Out of the Dust, by Karen Hesse

**Summer Reading Directions**: It is up to you how fast, or slow you read this novel. I DO NOT want your entire summer doing homework! Relax. Enjoy. Rest up; it will be an exciting year! Just don’t save this reading until the week before school. Pace yourself to have it completed in a reasonable amount of time. This will be (MAX) about 10 hours worth of work, not including reading the novel.

**Basic expectations:**

1. Read the novel.
2. Highlight important passages (answers to the questions) AND **CIRCLE** words you are unfamiliar with.
3. Answer the questions, using complete sentences – don’t start with a pronoun! - on this page. There won’t be questions for every poem – so read carefully.
4. Reference what page in the novel you found the answer next to your answer.
5. Summarize each season at the end, in the book. (Bullet points are fine – just be complete)

**Comprehension Questions:**

**Beginning: August 1920**
- Why is the first poem entitled “Beginning: August 1920” – yet the title of the section is Winter 1934? What does this tell you about the narrator?
- Why was she named Billie Jo? What does this tell you about her childhood perspective about her father?
- Why might her father be eager for a son? Does that mean he doesn’t love her?

**Losing Livie**
- How long have Livie and BJ been friends?
- Why is this loss so painful?

**Not too much to ask**
- How long has it been since they have had a good year on the farm?
- Overall, how do the Kelby’s help their neighbors? Give concrete evidence to support your answer.

**Fifty Miles South of Home**
- How bad is the wind in Texas? Why mention it?

**Rules of Dining**
- How are the plates and silverware protected from dust? Draw what you think that might look like.
- How does Daddy make light of the dust being in their food? What does this tell you about BJ’s father?

**Breaking Drought**
- What do the printed words look like?
Dazzled
• How many distinct personalities does Mrs. Kelby have at home? Support your answer with evidence.

• Where does she dazzle? Where do you dazzle?

• Why might Ma be so skinny and have bad teeth?

• How do you know Daddy appreciates her playing? Why is this appreciation significant?

Fields of Flashing Lights
• What does lightning usually mean? What does it signal in this case?

• What damage does the dust storm cause?

** What was your favorite piece in this section? Why?

Spring 1934
Tested by Dust
• What were the conditions like in the classroom during the 6 week test?

• How do you think you would have handled things?

Banks
• Why hadn’t the Kelby’s been able to withdraw their money from the bank?

• Do you think they had a lot of money saved? What would make you think this? Support your answer with evidence.

Beat Wheat
• Why has so much wheat been lost?

• What does BJ’s music help her to do? What is Ma’s response?

Give Up on Wheat
• What suggestions does Ma make? How does Daddy respond?

• If Daddy resolved to keep things calm while Ma is pregnant, why do you think he responded they way he did? Support your answer with evidence.

• What is Ma’s anger like? How does she calm herself down?

Apple Blossoms
• Ma can be described as a “mule.” Why? What has this quality kept alive?
• When and why did Ma plant the apple trees?

**World War**
• What war did Daddy fight in?

• Why doesn’t he, and many other soldiers, want to talk about the war?

• Why does he remember the poppies?

**Apples**
• How are the baby and the growing fruit connected?

**Dust and Rain**
• Why was the rain “no blessing”?

• Do you think Daddy will give up or start over? Why? Support your answer with evidence.

**Harvest**
• Mr. Haverstick harvested EIGHT bushels per acre. How many can Daddy expect? Why is there a difference?

**On the Road with Arley**
• How does BJ honor her mother during the set?

• What does Ma do with her pay? Does BJ care about the money? How do you know? Support your answer with evidence.

**What was your favorite piece in this section? Why?**

**Summer 1934**

*Hope in a Drizzle*
• How will ¼ inch of rain help?

• What is the only thing Ma talks about now?

**Dionne Quintuplets**
• Why might Ma have cried when hearing of the Dionne Quintuplets’ birth?

**Wild Boys of the Road**
• How did the boy offer to pay for his meal?

• How do you know that life on the road has been hard on him? Support your answer with evidence.
The Accident (just quick answers – no sentences)
- How did the fire start?
- How did Ma get burned?
- What did BJ do to save her?
- What happened to BJ?

A Tent of Pain
- Where does Ma belong? Why isn’t she in a hospital?
- Do you think she will survive? Why? What about the baby? Support your answer with evidence.

Drinking
- What did Daddy do with the emergency money? Do you understand why he did it? Support your answer with evidence.
- Why couldn’t BJ help Ma?

Devoured
- The apple tree was a symbol of hope. What happened to it?
- What happened to Ma?

Blame
- Did they attend church regularly? How do you know? Support your answer with evidence.
- Do the women blame BJ outright, or is the blame inferred? Support your answer with evidence.

Roots
- Why does FDR urge people to plant trees?
- What doesn’t the president understand?

The Empty Spaces
- How does BJ now refer to her father? Why doesn’t she call him Daddy anymore?
- How and why is their relationship changing?

The Hole
- BJ thinks he is digging the pond, but isn’t sure. Why won’t she ask him?
- Why do people think he is going crazy? Do you think he is? Give evidence to support your answer.
- What can she forgive him for? What is unforgivable?
Night Bloomer
- Why do you think BJ wanted to see the plant?
- What happens to the flowers in the morning? Why couldn’t BJ see that happen? What did it remind her of?

The Path of Our Sorrow
- Why does “sorrow not come suddenly”? Give evidence to support your answer.
- Even though it might not come suddenly, are we ever prepared for sorrow? Was BJ?

** What was your favorite piece in this section? Why?

Autumn 1934
Hired Work
- What sort of job did BJ’s father take? Why?
- How does BJ feel about the piano now?

Almost Rain
- Why is this even worth mentioning?

Those Hands
- Why did Coach want her on the basketball team? Why did he ask this year? Was he being mean?
- Who urges her to start playing again? Why would he do that, do you think?

Real Snow
- What sort of snow fell?
- Who will be happy? Why?

Mad Dog’s Tale
- How in the world did Mad Dog get that name?
- Why would Ma have known his given name, but her father wouldn’t?

** What was your favorite piece in this section? Why?

Winter 1935
Christmas Dinner Without the Cranberry Sauce
- Why was this celebration more bearable than the one she shared with her father?
• Are you getting a sense of Miss Freeland? What do you think of her? Is she a good teacher? Why

Driving the Cows
• Why did the country agent shoot the cows?

First Rain
• How does BJ protect herself from breathing dust?

Scrubbing up Dust
• What made BJ think of Ma?

• What had BJ been neglecting? Why does she avoid housework? Is she being lazy?

• Is Ma really haunting her? What does haunt her?

Lunch
• Was there usually enough food for lunch or did the children go hungry? How do you know?

• What did the government send?

• Who served and who cleaned up? Why don’t they have a lunchroom staff?

Guests
• Who were these guests?

• What does Miss Freeland’s response tell you about her?

Family School
• What do the children bring for lunch? Why do they hold back, taking smaller portions?

• What does the family do when they are in their little apartment? Do you think Miss Freeland minds? Explain.

Birth
• Why was there a delayed school opening?

• Why is the birth particularly difficult for BJ? Do you think she will ever stop making connections like this? Why or why not?

Dreams
• Why is BJ practicing the piano?

• Why is she willing to put herself out there?
• What does she compare her hands to?

No Good
• It is possible her hands are too badly scarred to play, but what else could have been the cause of her uninspired performance?

• Does the title of this verse hold a deeper meaning for BJ’s life? Why or why not?

Snow
• Why did BJ think the snow might be dust?

• How did she test the unknown substance?

Night School
• What does her father say that makes him sound like Ma?

Dust Storm
• How do we know this is a bad dust storm?

• How did BJ keep on the road?

Broken Promise
• Who broke a promise?

Motherless
• What one, impossible thing would make BJ less eager to leave home?

** What was your favorite piece in this section? Why?

Spring 1935
Skin
• What does she notice on her father’s face?

• Why do you think he hasn’t seen a doctor?

Fire on the Rails
• Why are fires so common now?

• How does BJ react to fire? Do you find her fear unreasonable?

Blankets of Black (Black Sunday, April 14, 1935)
• What were the “caves of dust” people staggered out of? What do you think they just endured?

• Where did BJ and her father go?

• How was this dust storm different from the others?
What kept the storm from breaking them?

What did they find when they got home?

**Help from Uncle Sam**
- What will the government loan pay for?
- Will they have to repay the loan if the crops don’t come in?

**Let Down**
- What happened at graduation that made Miss Freeland cry?
- Do you think a doctor could help BJ? Explain.
- What is happening to both BJ and her father?

**Hope**
- Describe “the kindest kind of rain” that finally fell.
- What did the gentle rain turn into after three days?
- How does Bay (her father) celebrate?

**The Rain’s Gift**
- What did the rain bring back?
- How was that a gift to the farmers?

**Baby**
- What did they find on the North Steps of the Church?
- What did BJ ask her father to do?
- Did her father show any kind of emotion over his answer to her? If so, what did he do?
- What did BJ find? What was her Ma going to do with it?
- What was she imagining while she sat at the piano?

**Summer 1935**
**The Dream**
- What is she dreaming about?
- What reassurance does she find in the piano?
Midnight Truth
- Where does her bitterness come from?
- Why the bitterness with her mother? Her father?
- What kind of grave is her father digging?

Out of the Dust
- Does she tell her dad she is leaving?
- Where does she go? How does she get there?
- What does she take with her?

Gone West
- What did she see and feel on her journey?
- How did she “know” the girl she saw along the way?

Something Lost, Something Gained (quick answers – no sentences)
- Who does she meet in the train? Describe him.
- What is his only possession?
- What does she give him? What is his response?
- What does he leave her with?
- What does she discover about her parents, in talking with him?
- What do you think makes her go home?

Homeward Bound
- If getting away wasn’t better…what was it then?
- What does she compare it against?

Met
- What does she call him? Why is this significant?
- Why can’t she ever leave the dust?
- Why can she grow here?

Autumn 1935
Cut it Deep
- Why did BJ think her dad waited?
- What is the doctor’s advice for BJ?
- What do you think was in the box of Ma’s?
The Other Woman
- Who comes to dinner?
- Why does BJ like her?
- What does BJ fear will happen with Louise?

Not Everywhere
- Where won’t BJ let Louise visit? Why, do you think?

My Life, or What I Told Louise After the Tenth Time She Came to Dinner
- Why do you think she is telling Louise all of this?
- What does BJ admit to in stanza #5?
- Who backed down first? Is this a foretelling of future events (hard one…)?

November Dust
- Why do you think Bay kept digging that pond – even after Ma died?

Thanksgiving List
- What do you think is the most significant? Why?

Music (This one make me laugh)
- How do you know BJ has grown up in this poem?

Teamwork
- What doesn’t Daddy understand? What is BJ’s reaction to it?
- What was the reaction of Ma’s bones? Why even mention it?

Finding a Way
- How did Daddy “find a way”?
- How did BJ “find a way”?
- What can hard times also be about, according to BJ?
- What was the mule for? Can you figure out any symbolism towards that gift?
- Who do you think BJ sees at the end? Why?

How did you enjoy the book?

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