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Review: Out of the Dust

Rachel Schwedt

Liberty University, reschwed@liberty.edu

Janice A. DeLong

Liberty University, jadelong@liberty.edu

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Hesse, Karen, *Out of the Dust*. Scholastic, 1997. ISBN: 0590371258, Grades 5-8

Description

Disaster abounds in the life of Billie Jo when her mother dies and her own hands are injured in a terrible accident. Not only has she lost her mother, but she has lost the ability to play her beloved piano, and her father has isolated himself in his own grief. All of this happens within the context of the dust storms which blew across Oklahoma in the 1930s destroying crops and forcing families from their homes. While many flee this devastation, Billie Jo's family struggles to survive and through the difficulties this young girl emerges as a courageous young heroine finding peace amidst the storms of the landscape and the turbulence in her heart.

Critique

Karen Hesse tells the story of Billie Joe in a conversational tone as if we were eavesdropping on the young girl's internal musings. The sparse free verse proves an excellent vehicle to describe the bareness of the lives of those caught in the dust storm disaster of the 1930s. Although there is an abundance of sadness in this book, it ends with hope as Billie Jo comes to understand her father's innate strength and the importance of staying close as a family.

Subjects

Newbery Medal winner

Dust Bowl

Oklahoma

Fathers and daughters

Grief

Courage

Character Themes: Courage, Determination, Family Love