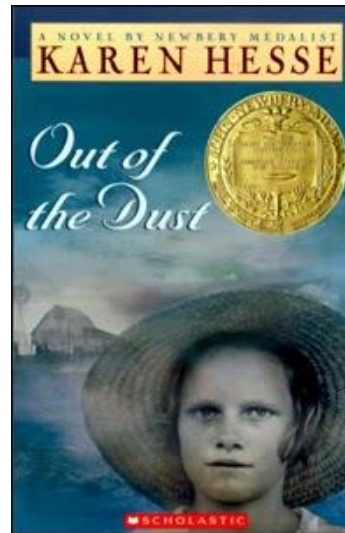


Out of the Dust



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Author	Karen Hesse
Publisher	Scholastic
Copyright	1997
Lexile	1040L
Genre	Historical fiction; poetry
Synopsis	Billie Jo and her family live in Oklahoma during the 1930s. Using poetry, Billie Jo describes the hardship and challenges of the dustbowl, and how playing the piano provides a sense of hope.
Themes	Overcoming obstacles; Grief; Anger; Perseverance; Great Depression

Objective: This lesson provides both a historical overview of the dust bowl and an introduction to reading poems.

Notes:

1. This lesson comes with a glossary of poetry terms. The glossary can be found at the end of the lesson plan.
2. Recommended graphic novel for additional reading: *The Great American Dust Bowl*; written and illustrated by Don Brown (ISBN-13: 978-0547815503).

Character-Based Literacy Program Independent Study Lesson Plan, *Out of the Dust*, Week 1



Kindness Requires Empathy. Kindness is the desire to lift others' spirits, help the ones in need, and mend relationships. Kindness requires that I take the time to listen, understand, and take action to benefit other people and the world.

PREPARE- Historical overview

Background Gather background knowledge about a place, time, event, person, or thing.

What was the dust bowl?

The dust bowl was a natural phenomenon that occurred in the southwestern Great Plains during the 1930s. The Great Plains had been fertile soil for the farmers that settled there after the passing of the Homestead Act. Repeated plowing of the land, grazing from cattle, and the use of dry crops contributed to the destruction of the prairie grasses that made up the plains. The grasses had held the soil in place, so once they were damaged there was nothing keeping the land in place. Environmental consequences began to impact the devastated land, specifically drought and strong winds. The winds swept through the Great Plains, picking up clouds of damaged topsoil along with it. The dust smothered the already struggling crops and left a path of destruction in communities. At times, the dust was dense enough to prevent visibility. After the dust storms passed, everything in their path would be covered in thick layers of dust. By the mid 1930's the conditions had turned the Great Plains into a desert and prompted the government to develop programs to change the basic farming methods of the region. Nineteen states in the heartland of the United States were impacted, with the Panhandle region of Oklahoma experiencing the greatest hardship. With no chance of making a living, farm families abandoned their homes and land, heading west to become migrant laborers.

What was occurring during the time of the dust bowl?

In the United States, the 1920's had been a time of prosperity. This ended with the stock market crash of 1929 that ushered a new era of economic depression. The depression threatened jobs, savings, homes, and farms. Many independent farmers lost their farms with favor going to larger landholders. The unemployment rate reached 30%, meaning many Americans were experiencing hard times. The great depression impacted internationally as well, influencing both economic and political instability. As the 1930's and the depression progressed, international tensions began to escalate and people became aware of the potential of another world war.

What was the "New Deal"?

Franklin D. Roosevelt became President in 1933. The first two of his Presidential terms were known as the "New Deal." This "New Deal" was aimed at promoting economic

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recovery and putting Americans back to work through Federal activism. This was seen as a time for hope and optimism for Americans devastated by the depression and the dust bowl. It was during his first inaugural address that Roosevelt reassured the nation: “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror.” The economic depression continued during the “New Deal” era, but people had put great trust in Roosevelt. Federal agencies were established to control agricultural production, stabilize wages and prices, and create a public works program for the unemployed.

Where did people migrate?

The great depression and dust bowl left many farmers in the Great Plains region struggling, and soon thousands of families packed up their belongings and headed west for California; with the majority of people leaving from Oklahoma. California was a popular destination because of its mild climate and diverse crops, something that appealed to farmers who hoped to start over. Along with the climate and crops, people were lured to California by popular songs and stories that exaggerated the fertile qualities and abundance of California. When families arrived, they were saddened to see that California had been impacted by the great depression and jobs were not nearly as prevalent as rumored. Many families were turned away at the California border, and those who found work did not make enough money to support themselves. To maintain an income, families followed the harvest around the state.

Photographer Dorothea Lange captured the migrant experience through her photographs.

How did the Dust Bowl end?

Relief from Dust Bowl conditions came in various ways at different times. There is not a singular explanation we can look at, but there are major contributors to explore. In response to the environmental conditions that influenced the Dust Bowl, President Franklin D. Roosevelt started the Shelterbelt Project. It was thought that native trees could help protect the land from erosion and provide a windbreak. Soon trees spanned 100-miles between Canada and northern Texas. Along with the trees, millions of acres of land were planted with buffalo grass which is a hearty land cover. Farmers were also taught ways to plant crops in ways that would not damage the soil. Within a year of this project there was a reduction in the amount of soil blowing. Agricultural reform and trees were making a difference, but the drought was not ended until the rain came in 1939. The end of the drought made more progress possible and helped put an end to dust storms and regrow crops. At the same time as the rain came, World War II was coming too. World War II helped pull the United States out of the Great Depression due to war time labor demands, and ushered a new era of jobs and social changes.

Terms Review the definitions in the Glossary. Write or discuss two examples for each term.

genre	stanza	couplet	refrain	narrative poem
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tone	metaphor	simile	free verse	blank verse
onomatopoeia	assonance	consonance	alliteration	synecdoche
meter	feet	image	symbol	allusion
paradox	parallelism	personification	hyperbole	understatement

Review Words and ideas about poetry.

How to read a poem?

1. **Read the title-** what do you think the poem will be about?
2. **Read the poem-** It is preferred to read the poem aloud, this allows you to listen to the rhythm and rhymes. If reading aloud is not an option, silently read the poem to yourself. Read slowly and thoroughly, paying attention to punctuation and line breaks. Only pause where punctuation is, this may not necessarily be at the end of a line.
3. **Read the poem again-** Poems tend to provide more meaning when read multiple times. Read the poem at least three times, each time with careful attention.
4. **Reread the title-** Has reading the poem provided you with more understanding about the title?

*Tip: do not begin to analyze the poem until you have read it in its entirety multiple times.

Questions to ask about a poem

After reading the poem, ask yourself these questions:

1. **Who is talking?** What do we know about the speaker? What are their feelings or opinions or character traits?
2. **Whom is being addressed?** Is the speaker addressing someone besides the reader?
3. **What is the context?** Is there a reason for the poem? What, if anything, is happening in the background of the poem?
4. **What happens during the poem?** Consider the tense of the poem, is the event internal or external, is the speaker active or passive in the context of events?
5. **What motivates the speaker to speak now?** Consider the tone.
6. **How does the language used contribute to the meaning?** Consider the type of language tools used, such as simile, metaphor, and allusion.
7. **How is the poem organized?** Does the poem adhere to a form, or does it take liberties with structure and grammar?
8. **Do patterns of rhyme and rhythm contribute to the meaning?** Consider the poem's tempo.
9. **What themes are present?** Are the themes obvious or implied?

10. **What is your response to the poem?** How did it make you feel? What did it make you think about?

*Tip: write a summary of the poem. Putting the concept in your own words can help you conceptualize the meaning.

What is rhyme?

Rhyme is harmony of words with similar sounds. There are different types of rhyme, but commonly used are end and internal rhymes. End rhymes occur at the end of a line. An example of end rhyme can be seen in the last words in the lines of *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*: star/are and high/sky. Internal rhymes occur within a line or stanza. An example of internal rhyme is: The long light *shakes* across the *lakes*. Rhymes commonly appear in a pattern, called a rhyme scheme. A rhyme scheme is often noted with a letter from the alphabet.

For an example of a rhyme scheme we will refer back to *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. This stanza has an a-a-b-b pattern.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,	A
How I wonder what you are!	A
Up above the world so high,	B
Like a diamond in the sky.	B

Noticing the pattern of rhyme can help readers understand meaning and add effect. Some poems do not rhyme and instead use other tools such as language and sentence structure to give meaning; these poems are referred to as *blank verse*.

What is rhythm?

Rhythm is sound in movement. When you think about rhythm, think about a heartbeat or the rise and fall of breathing; it is all around us. Rhythm in poetry is a pattern of stressed or unstressed syllables; a pattern of emphasis. Synonymous with rhythm is meter, you may see these words used interchangeably. Meter is a way to describe the rhythmic pattern and of keeping time in a poem. Some people count their steps when they dance to ensure they are moving in time with the music; the same can be seen with poetic meter. Meter is a distinguishing aspect of poetry because the words and order of the words are irreplaceable to maintain the metric pattern. The words were chosen for a reason, and no other word will fit. An author may shorten a word, or use another word in its place as a method to maintain the desired rhythm. Some poets may shift the rhythm throughout the poem in order to add pauses, express emotion, and to help give the poem an active voice.

As you read a poem, think about the meter; what kind of movement is the author trying to produce? Think about how the rhythm of the poem effects the meaning. Some poems ignore the rules of meter and rhythm and are called *free verse*.

What is poetic language?

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The choice of language a poet uses is called *diction*. The language carries meaning, both literal and figurative, and provokes emotion in readers. As you read a poem, think about why the author chose the word they did, and ask yourself if there is a meaning beyond the literal definition. Look for figurative language such as metaphor, similes, symbols, and imagery. Language can tell readers about the speaker, and also the poet. Readers can infer information such as the time period, the speaker's background, and the speaker's values or personality all from the language used.

Read the poems. Preferably read the poems aloud.

Look at the front and back cover, then make predictions about what you will be reading over the course of this unit.

Read the poem "On Stage" (p. 13)

Read the poems "Wild Boy of the Road" (pp. 58–59) and "Family School" (pp. 121–122).

Read the poem "First Rain" (pp. 104–106)

Read the poem "Met" (pp. 205–206)

Read the poem "Finding a Way" (pp. 225–227)

RESPOND

Timeline Events occurring between the selected poems

Over the course of the next week, you will be required to read the selected poems. Since you are not reading the entire book, a summary of events has been provided for you. Read through the summary timeline and notice if it changes the way you perceived the selected poems.

Summary of events from the poems in pages 1-12.

- Billie Jo, her father, and her pregnant mother live on an Oklahoma farm. They are experiencing financial struggles due to the drought and Dust Bowl that is killing their crops.
- Billie Jo finds pleasure by playing the piano; something her mother taught her to do.
- Billie Jo was asked to play piano at the Palace Theater by her school's music teacher, Arley Wanderdale.

Summary of events from the poems in pages 14–57.

- Billie Jo says the family farm has not produced a good crop in three years.
- The drought of 70 days was ended with a small rainfall.
- Billie Jo begins to make money by performing at different venues with Arley and the Black Mesa Boys.

Summary of events from the poems in pages 60–103.

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- Billie Jo's mother and newborn brother pass away in a tragic fire. Although not blamed directly, Billie Jo heard whispers of her role in the tragedy.
- After the deaths of her mother and brother, Billie Jo and her father begin to drift apart in their grief.
- Billie Jo's hands were injured in the fire and she now struggles to play piano and perform daily tasks. She is embarrassed by the appearance of her hands.
- Billie Jo's father gets a job excavating land for electrical towers to be installed.
- Billie Jo no longer makes money by playing piano due to her injuries, but she tries to keep playing.

Summary of events from the poems in pages 107–120.

- Billie Jo and her father continue to grow more distant from one another. Billie Jo feels metaphorically haunted by her mother's presence in their house.
- The Government sent food to aid families.
- A migrant family sought shelter in the school and asked if they could stay until their baby was born. Miss Freeland permits the family to stay as long as they need.

Summary of events from the poems in pages 123–204.

- The migrant family staying in the schoolhouse have their baby and leave to continue their journey West.
- Billie Jo competes in a talent show and is able to play piano despite the pain in her hands. Once she got in the rhythm of playing she could not feel the pain above the thrill of the music. She won the third place prize of \$1.
- Billie Jo's father begins attending night school so he will have skills in case the farm fails.
- The government lends farmers money to keep their farms in operation.
- Billie Jo is bitter from the dust, the silence from her father, and the death of her mother; she decides to run away.
- Billie Jo left at night, without saying goodbye to her father, and boarded a train heading West. She speaks to a man on the train and comes to understand that she needs to return. Billie Jo departs the train in Arizona and gets on one heading home.

Summary of events from the poems in pages 207–224.

- Billie Jo and her father are working on rebuilding their relationship and their farm.
- Billie Jo's father visits the doctor as he promised Billie Jo he would, he is diagnosed with skin cancer.
- Billie Jo's father met Louise while attending night school and began a relationship with her.
- Billie Jo starts playing piano every day and feels as if her family is a team again.

EXPLORE

Analyze the poems

“On Stage”, p. 13

1. Based on the adjectives Billie Jo uses, can you guess what kind of music she plays? Explain your answer using quotes from the poem.
 2. In a visual poem, the lines form a pattern that is associated with the content of the poem. What pattern do you see in this poem? Why did the poet use this pattern?
-

“Wild Boy of the Road”, pp. 58-59 and “Family School”, pp. 121

1. What is the significance, if any, of the boy not having a name?
 2. In what ways are these poems similar? What theme do they share?
 3. What virtues do the Kelby family and Miss. Freeland practice by offering assistance to the migrating visitors?
 4. How do the titles relate to the poems message?
-

“First Rain”, p. 104

1. What themes are present?
 2. What is the tone?
 3. How do the first two stanzas contrast from the rest of the poem?
 4. Besides water, what else does the rain provide Billie Jo and the farmers?
-

“Met”, p. 206

1. Billie Jo’s father met her at the station; in what figurative ways are they meeting each other?
 2. Billie Jo returned to her father despite her intent to go West to escape the dust. What themes do her actions imply? What themes are explicitly stated?
 3. Billie Jo says she cannot escape the dust because it is inside her. Within this context, what can the dust be a metaphor for?
-

“Finding a Way”, p. 225

1. In what ways is the growing of crops related to Billie Jo’s idea of growing as a person?
2. Consider the context of this poem. What can you infer as happening in the background?
3. Why do you think the book ended with this poem? What emotions does this poem evoke? What meaning does it leave readers with?

EXTEND

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Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to each of the writing prompts in a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text and use as many details as possible.

- Billie Jo describes her hobby – playing the piano. How does playing the piano makes her feel? What hobbies and activities make you happy?
- The poems “Wild Boy of the Road” (pp. 58-59) and “Family School” (pp. 121-122) show interactions between Billie Jo’s family and the community. What values can you find in these poems that serve as an example of ways families and communities can support one another?
- The poem “First Rain” (pp. 104-106) shows the community feeling hope and gratitude for the rain. What are ways communities can feel hope and increase moral during times of hardship?
- How can forgiveness change the relationship Billie Jo has with herself and her father?

Final Writing Product

Your final writing product will be an expository essay in response to the following question:

The Dust Bowl and Great Depression occurred in the 1930s, but without preventative measures, environmental and financial hardships of a similar nature can occur again. Consider current events and how they compare to the events in the book.

What roles can individuals and communities act upon to help prevent an environmental disaster such as the Dust Bowl from occurring in the future?

Remember that even small changes can make a difference.

Your essay should include at least 300 words (one page double-spaced).

The essay should be concise – avoid repetition and redundancy in statements. Use the following checklist to evaluate your work:

- The essay begins with a clear argument.
- The essay provides examples to clarify on the reasoning.
- The essay includes good transition sentences and phrases.
- The essay thoughtfully presents counterarguments.
- There is a topic sentence in each paragraph.
- There is a logical progression from one paragraph to the next.
- The essay ends with a strong conclusion.

Create a timeline to organize your writing schedule.

- Add dates in the right-side column.
- Add lines to the schedule, as needed.

What	When
Create a thesis statement.	
Collect and organize ideas and facts.	
Complete an introduction paragraph.	
Complete the body paragraphs.	
Complete the conclusion paragraph.	
Read through and refine.	
Submit first draft.	
Revise based on feedback.	
Submit final draft.	

Poetry Glossary

Day 1

Genre- A category of a work of literature. Literature is broadly divided into prose, poetry, and drama. Poems can be further divided into genres such as narrative, lyric, dramatic, epic, etc.

Stanza- Two or more lines of a poem that are combined in a pattern, often based on subject matter, rhyme, or meter.

Couplet- A pair of rhyming lines within a poem.

Refrain- Repeated lines or phrases in a poem.

Narrative poem- A form of poetry that tells a story.

Day 2

Tone- Describes the author's attitude towards the material and or audience. Tone may be easier to identify when the poem is read aloud. Example words to describe tone are *serious, funny, sarcastic, and somber*.

Metaphor- A figure of speech that uses the comparison of seemingly unlike things to suggest similarity. Metaphors make the writing vivid, imaginative, and meaningful. Example: You have a heart of gold.

Simile- A comparison using the words *like* and *as*. Example: Your smile is as bright as the sun.

Free verse- A form of poetry that does not have rhyming lines, rhythm, or a fixed meter.

Blank verse- A description of a poem that does not rhyme. These poems are typically written in iambic pentameter; a form of meter.

Day 3

Onomatopoeia- A word that has its meaning imitate a sound. Example: Hiss, Buzz, Boom, Purr.

Assonance- The repetition of vowel sounds in a group of words or lines of poetry. Example: The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plains.

Consonance- The repetition of consonant sounds in a group of words or lines of poetry. Example: Tick, tock went the clock.

Alliteration- The repetition of sounds, especially initial consonant sounds, in two or more words. Example: A brisk breeze blew by.

Synecdoche- A figure of speech in which part of a thing is said to represent the whole thing; or the other way around. Example: "Look at my new wheels!" (wheels is a part said to represent the whole new car)

Day 4

Meter- A pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Feet or Foot- A unit used to determine the meter.

Image- Language used to describe sensory information.

Symbol- A symbol is anything that represents itself and stands for something else. Usually a symbol is something concrete that represents something abstract. Example: Scales used as a symbol for justice and law.

Allusion-a reference to something that is thought to be commonly known, such as a book, myth, or historical event.

Day 5

Paradox- A statement that appears to be contradictory, but contains some degree of validity.

Parallelism- The framing of words, phrases, or sentences to give structural similarity. Parallelism is often used to attract attention, add emphasis, or add rhythm.

Personification- A figure of speech in which an object, concept, or animal is given human attributes.

Hyperbole- A figure of speech that uses deliberate exaggeration or overstatement, often in a comedic manner.

Understatement- The opposite of hyperbole. The deliberate presentation of something as less significant than it is.