About the Book

Billie Jo Kelby is almost 14 years old when she begins keeping a journal about her life growing up during the Great Depression in Oklahoma. Her compelling story, told in free verse, highlights the frustrations and crushing hardships of surviving the smothering heat, choking dust, and destructive winds of Oklahoma’s dust bowl. Billie Jo’s dream of becoming a pianist is almost completely lost when a horrible accident claims the life of her pregnant mother and terribly scars her own hands. Left alone with her grieving, silent father, Billie Jo struggles to make sense out of the terrible things her family has been through. Just as she is ready to leave the dust bowl behind her, she reaches deep within herself and finds the inner strength to reclaim her hopes and dreams.

About the Author

Karen Hesse was born on August 29, 1952, in Baltimore, Maryland. Growing up, an apple tree and the public library were refuges that provided her with the privacy she needed to read. Along with a great love of reading, Hesse had an active imagination. At one point in her childhood, she was sure she could fly and was prepared to prove it until her mother stopped her.

During high school, Hesse became involved in drama. She continued with drama at Towson State College, but left college and the stage after two years to marry Randy Hesse. She later completed her undergraduate work at the University of Maryland.

From the time she was ten years old, Hesse knew she was good with words. She has used experiences from her childhood and family experiences in her stories. *Letters From Rifka* is based on the experiences of her great-aunt. Hesse was advised not to write historical fiction, but she followed her heart and her love for research anyway, and in 1998 she won the Newbery Award for *Out of the Dust*!

Student Contract Materials List

- Activity #1: shoebox, arts-and-crafts supplies
- Activity #2: 2 sheets of 12” x 18” light-colored construction paper, crayons or markers
- Activity #3: copy of page 19, 1 sheet of 8½” x 11” poster board, 2 sheets of 8½” x 11” white paper
- Activity #4: reference materials on the dust bowl
- Activity #5: 1 sheet of 12” x 18” light-colored construction paper, reference materials on volcanoes, crayons or markers
- Activity #6: reference materials on apple pandowdy, recipe books, 1 sheet of 9” x 12” red construction paper, scissors
- Activity #7: pencil, paper
- Activity #8: reference materials on Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, 5 sheets of 8½” x 11” white paper, 5 index cards
- Activity #9: copy of page 20, crayons or markers
- Activity #10: reference materials on grasshoppers, 1 sheet of 12” x 18” light-colored construction paper, markers
- Activity #11: reference materials on ragtime music, several recordings of ragtime music
- Activity #12: reference materials on windmills, craft sticks, cardboard, other building materials
Out of the Dust
Independent Contract

Name:___________________________  Number of activities to be completed:_______

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<tr>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Art</th>
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<td><strong>Billie Jo</strong> has two boxes in her closet filled with precious mementos of her life. Reread “Boxes,” September 1934, to discover what she keeps in her special boxes. Then use arts-and-craft supplies to design a special box of your own! Gather several items that have special meaning to you, and place them in the box. On a slip of paper, write a sentence about each item, telling what it is and why you chose it. Attach each slip to the corresponding item in your box.</td>
<td><strong>Billie Jo</strong> writes that President Roosevelt wants people to plant trees to help solve the problems of the dust bowl. He says trees will break the wind, help end the drought, and hold on to the land. Billie Jo’s parents have an argument about the amount of water Ma’s two apple trees need to survive. Imagine having to make the decision whether or not to plant trees on your farm. Design two billboards, one advertising the benefits of planting trees and the other explaining the negative aspects of planting trees.</td>
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<th>Math</th>
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<td><strong>Billie Jo</strong>’s mother is pregnant with one baby, Oliva Dionne gives birth to five babies! In a sense, she also gave birth to the word <em>quintuplets</em> because her babies were the first known quintuplets to live more than a few hours after birth. There are several words that have the Latin base <em>quintus</em>, meaning fifth. Obtain a copy of page 19 from your teacher to make a book of fives.</td>
<td>Imagine that you can change the course of history by traveling back in time. Reread “The Path of Our Sorrow,” September 1934, about some of the incidents that led to the dust bowl. Then research the causes of the dust bowl. Use the information you find to write a speech. Prepare the speech as if you had gone back in time to Oklahoma in the 1920s. Warn the people about the future tragedy of the dust bowl, and give them suggestions as to how they can avoid it.</td>
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<td><strong>Billie Jo</strong> mentions that a volcano erupted in Hawaii, she suggests that it was something like a dust storm. Reread “Fields of Flashing Light,” March 1934, and “Dust Storm,” March 1935, in which Billie Jo describes the dust storms. Research volcanoes to compare and contrast them with dust storms. Then divide a sheet of construction paper in half. On one half, draw pictures and write a paragraph describing dust storms. On the other half, draw pictures and write a paragraph describing volcanic eruptions.</td>
<td><strong>Billie Jo</strong> longs to have apples from Ma’s trees to make all sorts of apple treats, such as apple pie, applesauce, and apple cobbler. When Sheriff Robertson confiscates one thousand pounds of sugar, he gives some of it to Billie Jo’s teacher and tells her to bake apple pandowdy for her students. Research apple pandowdy to find out how it is made. Next, cut out five construction paper apple shapes. Write the recipe for apple pandowdy on one shape. Then look up the recipes for four of your favorite apple treats and write them on each of the other apple shapes. Staple the shapes together to create an apple-shaped recipe book!</td>
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