

# *Out of the Dust*

by Karen Hesse

**Story Synopsis:** Written in poetic free verse, this historical novel describes the struggles of fourteen-year-old Billie Jo and her family living in the panhandle of Oklahoma during the Great Depression. The family struggles with physical hardships, great loss and financial ruin caused by the unrelenting drought and resulting dust. Billie Jo's father makes the choice to stay after a massive dust storm that causes other farmers to give up the region and move to California. After the horrific accidental death of her mother, Billie tries to run away but realizes that her future lies in her home and heritage and that dust is just a part of life.

## **Lesson I Plain Choices**

**Introduction:** Billie Jo, acting on pure emotion, decides to run away from the dust, dry land and her unfeeling father. She discovers this was not a wise thing to do and returns home. If she had given more thought to her actions, she may have saved her father and her self a great deal of anxiety.

**Time Required:** 30-35 Minutes

### **Economic Concepts**

- Scarcity – the condition of limited resources. Because resources are limited, people must make choices.
- Opportunity cost – that which is given up when a choice is made. When deciding how to spend a resource it is one's second-best alternative; the alternative given up.
- Choice - takes place whenever someone makes a personal decision to use limited resources.
- Trade offs – getting more of one option in exchange for a little less of something else.

### **Materials:**

- Visual – *Should Billie Jo Stay or Leave?*
- Activity Sheet – *Bayard Makes a Choice*
- Writing Tools

### **Procedure:**

- Introduce the lesson by explaining that people make choices all the time. When a decision is made people choose the alternative that seems to be in their best interest because it involves the least cost and the greatest benefit.
- Display the visual *Should Billie Jo Stay or Leave? Steps in Decision Making*. Review the listed Steps in Decision Making with the students.
- Explain to the students that Billie Jo would have benefited from using a decision-making grid. Review the components of the grid with the students. Fill in the grid using suggestions from the students. Encourage discussion as there can be different interpretations as to if an action is negative or positive. (There are no right or wrong answers for this activity.)

- Pass out Activity Sheet **Bayard Makes a Choice**. Review the directions with the students.
- Allow students to work in groups. Encourage them to share their solutions with the class.
- Possible solution of Visual:

	Easy (Does this take much effort and is it safe?)	Future (Might this action provide for future wellbeing and happiness?)	No Cost (Does doing this require money or other scarce resources?)	Considerate (Will this decision help others?)	Total Pluses
<b>Leave Oklahoma</b> go to another state and start a new life	–	<b>0</b>	–	–	<b>0</b>
<b>Stay in Oklahoma</b> , but leave home and Pa	–	<b>0</b>	–	–	<b>0</b>
<b>Stay home</b> and let things remain the same	<b>+</b>	–	<b>+</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Stay home</b> but confront Pa and make him take care of himself	–	<b>+</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>3</b>

**Extension Activities:**

- **Reading:** Read other books about the Great Depressions. Suggested Titles: **Babe and Me** by Dan Gutman, **Bud, Not Buddy** by Christopher Paul Curtis, **Dave at Night** by Gail Carson Levine, **Esperanza Rising** by Pam Munoz Ryan, **A Long Way from Chicago** by Richard Peck, **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry** by Mildred Taylor.
- **Writing:** The author uses an interesting first-person narrative and free verse poetic style to tell Billie Jo’s Story. Write your own diary entry using the same style. Topics could include your concern about the weather, environment, finances, family or future.
- **Display:** Create an attractive and information poster that showcases the Dust Bowl. Emphasize that this was an ecological and financial disaster that hit the Southern Great Plains. The eight years of drought were caused by man’s misuse of the land causing farmland to become useless, and forcing thousands of people to leave their homes.
- **Interview:** Locate someone who lived in the 1930s. (These people would be in their 70s and 80s) Ask them what life was like during the Depression. Prepared at least five questions in advance but allow the person you interview to volunteer information about how life has changed since then as well as what things have remained the same.

Visual-

People Make Choices

## Should Billie Jo Stay or Leave?

### Steps in Making a Decision

1. What is the **PROBLEM**?
2. What **ALTERNATIVE** actions can be taken to solve the problem?
3. What are the **IMPORTANT** things to consider in making this decision?
4. **EVALUATE** what is important.
5. Make a **DECISION**.

	Easy (Does this take much effort and is it safe?)	Future (Might this action provide for future wellbeing and happiness?)	No Cost (Does doing this require money or other resources?)	Considerate (Will this decision help others?)	Total Pluses
<b>Leave Oklahoma</b> go to another state and start a new life					
<b>Stay in Oklahoma,</b> but leave home and Pa					
<b>Stay home</b> and let things remain the same					
<b>Stay home</b> but confront Pa and make him take care of himself					

### Decision-Making Grid

In the top row are the important things Billy Jo needs to consider as the make the decision to stay or leave. →

In the column are the possible actions Billie Jo can take.

**Directions:** Fill in each square with a Plus (+), Minus (-), or Zero (0). For example, if you think it would be difficult to leave Oklahoma, put a minus sign in the first space on the grid. If you think it would be easy, put a plus sign and if it does not matter one way or another, put in a zero.

Activity

## Bayard Makes a Choice

### Steps in Making a Decision

- 1) What is the **PROBLEM**?
- 2) What **ACTIONS** can be taken to solve the problem?
- 3) What are the **IMPORTANT** things to consider in making this decision?
- 4) **EVALUATE** what is important.
- 5) Make a **DECISION**.

**Scenario:** Billie Jo's father, Bayard, has a difficult choice to make. Should he remain in Oklahoma and try to continue farming though the drought and dust storms, or leave the land and go to California like many of his neighbors have done?

	<b>Easy</b> (Does this take much effort and is it safe?)	<b>Future</b> (Might this action provide for future wellbeing and happiness?)	<b>No Cost</b> (Does doing this require money or other resources?)	<b>Considerate</b> (Will this decision help others?)	<b>Total</b>
<b>Stay on the farm</b> and continue to work in the fields full time.					
<b>Stay on the farm</b> but take night classes to learn another skill.					
<b>Pack up and leave</b> the farm for temporary work elsewhere					
<b>Sell the farm</b> and leave for good					

### Decision-Making Grid

In the top row are the important things Bayard needs to consider as he makes the decision to stay in Oklahoma or go to California. —————→

In the column are the possible actions Bayard can take.

**Directions:** Fill in each square with a Plus (+), Minus (-) or Zero (0). For example, if you think it would be easy to stay in Ember and do nothing, put a plus sign in the first space on the grid. If you think it would be difficult, put a minus sign and if it does not matter one way or another, put in a zero.

Be prepared to answer these questions:

According to the results of the Decision-Making Grid what is the best decision for Bayard?

Why?