



TEACHER'S PET PUBLICATIONS

LITPLAN TEACHER PACK™

for

Out of the Dust

based on the book by
Karen Hesse

Written by
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Introduction

Out of the Dust

This unit plan has been carefully designed to give teachers all of the tools they need to present twenty-four daily lessons on Karen Hesse's novel, **Out of the Dust**. All exercises, activities, and assignments in the unit will develop students' reading, writing, thinking, and language skills. In addition to the essential elements, the unit contains a wide variety of extra resource materials and suggested activities.

The **first lesson** uses a bulletin board activity to introduce the theme of having a dream. All subsequent lessons are designed to maximize the teacher's time while assuring that students at a variety of learning levels are able to progress successfully through the novel.

Reading assignments consist of chronological clusters of poems. The clusters are called sections. The assignments average fifteen pages in length, but that number is deceiving because the poems are often filled with information and dense with emotion and meaning. Students do approximately 15 minutes of pre-reading work in conjunction with each reading assignment. Pre-reading involves reviewing the study questions for the assignment and doing some brief vocabulary work connected to the section of reading.

The **study guide questions** are fact based; the answers are right in the text. These questions come in two formats: short answer or multiple choice. It is probably best to use the short answer questions as study guides for students and the multiple choice version for occasional quizzes.

The **vocabulary work** is intended to enrich students' vocabularies and to aid in their understanding of the book. Students will complete a two-part vocabulary worksheet for each section of reading. Part I focuses on students' use of general knowledge and contextual clues by giving the sentence in which the word appears in the text. Students then write down what they think the words mean based on their usage. Part II nails down the definitions of the words by giving students dictionary definitions of the words and asking students to match the words to the correct definitions.

Although students can attempt the vocabulary work prior to reading the appropriate section of the book, it is probably best to encourage students to do the vocabulary work while they are reading. Thus the contextual clues that students use in understanding the words would include not just those in the individual quotes but those in sentences surrounding the quote and often in the entire poem. By the time that students have finished the reading assignment and completed the companion worksheet, they should have a clear understanding of the meaning of each word.

Students should be encouraged to use the study guide questions to round out their understanding of the text and to prepare for the unit test. The material covered in these questions serves as a way of reviewing the most important events and ideas presented in the reading assignments.

In this unit there is a **Critical Based Questions Option**, which gives the teacher a choice of adding to the fact-based questions some questions that require more critical thought. These will be found in Lessons Eight, Nine, Eleven, Thirteen, Fourteen, Fifteen, and Seventeen. Teachers may use all, some, or none of these optional questions.

There are there **writing assignments** in this unit.

The first assignment, in Lesson Five, asks students to write from personal experience. They may write about their own lives, mirroring the kinds of information conveyed by Billie Jo Kelby in the novel, or they may write about Billie Jo herself, explaining why they would or would not like to have Billie Jo as their close friend. Either choice will encourage students to examine the text closely and to try to understand the heroine better.

The second writing assignment, in Lesson Ten, asks that students write to inform. Here students have an opportunity to choose something that they do well and then to explain to an audience how to do the activity. Because not all students know how to do something that they consider to be particularly interesting, they are encouraged to look even at activities like getting from one location to another, traveling the route they take to school. The activity doesn't matter so much as that the students have an opportunity to examine a procedure, looking closely at its parts and explaining how to do the activity to another person.

The third writing assignment, found in Lesson Eighteen, requires students to write to persuade. Because they should have a firm grasp of the novel at this point in the unit, students are asked to write persuasively about it. The assignment requires the students to exercise judgment, to set criteria for what is good and what is bad in their opinion, and then to argue that **Out of the Dust** is either a good or a bad book.

The **nonfiction reading assignment** in this unit focuses on modern farming and is a precursor to the major class project topic. For the nonfiction assignment, students are given a variety of topics relative to modern farming and asked to choose one and read about it. After reading their nonfiction pieces, students will fill out a worksheet on which they answer questions regarding facts, interpretation, criticism, and personal opinions. You are also provided with a KWL (What I Know, What I Want To Know, What I Learned) Sheet that may facilitate students' nonfiction reading.

The major **class project** is optional. Project Modern Farming is an attempt to get students to move beyond the knowledge they acquire through reading the novel to gain firsthand understanding of the situation faced by farmers in America today. The project is geared to having students discover concerns that need addressing and then to address those concerns in meaningful ways.

You are encouraged to do **group activities** whenever time and circumstances permit. Numerous opportunities are possible for group activities throughout the unit.

Students also will have ample opportunity for **reading aloud** and **making presentations**. Also, a great deal of opportunity will present itself for having rich class discussions about the novel and relevant ancillary topics.

One of the most flexible sections of the unit is the **Extra Discussion Questions/Writing Assignments**. In this section you will find interpretive, critical, critical/personal, and personal response questions and quotations from the text that can be used in a number of ways. Some of these questions and quotations are used as the basis for parts of the unit tests.

Review lessons offer chances to review the novel's main events and ideas and to re-examine its characters through **vocabulary review** and **review with games and puzzles**.

The **unit test** comes in five different formats: two different Short Answer Unit Tests, one Advanced Short Answer Unit Test, and two different Multiple Choice Unit Tests. Answer keys are given for all parts of all tests except for the subjective questions that appear in some of the tests.

There are additional **support materials** included with this unit. The **extra activities packet** includes suggestions for an in-class library, crossword and word search puzzles related to the novel, and extra vocabulary worksheets. There is a list of **bulletin board ideas** which gives the teacher suggestions for a variety of bulletin boards to supplement the unit. In addition, there is a section called **More Activities** which provides the teacher with even more valuable activities to choose from.

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A Few Words About the Author and Her Work

It is not usual in a Teacher's Pet LitPlan for the writer of the plan to plug the book about which it is written. And this is not really a plug, but an explanation. Despite having captured the coveted Newbery Medal for 1998 and being a marvelously interesting book, **Out of the Dust** is a novel that might take a little selling to young readers. For the book is written in free-verse poems.

Let me explain a little further. While I was writing this unit plan, I made a point of mentioning **Out of the Dust** to one of our local librarians. Noticing her with children visiting the library that evening, I could see that she had a special rapport with young readers. So I told her that if she was in the habit of recommending good books to young readers, this would be an excellent choice to recommend. I went so far as to say that the fourteen-year-old protagonist will be liked by readers of all ages. The librarian listened politely, smiled, and then, with a kind of sigh, said, "It's so hard to get children to read poetry."

Because I myself had wondered about the advisability of Karen Hesse's having written the whole book in blank verse form, I was ready with my response. First, the poems are not the rhyming kind that might turn so many children off. They are in blank verse and their voice is very compelling and sure to reach young readers. I even went so far as to say that the poems are "not really poems." I offered the book, open, back to the librarian for her to take a look at one of the "poems." Oh, they're like little journal entries," she said, with new understanding.

And I think she has put her finger on it. The whole novel is filled with little journal entries that allow Billie Jo Kelby, the heroine of the book, to speak in an unaffected, authentic fourteen-year-old voice. One short entry will suffice. Billie Jo and her classmates are regularly given achievement tests at their school:

*While we sat
taking our six-weeks test,
the wind rose
and the sand blew
right through the cracks in the schoolhouse wall,
right through the gaps around the window glass,
and by the time the tests were done,
each and every one of us
was coughing pretty good and we all
needed a bath.
I hope we get bonus points
for testing in a dust storm.*

April 1934

Dust A Few Words continued page 2

None of the poems is hard to read. None contains very difficult language. None is longer than four printed pages. Each adds something interesting to the reader's understanding of Billie Jo Kelby, her family, friends, and neighbors, and their lives in Oklahoma in 1934 and 1935.

I tell you all of this as fair warning. If you really want your students to like this book, you might take a few minutes before the first lesson to "sell" the book. Maybe you even want to talk about journal entries and let your students discover the word "poems" later on their own. The rewriting exercise in the third lesson of the plan might further help to dispel the notion that young readers are actually reading indulging in poetry.

The novel was, of course, written by Karen Hesse, who has written a number of other works. She is the author of **The Music of Dolphins**, **A Time of Angels**, **Phoenix Rising**, **Letters from Rifka**, and **Wish on a Unicorn**. For even younger readers, she has written **Lavender**, **Sable**, **Poppy's Chair**, and **Lester's Dog**.

Out of the Dust is a *Publisher's Weekly* Best Book of the Year, *A School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, *A Booklist* Editors' Choice, *A Booklinks* Best Book of the Year, and is a New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing selection. And it is, as they say, a Newbery book.

Karen Hesse lives with her husband and two daughters in Williamsville, Vermont.

Unit Objectives

Out of the Dust

1. Through reading **Out of the Dust** by Karen Hesse, students will gain a better understanding of the themes of having a dream, parent/child relationships, friendship, hard work, personal and community values, passion, love, death, loss, and reconciliation.
2. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the text on four levels: factual, interpretive, critical, and personal.
3. Students will define their own viewpoints on the vast number of issues presented in the novel.
4. Students will be exposed to new ways of looking at their own lives and the lives of other people.
5. Students will study various aspects of modern farming and will create plans for dealing with some of the needs of the farming community.
6. Students will be practice reading aloud as well as silently.
7. Students will enrich their vocabularies and improve their understanding of the novel through the vocabulary lessons prepared for use in conjunction with it.
8. Students will practice writing through a variety of assignments.
9. The writing assignments in this unit are geared to several purposes:
 - a. to check the students' reading comprehension
 - b. to make students think about the ideas presented in the book
 - c. to allow students to write from personal experience, to inform, and to persuade
 - d. to provide the opportunity to review standard English
 - e. to encourage critical and logical thinking
10. Students will be encouraged to make connections between the book and real life.

Reading Assignment Sheet
Out of the Dust

Section of the Text Assigned	Date Assigned	Date to be Completed
Section 1 <i>Beginning: August 1920</i> through <i>Birthday for F.D.R.</i>		
Section 2 <i>Not Too Much To Ask</i> through <i>Breaking Drought</i>		
Section 3 <i>Dazzled</i> through <i>Fields of Flashing Light</i>		
Section 4 <i>Tested by Dust</i> through <i>On the Road with Arley</i>		
Section 5 <i>Hope in a Drizzle</i> through <i>Devoured</i>		
Section 6 <i>Blame</i> through <i>The Path of Our Sorrow</i>		
Section 7 <i>Hired Work</i> through <i>Art Exhibit</i>		
Section 8 <i>State Tests Again</i> through <i>Outlined by Dust</i>		
Section 9 <i>The President's Ball</i> through <i>The Competition</i>		
Section 10 <i>The Piano Player</i> through <i>Following in His Steps</i>		
Section 11 <i>Heartsick</i> through <i>Blankets of Black</i>		
Section 12 <i>The Visit</i> through <i>Old Bones</i>		
Section 13 <i>The Dream</i> through <i>Met</i>		
Section 14 <i>Cut It Deep</i> through <i>November Dust</i>		

Unit Outline Out of the Dust

1 Introduction Distribution Bulletin Board activity	2 PVR #1 Reading aloud Oral reading evaluation	3 Rewriting exercise	4 PVR #2 Reading aloud Preview work homework	5 Checking preview work Read #3 WA #1 (personal exp.)
6 Quiz Finish WA#1 PVR #4	7 Nonfiction Reading Assignment	8 NFRA updates (one interesting fact) PVR #5 (CQ option)	9 PVR #6 (CQ option) Project Modern Farming)	10 PVR #7 WA #2 (to inform)
11 PVR #8 Quiz Metaphor exercise or CQ option	12 Role playing exercise (Character)	13 Review PVR #9 (CQ option)	14 PVR #10 (CQ option) Project updates	15 PVR #11 (CQ option) Finish Project updates
16 PVR #12 Quiz	17 PVR #13 (CQ option)	18 PBR #14 WA #3	19 Review Quiz	20 Discussion using Extra Discussion Questions/Writing Assignments
21 Finishing discussion	22 Vocabulary review	23 Games/puzzles review	24 Unit Testing	

Key: P = Preview Study Questions
V = Vocabulary Work
R = Read
WA = Writing Assignment
CQ option (option to use critical based questions)

Lesson One

Objectives

1. To introduce the unit on **Out of the Dust**
2. To distribute books and other related materials
3. To begin consideration and discussion of one theme in **Out of the Dust**, namely having a dream

NOTE: Prior to this lesson, students should have been assigned to bring in some physical item (or a written physical description, photograph, or drawing of that item) that symbolizes a special dream of theirs. Borrowing from the story line in **Dust** in which Billie Jo Kelby has a special dream—namely to get out of the Oklahoma Dust Bowl--students should be encouraged to think about what dreams they would like to realize in their lifetime. You will have prepared ahead of time a bulletin board that has the title MY DREAM: THE THING I MOST WANT TO ACHIEVE. You may want to place pictures on the board. Remember to include pictures of both tangible and intangible things. For instance, you might have some valuable possessions pictured but will also want to show pictures of people embracing, people laughing together, people talking with doctors, etc. The point, of course, is that our most cherished dreams may be to achieve good health, to reach a deeper spiritual relationship, and to gain new friendships and strengthen old ones as to achieve a more tangible goal.

Activity #1

Ask students individually to explain the significance to them of their special dreams. If they can, they might explain how long they have had the dream, how they came to have it, what they think are their chances of achieving it, and when they think they might achieve it. After they have explained this, each student should go to the bulletin board and write a few words (using the infinitive “to”) to describe their most cherished dream. If they have a picture representing their dream and there is space on the bulletin board, the students might post their pictures on the board as well. Students should be encouraged to keep all valuables with them and not leave them lying around in the classroom.

Activity #2

Distribute the materials students will use in this unit. Explain in detail how students are to use the materials.

Study Guides Students should read the study guide questions for each reading assignment before beginning the assignment to get a feeling for what events and ideas are important in the section they are about to read. After reading the section, students will (as a class or individually) answer the questions to review the important events and ideas from that section of the book. Students should keep the study guides as study materials for the unit test.

Writing Assignment #1 Out of the Dust

PROMPT

In the sections of the novel that you have read so far, you have learned a lot about Billie Jo's life. You know something about several areas of her life: her birth, her parents, her community, her friends, her relationship with her mother, her passion (the piano), her value system, the kind of life she leads, her views in regard to her parents, her parents' relationship with each other, and her school life. In seventeen poems, then, the author of **Out of the Dust** has brought her heroine to life for you.

Your assignment is to choose one of two options:

One, you may write your assignment about yourself. Or, two, you may write your assignment about Billie Jo Kelby and why you would or would not like to have her as a close friend. If you choose the first option, you should be sure that at the end of your paper, your audience knows about at least three areas of your life. If you choose the second option, you should give at least three reasons for your decision.

Your choice should be relatively easy: if you find yourself interested in Billie Jo, positively or negatively, then write about her, or, if you are not particularly interested in Billie Jo but would like to write about your own life, then write about yourself.

PREWRITING

For whichever choice you have made, make a list of the things that you would like to talk about. If you are writing about your own life, make a list of what you consider to be important areas in your life. If you are writing about Billie Jo, make a list of what you consider to be favorable or unfavorable aspects of her life or traits that would make you want or not want her as a close friend.

Write down everything that occurs to you, and then go back and sort through them and combine ideas that are essentially the same. Pare your categories down until you have three basic points to make about yourself or about Billie Jo. Then you can begin to write your paper.

DRAFTING

You will probably want to begin your paper with an interesting introductory paragraph in which you state your main point: I would/would not want Billie Jo Kelby as a close friend. I lead an exciting life filled with interesting challenges. I lead a humdrum life filled with many boring experiences. Whatever you choose to say, state your point clearly in the first paragraph so that your audience knows what you are writing about.