication of some universal truth that lies just beyond our grasp. What is the message signalled by the hordes of diatoms*, flashing their microscopic lights in the night sea? What truth is expressed by the legions of the barnacles, whitening the rocks with their habitations, each small creature within finding the necessities of its existence in the sweep of the surf? And what is the meaning of so tiny a being as the transparent wisp of protoplasm that is sea lice, existing for some reason inscrutable* to us - a reason that demands its presence by the trillion amid the rocks and weeds of the shore? The meaning haunts and ever eludes* us, and it's very pursuit we approach the ultimate mystery of Life itself.

- * lambent: running or moving lightly over a surface
- * obliterating: destroying
- * inexorably: not capable of being persuaded; unrelenting
- * diverted: to change direction
- * teeming: to be full of things
- * diatom: a single-cell alga
- * inscrutable: impossible to understand
- * elude: fail to be understood or grasped

Planning Space
(will not be graded)