



# OUT OF THE DUST

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## Chapter Questions

**Learning Intentions:** *students practice using comprehension strategies such as retrieving directly stated information, making inferences, visualising, predicting, connecting, and summarising. These strategies help students interpret and evaluate the ideas in longer texts.*

**INSTRUCTIONS:** As you read through the novel in class or at home, answer these short questions to show your understanding of the events of the book and the thoughts and emotions surrounding each chapter.

### Winter 1934

1. Describe Billie Jo Kelby from what she reveals about herself in 'Beginning: August 1920'.
2. How did she get her name?
3. Based on the first entry, what do you feel is her relationship with her mother and her father?
4. Suggest two reasons why the author decided to use poetry to tell this story.
5. Why might Billie Jo's father have wanted a boy during this era, and not a girl?
6. Why is dust such a good physical metaphor for the depression era?
7. Why might Billie Jo have wanted to escape the dust?
8. 'Mr Hardly's Money Handling', p.17: Why do you think that Billie Jo had to return the 4 cents? What do the last two lines say about Billie Jo's mother? Do you think Mr Hardly undercharged Billie Jo by accident or on purpose?
9. 'Dazzled', p.24: What are Billie Jo's thoughts on her mother in this poem? What do you learn about her parents?
10. Why do you think Billie Jo's father bought a piano as a wedding gift instead of fixing up the house properly?

### Spring 1934

1. 'Give up on Wheat', p.40-41. What are Polly Kelby's ideas for the farm? What does Billie's dad Bayard think about them?
2. In 'Apples', p.45, Billie Jo uses repetition of the word "and". What effect does this have on the poem? Why are apples so important to Billie Jo, given what you know about the context of the novel?
3. 'Dust and Rain', p.46. After the dust, rain came, but it was "rain that was no blessing". Why wasn't it a blessing? In your opinion, provide an answer to Billie Jo's question of who fared better.



### Summer 1934

1. 'The Accident', p.60: Who does Billie blame for the accident? How would you feel if you were Billie?
2. Thinking in particular about 'Drinking', p.67, 'Blame', p.70 and 'The Empty Spaces', p.76, how does Billie's attitude towards her father change? How would you feel if you were Billie Jo and overheard the things she heard those women saying about her throwing the pail? What are your thoughts on how her father is handling the tragedy?
3. 'The Hole', p.77: Why do you think Billie Jo's father is digging the hole beside the house?

### Autumn 1934

1. From what you've read up until 'Those Hands', p.89, how has Billie's attitude changed towards her hands and the piano? Aside from the physical pain, what else might have changed her attitude?
2. 'Art Exhibit', p.94. Explain how the art exhibit made Billie Jo feel. What are some things that you feel we take for granted these days, now that you've been reading this book?
3. Autumn 1934 has the fewest entries of any of the chapters in the book. Do you have any feelings about why Billie Jo may have stopped writing in her journal as much? What do you think she is feeling which makes her find less about her life worth writing about?

### Winter 1935

1. In 'Scrubbing up Dust', p.109, Billie Jo mentions that her mother is "haunting" her. What does she mean by this? What are some examples from this entry and previous entries you can think of where this happens? You may need to reread the previous entries after the accident to remember.
2. 'Outlined by Dust', p.112. From this entry, in which ways is Billie Jo her father's daughter? Why do you think she is comparing herself so much to her father, and why does she wish to see more of her mother in herself?
3. 'Birth', p.123: What are the feelings that Billie Jo needs to "walk off"? Why is the birth of the baby affecting her in this way? In the following poem, 'Time to Go', why is it so hard for her to let that baby go, and why does she want to go with them?
4. 'The Competition', p.129: How does Billie Jo feel after getting third place in the Palace Theatre talent contest? How did her hands feel? In the next poem, 'The Piano Player', she doesn't want to play her Ma's piano at home. Why do you think this is?
5. 'Motherless', p.148: How have Billie's feelings towards her mother changed since the early chapters of the book, when her mother was alive?

### Spring 1935

1. 'Heartsick', p.153: What can we learn about Billie Jo's hopes for the future in Heartsick? Why do you think she feels frustrated with her father because of these hopes? (It may help you to think about the relationship between mothers and daughters and how they are different to the relationship Billie has with her father. )
2. 'Skin', p.154: What do you think the spots Billie Jo's father has are? (The last line is the biggest clue). How might this poem help us to understand her growing frustration with her life?
3. 'The Mail Train', p.158: Billie Jo questions what it's supposed to mean when her father says, "Let's wait and see" to her possibly moving to live with her Aunt. Why do you think he wants to wait before accepting or rejecting the offer?

4. 'The Visit', p.168: In this entry, what was the significance of Billie Jo noting that Mad Dog's hands were scarless, after he said "I love this land, no matter what."?
5. 'Let Down', p.174: Do you think Billie Jo is the only person who has let someone down in this entry? Consider her father's refusal to go to the doctor. What message is this sending Billie Jo?
6. 'Baby', p.184. Why do you think that someone might have abandoned their baby, particularly in the Great Depression era? Why do you think Billie Jo wanted to adopt the baby?

### Summer 1935

1. In 'The Dream', p.193, Billie Jo personifies the piano as her mother. What characteristics of her mother does she find?
2. 'Midnight Truth' p.195. What can we conclude about Billie's relationship with her father at the moment? How does she feel toward her mother?
3. 'Out of the Dust', p.197: Do you think Billie is running towards a goal or running away from something? Depending on your answer, what is the goal or what is she running from?
4. 'Gone West', p.199: In this entry, what do you think Billie Jo means when she says she knew the girl she saw?
5. Why do you think Billie Jo decided to come home after 'Something Lost, Something Gained', p.200? Put yourself in her shoes and decide for yourself if you would come home or keep going.
6. How is Billie's decision to come home a turning point in the story?

### Autumn 1935

1. After 'Cut it Deep', p.209: Describe Billie Jo's new relationship with her father. What do you feel had been holding them back before?
2. 'The Other Woman', p.212: What are Billie's thoughts on the "other woman"? What is she concerned Louise will do? The next entry, 'Not Everywhere', can help answer this.
3. 'My Life' p.216: What are some of the things you think Billie Jo didn't say to Louise that were implied? What meaning / reason did you sense was behind her talk with Louise?
4. In 'Thanksgiving List', p.220, poppies are set to bloom on Ma and Franklin's grave. Poppies were mentioned in one of the earlier entries; how are these instances related?
5. How do you feel the story ends? How have Billie Jo and her father changed? What is their life like now?

