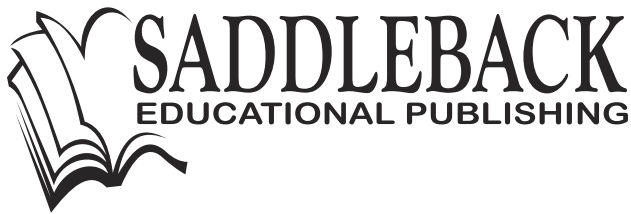


Focus **ON READING**

*Out of
the Dust*

LISA McCARTY

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.



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Contents

<i>Introduction/Classroom Management</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Focus on the Book</i>	<i>vi</i>
Focus Your Knowledge	1
I. WINTER 1934	
Focus Your Reading	2–3
Build Your Vocabulary	4
Check Your Understanding:	
Multiple Choice	5
Check Your Understanding:	
Short Answer	6
Deepen Your Understanding	7
II. SPRING 1934	
Focus Your Reading	8–9
Build Your Vocabulary	10
Check Your Understanding:	
Multiple Choice	11
Check Your Understanding:	
Short Answer	12
Deepen Your Understanding	13
III. SUMMER 1934–AUTUMN 1934	
Focus Your Reading	14–15
Build Your Vocabulary	16
Check Your Understanding:	
Multiple Choice	17
Check Your Understanding:	
Short Answer	18
Deepen Your Understanding	19
IV. WINTER 1935	
Focus Your Reading	20–21
Build Your Vocabulary	22
Check Your Understanding:	
Multiple Choice	23
Check Your Understanding:	
Short Answer	24
Deepen Your Understanding	25
V. SPRING 1935	
Focus Your Reading	26–27
Build Your Vocabulary	28
Check Your Understanding:	
Multiple Choice	29
Check Your Understanding:	
Short Answer	30
Deepen Your Understanding	31
VI. SUMMER 1935–AUTUMN 1935	
Focus Your Reading	32–33
Build Your Vocabulary	34
Check Your Understanding:	
Multiple Choice	35
Check Your Understanding:	
Short Answer	36
Deepen Your Understanding	37
<i>End-of-Book Test</i>	38
<i>Answer Key</i>	40

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Introduction/Classroom Management

WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

Focus on Reading is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains a before-reading **Focus Your Reading** page containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

USING *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference page for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

Vocabulary Words to Know lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

Things to Know identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

Questions to Think About helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Focus on Reading is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or

other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives the adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary** and **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice and Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

Deepen Your Understanding is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

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Focus on the Book

Synopsis

Fourteen-year-old Billie Jo has a great deal to cope with. Growing up in the Oklahoma Dust Bowl of the mid-1930s, she relates how her mother and baby brother die after a terrible accident with burning kerosene. Blaming both herself and her father, she is unable to work through her pain and grief by playing the piano because of the burns on her hands. To make matters worse, dust storms are devastating the family farm and all the farms nearby. Faced with almost insurmountable odds, Billie Jo runs away but quickly returns to her roots—her home of dust and her father. Told in a free verse form that allows the narrator to speak for herself, this compelling tale effectively communicates a young woman's fierce spirit and developing self-knowledge.

About the Author

Karen Hesse decided to write about the Dust Bowl when she was driving to Colorado with a friend and fell in love with the plains. She began thinking about times in this country when people really wanted it to rain. So she came back to the Dust Bowl. She then began researching and became fascinated by that period and the people living then. Before writing *Out of the Dust*, she studied books about growing wheat and living on a farm in that period. She studied the effects of the dust on farmers and nonfarmers living in that area. Ms. Hesse also read newspapers from that time period and drew many of the events in the book directly from newspaper accounts.

In conducting her research of this time period, Ms. Hesse also learned the effects of dust throughout the world. One thing she learned was that ships out at sea 200 miles out into the Atlantic—could see dust tracing all the way back to the Kansas or Oklahoma prairie.

When asked why she chose to write *Out of the Dust* in blank verse, Ms. Hesse replied, “I don’t think I ever consciously decided to write this book in blank verse, but when I tried to put my finger on who Billie Jo was, and how she would speak, I realized she lived a very spare life. Everything she did was carefully considered, because it took so much to survive, to get through one day living with parents who were struggling. It seemed as if the only way to get at that spareness was to tell it through poetry.”

Historical Background

The setting of *Out of the Dust* is the Oklahoma Panhandle, a part of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. It was a term born in the hard time from the people who lived during the Great Depression in the drought-stricken region of the country. The area covered some 50,000,000 acres and included parts of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

The Dust Bowl period lasted about a decade. It was a time of extremes: tornadoes, floods, blizzards, droughts, and dirt storms. Although the primary area of impact was the southern Plains, a ripple effect in the northern Plains brought agricultural decline. This agricultural devastation helped to lengthen the Great Depression, whose effects were felt worldwide. In addition, the movement of people on the Plains was profound.

The Dust Bowl was caused by years of poor agricultural practices and drought. Farmers had come to the Plains lured by the promise of rich, plentiful soil. They brought with them farming techniques that had worked well in the North and East. They subsequently plowed millions of acres of grassland, only to be faced with drought. The grasslands of the Plains had been plowed and planted with wheat. In the years of adequate rainfall, there was a bountiful crop of wheat. However, as the droughts of the early 1930s deepened, the farmers continued to plow and plant and nothing would grow. As winds whipped across the fields of the Plains, huge clouds of dust swept across the landscape.

Out of the horror of the Dust Bowl came new farming methods and techniques. A new era of soil conservation was ushered in. In April of 1935, Congress declared soil erosion “a national menace” in an act establishing the Soil Conservation Service in the Department of Agriculture. The SCS developed extensive conservation programs that retained topsoil and prevented irreparable damage to the land.

In the fall of 1939, the rain began to fall, finally bringing an end to the drought. During the next few years, the country pulled out of the Great Depression and the Plains once again became golden with wheat.

Focus Your Knowledge

During the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s, dust storms devastated a part of the Plains region of the United States. This region was called the Dust Bowl.

- Look at a current map of the United States. Identify the five-state region known as the Dust Bowl. The states are Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Gather information about the terrain of the land, general weather patterns, sources of water, and economic activity.
- Next, recall everything you have ever known about the Dust Bowl. Have you ever heard of it? What images come to mind when you hear the words *dust bowl*?
- Who was affected by the dust storms of the Dust Bowl? What happened to cause this region to become a dust bowl? What images come to mind when you think about America in the 1930s?
- Look at the photograph below. This picture of a dust storm was taken from a 100 foot-high water tower, looking down on the small town of Rolla, Kansas, on May 6, 1935. How does this photograph help you imagine what it must have been like to experience a duster? As you read *Out of the Dust*, keep this image in mind. It will help you visualize the devastation of the Plains and the strength and courage of Billie Jo and all the people who survived this terrible time.



Courtesy of FDR Library

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Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

fidgety—nervous; uneasy; making unnecessary fuss

wagering—betting; gambling

scowl—to frown

riled—to upset; to irritate

testy—easily annoyed; marked by impatience

distracted—to have drawn someone's attention away from something; turned aside

whittled—pared down; reduced

maggoty—having the characteristics of a maggot

spindly—frail or flimsy in appearance

drought—a prolonged period of dryness

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

The **Panhandle** refers to the western portion of Oklahoma, a strip of land 166 miles long and 34 miles wide.

Lubbock is a city in the Texas Panhandle.

Jacks is a shortened form of *jackrabbits*.

A **plowboy** is a boy who leads the team of animals drawing a plow.

FDR, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was the thirty-second president of the United States (1933–1945). He assumed the presidency during the Great Depression. He brought hope to people at this dark time by promising prompt, vigorous action. He said in his Inaugural Address, “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Birthday Balls were dances that were held across the country to raise money for the Warm Springs Foundation established by President Roosevelt.

The **Warm Springs Foundation** was founded in 1927 by Franklin Roosevelt. The foundation was established to raise money for people with disabilities. FDR was himself disabled by polio. The foundation staged birthday parties in FDR's honor across the country. The first series of parties—in 1934—raised over a million dollars for the foundation.

Amarillo is a city in the Texas Panhandle.

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. In what ways does Billie Jo's restlessness come out?
2. In the poem "Rabbit Battles," how does Billie Jo's maturity shine through?
3. What are Billie Jo's feelings about her friend Livie moving away?
4. How do you think Billie Jo feels about Mad Dog Craddock?
5. Why do you think Ma always gets "testy" about Billie Jo wanting to play the piano?
6. Why are the "rules for dining" necessary? How does this ritual emphasize the difficulty of living during these times?

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. "... I've been restless in this little Panhandle shack we call home, always **getting** in Ma's way with my pointy elbows, my **fidgety** legs."
fidgety: _____
2. "They pledged revenge on the rabbit population; **wagering** who could kill more. They ought to just shut up. Betting on how many rabbits they can kill."
wagering: _____
3. "Now they can't be civil with each other. They **scowl** as they pass on the street."
scowl: _____
4. "I suspected Mad Dog had come first to Arley Wandersdale's mind, but I didn't get too **riled**. Not so **riled** I couldn't say yes."
riled: _____
5. "She always gets **testy** about me playing, even though she's the one who truly taught me."
testy: _____
6. "... this time I caught her in the slow stirring of biscuits, her mind on other things ... she was **distracted** enough."
distracted: _____
7. "We haven't had a good crop in three years, ... and we're all **whittled** down to the bone these days."
whittled: _____
8. "... I glare at Ma's back with a scowl foul as **maggoty** stew."
maggoty: _____
9. "The night sky kept flashing, lightning danced down on its **spindly** legs."
spindly: _____
10. "I watched the plants, surviving after so much **drought** and so much wind, I watched them fry, or flatten."
drought: _____

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. At what time of year was Billie Jo born?
 - a. spring
 - b. summer
 - c. autumn
2. Where does Billie Jo's friend Livie Killian move?
 - a. Lubbock
 - b. Cimarron County
 - c. California
3. Who is Arley Wanderdale?
 - a. music teacher
 - b. piano player
 - c. talent scout
4. How does Billie Jo ask her mother for something she wants?
 - a. She asks her father to ask for her.
 - b. She waits until her mother is asleep and then asks her.
 - c. She catches her mother off guard when she is distracted.
5. What is "heaven" to Billie Jo?
 - a. getting Mad Dog Craddock's attention
 - b. playing the piano
 - c. walking in a rainstorm
6. Where is Billie Jo asked to play the piano?
 - a. at the White House
 - b. at the Warm Springs Foundation
 - c. at the President's Birthday Ball
7. Why does Mr. Hardly have a bad reputation?
 - a. He doesn't like young girls and is rude to them.
 - b. He doesn't stock necessary items in his store.
 - c. He doesn't give the correct change.
8. When is Billie Jo dazzled by her mother?
 - a. when her mother is busy in the kitchen
 - b. when her mother is pregnant
 - c. when her mother is playing the piano
9. What city is fifty miles from Billie Jo's home?
 - a. Joyce City
 - b. Amarillo
 - c. Washington, D.C.
10. Why is Billie Jo's father considering a loan from the government?
 - a. to pay for a doctor for the new baby
 - b. to buy some wheat to plant a new crop
 - c. to get money for food for his family

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. Why does Livie Killian's family move west?
2. Why does Billie Jo enjoy playing with the Black Mesa Boys?
3. What are two ways Billie Jo's family members demonstrate their goodness?
4. What happens to Mr. Hardly to put him in such a foul temper?
5. What are the "rules for dining"? What is the purpose of the rules?
6. What happens to Livie Killian's family once they go west?
7. How old was Billie Jo when she learned to play the piano? Who taught her to play?
8. How does Ma explain Daddy's optimism about rain to Billie Jo?
9. What does Billie Jo think are the reasons Ma won't allow Billie Jo to play the piano for the Sunny of Sunnyside show?
10. Why is Billie Jo disappointed in Ma's reaction to her wonderful test scores?

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Deepen Your Understanding

Mood refers to the climate of feeling, or atmosphere, created by the author. Describe the mood of Billie Jo's poems. Does she seem serious? Lighthearted? Worried? Give specific examples from various poems.

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