

# Out Of The Dust Answer Key

Spring 1934: (p. 35-51)

18. In a dust storm, the children set to take their exams. What does Billie Jo notice by the end of the testing session?

Sand blew through the cracks in the schoolhouse wall, everyone was coughing pretty good and everyone was covered with sand.

19. What argument do Billie Jo's parents have about wheat and water?

Her Ma says that the wheat isn't meant to be here, Her Pa says that maybe they should cut down the apple trees because they drink the most water.

20. Billie Jo states, "how much more is out there most everyone else has heard of except me?" Have you ever been frustrated by learning about something that everyone else seems to know? How does it make you feel?

Answers will vary but generally students may share that it is frustrating to be the only one in a room that doesn't know or get something.

21. How are Ma's apple blossoms a labor of love? Is it selfish to continue to water the apple trees during the drought?

She has had to water and nurture them throughout the drought and dust storms. They take a lot of effort and because of her nurturing, they are finally blossoming and growing apples. In a way many would say that during a drought it is selfish to continue to water crops.

22. Assess how when the rain finally appeared, it was actually more of a problem than a solution to the problem.

When it finally appeared, the rain washed things away, including some of the crops.

23. Based on reports from Mr. Hovershick, how is the harvest looking?

The harvest is not looking great. Mr. Hovershick only got 8 bushels off a 20-acre parcel. \*\* Billie Jo's father is not going to get many bushels. This means that there will be less to go around and probably going to be a time of scarcity.

24. How is Billie Jo paid for playing the piano for Arley? Where do her earnings go?

She is paid in dimes. Ma takes the dimes and puts them somewhere, though she doesn't know where they go.

*Think Critically:* What does Billie Jo like most about being with Arley and the Black Mass boys?

It offers her an escape from reality and some freedom and fun that she hasn't experienced much prior to this. It is an opportunity to "fit in" and be part of something a little bigger than just her family.

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**Out of the Dust Answer Key** is a vital resource for educators, students, and parents who wish to delve deeper into the themes, characters, and literary elements presented in Karen Hesse's poignant novel. This book, which won the Newbery Medal in 1998, is a compelling tale set during the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s in Oklahoma. Through the eyes of a young girl named Billie Jo, readers experience the struggles of a family grappling with loss, hardship, and the enduring power of hope. This article explores the main themes, characters, and provides an answer key to some of the most commonly asked questions about the novel.

## Overview of "Out of the Dust"

"Out of the Dust" is written in free verse, allowing for a unique narrative style that conveys the emotional turmoil of the protagonist. The story is set against the backdrop of the Dust Bowl, a period characterized by severe dust storms that greatly damaged agriculture and ecology in the U.S. The novel showcases the resilience of individuals facing environmental and personal adversity.

## Main Characters

- Billie Jo Kelby: The protagonist and narrator, a talented piano player whose life is turned upside down by tragedy. Her journey of self-discovery and healing is central to the story.
- Ma (Mother): A nurturing figure who is deeply affected by the hardships of their environment and the loss of her child.
- Pa (Father): A farmer who struggles with the impact of the Dust Bowl on their livelihood and his family.

- The Baby: The unnamed child whose death profoundly affects Billie Jo and her family.
- Miss Freeland: Billie Jo's teacher, who encourages her passion for music and helps her to find a way to cope with her grief.

## Themes in "Out of the Dust"

Understanding the key themes in "Out of the Dust" can enhance comprehension and appreciation of the novel's message.

### Resilience and Survival

The theme of resilience is prevalent throughout the book. Billie Jo's journey illustrates how individuals can endure and adapt in the face of overwhelming challenges.

- Examples:
- Billie Jo's passion for piano serves as an emotional outlet and a means of coping with her struggles.
- The family's efforts to survive the Dust Bowl, despite the devastation it brings to their farm and livelihoods.

### Grief and Loss

The novel poignantly portrays the impact of grief. Billie Jo's emotional journey is marked by profound loss, including the death of her mother and brother.

- Examples:
- Billie Jo's feelings of anger and guilt after the tragic accident that leads to her mother's death.
- The longing for connection and understanding in the aftermath of loss.

### Hope and Healing

Despite the overwhelming despair, "Out of the Dust" conveys a message of hope. Billie Jo's journey towards healing demonstrates that it is possible to find light even in the darkest times.

- Examples:
- The moments when Billie Jo plays the piano, showcasing her ability to express her feelings and begin to heal.
- The eventual reconciliation with her father, which signifies emotional growth and the rebuilding of family bonds.

# **Answer Key for Discussion Questions**

Teachers often assign discussion questions to facilitate deeper understanding of the text. Below are some common questions along with sample answers.

## **1. How does the setting influence the characters' lives?**

The setting of the Dust Bowl plays a crucial role in shaping the characters' experiences. The harsh environmental conditions lead to economic hardship, forcing Billie Jo and her family to confront physical and emotional challenges. The dust storms serve as a constant reminder of their struggles, impacting their health and livelihood. The desolation of the landscape mirrors Billie Jo's internal conflicts and feelings of isolation.

## **2. What role does music play in Billie Jo's life?**

Music serves as a vital form of expression for Billie Jo. It provides her with a sense of identity and a way to cope with her grief. Throughout the novel, Billie Jo's piano playing symbolizes her emotions, from joy to sorrow. It becomes a means of communication, allowing her to connect with her mother and later, to find solace in her memories.

## **3. Discuss the relationship between Billie Jo and her parents.**

Billie Jo's relationship with her parents is complex and evolves throughout the novel. Initially, there is tension, particularly with her father, who struggles to express his emotions. After the tragedies, both Billie Jo and her father experience profound grief that creates a rift between them. However, as they navigate their loss, they begin to understand each other's pain, leading to a gradual reconciliation. Their relationship ultimately reflects the theme of healing and the importance of family support during difficult times.

## **4. How does Billie Jo's perspective on life change throughout the novel?**

At the beginning of the novel, Billie Jo is filled with dreams and aspirations, particularly regarding her music. However, after experiencing trauma and loss, her outlook becomes darker, and she struggles with feelings of anger and guilt. As the story progresses, Billie Jo gradually learns to confront her grief and embrace her love for music again, leading to personal growth and a renewed sense of hope.

## **5. What is the significance of the title "Out of the Dust"?**

The title "Out of the Dust" signifies the journey from despair to hope. It reflects both the physical dust

of the environment and the emotional turmoil that Billie Jo faces. The phrase suggests a movement towards clarity and healing, as Billie Jo strives to rise above her challenges and find a way to live a fulfilling life despite her circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

"Out of the Dust" is a profound exploration of resilience, grief, and hope. Through the powerful narrative voice of Billie Jo, readers are invited to witness the struggles and triumphs of a young girl during one of America's most challenging eras. The answer key provided here serves as a guide to understanding the complexities of the characters and themes, enhancing the reading experience for students and educators alike. As Billie Jo ultimately learns to navigate her pain and find her voice, so too does the novel encourage readers to embrace their own journeys toward healing and self-discovery.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is 'Out of the Dust' about?**

'Out of the Dust' is a historical novel by Karen Hesse that tells the story of a young girl named Billie Jo living in Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. It explores themes of loss, resilience, and the impact of environmental disaster on families.

### **Who is the main character in 'Out of the Dust'?**

The main character in 'Out of the Dust' is Billie Jo Kelby, a 14-year-old girl who navigates the challenges of her life during the Dust Bowl, including family tragedy and her passion for playing the piano.

### **What are some major themes in 'Out of the Dust'?**

Major themes in 'Out of the Dust' include survival, the struggle against nature, the impact of loss and grief, the importance of family, and the pursuit of dreams amid adversity.

### **Is 'Out of the Dust' written in prose or poetry?**

'Out of the Dust' is written in free verse poetry, which allows for a lyrical and emotive exploration of Billie Jo's thoughts and experiences.

### **What role does music play in 'Out of the Dust'?**

Music, particularly Billie Jo's love for playing the piano, serves as an important form of expression and escape for her. It symbolizes hope and the possibility of a brighter future amid the struggles she faces.

### **How does the setting of the Dust Bowl affect the story?**

The setting of the Dust Bowl is crucial to 'Out of the Dust', as it shapes the characters' lives,

influences their struggles for survival, and highlights the environmental and economic challenges faced by farming families during this period.

### What is the significance of the title 'Out of the Dust'?

The title 'Out of the Dust' signifies the journey from hardship and despair towards hope and renewal. It reflects Billie Jo's desire to rise above her circumstances and find her way forward despite the dust and challenges surrounding her.

## How is 'Out of the Dust' received by critics and readers?

'Out of the Dust' has been widely praised for its beautiful writing, emotional depth, and historical authenticity. It has won several awards, including the Newbery Medal, and is often included in school curricula for its rich themes and poetic style.

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