

Focus ON READING

Vocabulary

READING
COMPREHENSION

Out of the Dust

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ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Reproducible Activities

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

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.

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 Wanderdale'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: _____

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?

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.

dazed—stunned

wince—to shrink back; flinch

sorghum—a kind of grass, similar to Indian corn

leveling—knocking down of something; putting it on an equal level

boughs—branches of trees

tart—agreeably sharp or biting in taste

searing—burning; scorching

combine—a harvesting machine

rag—a song or music in ragtime

gripe—complain

Things to Know

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

By March of 1933, there were 13,000,000 unemployed people in the United States, and almost every bank was closed. When **banks** ran out of money, they were said to have **failed**.

Madame Butterfly is one of the world's most popular operas.

The Great War refers to World War I (1914–1918).

A **bushel** is a unit of measurement, equal to 4 pecks or 32 quarts.

Poppies are showy red flowers.

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. "Joe De La Flor doesn't see me pass him by; he rides his fences, **dazed** by dust."
dazed: _____
2. "I **wince** at the sight of his rib-thin cattle."
wince: _____
3. "Plant some other things . . . Try cotton, **sorghum**. If we plant the fields in different crops, maybe some will do better. . . ."
sorghum: _____
4. "Nothing needs more to drink than those two [trees]. But you wouldn't hear of **leveling** your apples, would you?"
leveling: _____
5. "I stand under the trees and let the petals fall into my hair, a blizzard of sweet-smelling flowers, dropped from the **boughs** of the two placed . . . in the front yard. . . ."
boughs: _____
6. "To eat them now, so **tart**, would turn my mouth inside out, would make my stomach groan."
tart: _____
7. "On Sunday, winds came, bringing a red dust like prairie fire, hot and peppery, **searing** the inside of my nose. . . ."
searing: _____
8. "The **combines** have started moving across the fields, bringing in wheat, . . ."
combines: _____
9. "And every little crowd is grateful to hear a **rag** or two played on the piano. . . ."
rag: _____
10. "Ma said okay, but only for the summer, and only if she didn't hear me **gripe** how I was tired, . . ."
gripe: _____

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. Why does Billie Jo think her class deserves bonus points for the state test?
2. What's comforting to Billie Jo during this bad time?
3. What do Ma and Daddy argue about?
4. How does Ma deal with her anger at her husband?
5. What is the opera Billie Jo's teacher, Miss Freeland, is singing in?
6. When had Ma planted her treasured apple trees?
7. What are some of the things Billie Jo dreams of doing with the apples from the apple trees?
8. In "Dust and Rain," why is the rain no blessing?
9. Why does Ma say she doesn't want Billie Jo traveling with Arley and the boys?
10. What are some of the reasons Billie Jo likes traveling with Arley and the boys?

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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.

antiseptic—a substance that helps prevent the spread of germs

grit—sand, gravel

chafed—irritated; rubbed in an irritating way

scorched—burned; dried up and shriveled

quench—to put out; to extinguish

writhed—twisted; distorted

carcasses—dead bodies

withered—dried up and shriveled

octaves—musical intervals of notes and tones

excavating—digging away; removing

Things to Know

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

Kerosene is a flammable oil used for fuel.

The Dionne Quintuplets were the miracle babies of their time. The five sisters were born in Canada in 1934. The public adored them, but they were abused by the world. They were taken from their parents by the Ontario government and made wards of the state. Although their health was fine, they lived at a hospital until 1943. People visited the hospital, and the sisters became a huge tourist attraction.

The **cereus plant** is a kind of cactus of the western United States and tropical America. It blooms only briefly.

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. “The doctor cut away the skin on my hands. . . . He bathed my burns in **antiseptic**.”
antiseptic: _____
2. “I was coming home through a howling dust storm, my lowered face was scrubbed raw by dirt and wind. **Grit** scratched my eyes, it crunched between my teeth.”
grit: _____
3. “Sand **chafed** inside my clothes, against my skin.”
chafed: _____
4. “Daddy has made a tent out of the sheet over Ma so nothing will touch her skin, what skin she has left. . . . She smells like **scorched** meat.”
scorched: _____
5. “. . . she cried for the water that would not soothe her throat and **quench** her thirst, . . .”
quench: _____
6. “They didn’t say a word about my father drinking himself into a stupor while Ma **writhed**, begging for water.”
writhed: _____
7. “On either side of the road are the **carcasses** of jackrabbits, small birds, field mice, stretching out into the distance.”
carcasses: _____
8. “My father stares out across his land, empty but for a few **withered** stalks like the tufts on an old man’s head.”
withered: _____
9. “. . . there are only these lumps of flesh that once were hands long enough to span **octaves**, . . .”
octaves: _____
10. “My father hired on at Wireless Power on Tuesday, **excavating** for towers. He said, ‘I’m good at digging, . . .’”
excavating: _____