

Approved for use in 8th grade

Summary of the Work:

Like the Oklahoma dust bowl from which she came, 14-year-old narrator Billie Jo writes in sparse, free-floating verse. In this compelling, immediate journal, Billie Jo reveals the grim domestic realities of living during the years of constant dust storms: That hopes--like the crops--blow away in the night like skittering tumbleweeds. That trucks, tractors, even Billie Jo's beloved piano, can suddenly be buried beneath drifts of dust. Perhaps swallowing all that grit is what gives Billie Jo--our strong, endearing, rough-cut heroine--the stoic courage to face the death of her mother after a hideous accident that also leaves her piano-playing hands in pain and permanently scarred.

Meanwhile, Billie Jo's silent, windblown father is literally decaying with grief and skin cancer before her very eyes. When she decides to flee the lingering ghosts and dust of her homestead and jump a train west, she discovers a simple but profound truth about herself and her plight. There are no tight, sentimental endings here--just a steady ember of hope that brightens Karen Hesse's exquisitely written and mournful tale.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

From Publishers Weekly

In a starred review of the 1998 Newbery Medal winner, set during the Depression, PW said, "This intimate novel, written in stanza form, poetically conveys the heat, dust and wind of Oklahoma. With each meticulously arranged entry Hesse paints a vivid picture of her heroine's emotions." Ages 11-13.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 5 Up. After facing loss after loss during the Oklahoma Dust Bowl, Billie Jo begins to reconstruct her life. A triumphant story, eloquently told through prose-poetry. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Kirkus Reviews

Billie Jo tells of her life in Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl: Her mother dies after a gruesome accident caused by her father's leaving a bucket of kerosene near the stove; Billie Jo is partially responsible--fully responsible in the eyes of the community--and sustains injuries that seem to bring to a halt her dreams of playing the piano. Finding a way through her grief is not made easier by her taciturn father, who went on a drinking binge while Billie Joe's mother, not yet dead, begged for water. Told in free-verse poetry of dated entries that span the winter of 1934 to the winter of 1935, this is an unremittingly bleak portrait of one corner of Depression-era life. In Billie Jo, the only character who comes to life, Hesse (The Music of Dolphins, 1996, etc.) presents a hale and determined heroine who confronts unrelenting misery and begins to transcend it. The poem/novel ends with only a trace of hope; there are no pat endings, but a glimpse of beauty wrought from brutal reality. (Fiction. 9-12) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Rationale:

Students at this age are often not familiar with the history of our nation during the 1930s and 1940s. *Out of the Dust* is a novel that brings to life the despair people experienced during the Great Depression, the economic devastation of the Dust Bowl, the New Deal programs instituted by FDR, as well as other significant historical happenings such as the Lindbergh Kidnapping and the Dionne quintuplets' birth. Written in free verse poetry, the language is contemporary and accessible to most students.

Noted Distinction:

- Winner of the [Newbery Medal](#) in 1998,
- [Scott O'Dell Award](#)
- ALA Notable Children's Book
- ALA "Best book for young adults"
- School Library Journal "best book of the year"
- Booklist "Editors' Choice" award
- Book Links "Lasting Connection"
- Publishers Weekly "best book of the year"
- [New York Public Library](#) "100 Titles for Reading and Sharing" selection.

Readability

- Lexile Score: **Non-prose Text (NP)**: A text designated as "NP" is any book whose content is at least 50 percent nonstandard prose. Some examples are poems, plays, songs, and books in which punctuation is absent or used unconventionally.
- Readability Level:

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: ([link](#))

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Connection to the Curriculum:

- This novel could be taught in conjunction with a science and/or social studies unit on the Dust Bowl/Great Depression Era.
- English teachers can explore the genre of poetry as well as writing in journal entry form.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

- PBS – *Surviving the Dust Bowl* video
- Web Quest - <http://wneo.org/WebQuests/TeacherWebQuests/dustbowl/dustbowl.htm>
- Web Quest - <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/t2arp/quest/dustbowl/dust.html>

<http://www.amazon.com/Dust-Apple-Signature-Karen-Hesse/dp/0590371258>