

Argumentative Essay Exemplar Response

The dust is making it difficult for Billie Jo and her neighbors to live happy and healthy lives. The lack of rain is causing dust storms, which is killing crops, animals, and even people. There are several passages in the novel that describe the damage that the dust is doing, and how people are suffering from it.

One effect of the dust is that it is killing the farmers' animals. The dust rips their food out of the ground and also clogs their lungs, suffocating them. In the poem "Beat Wheat," Billie Jo says about Joe De La Flor, "I wince at the sight of his rib-thin cattle." (p.39) The cattle are thin because they haven't had enough to eat. In the poem "Driving the Cows," Billie Jo says that County Agent Dewey came to shoot Joe De La Flor's cows. She says, "Too hard to watch their lungs clog with dust, like our chickens, suffocated." (p.102) These passages describe how the dust has negatively affected both Billie Jo's animals and those of her neighbor.

Another reason the dust is making life difficult is that farmers are not able to make enough money to live on. The lack of rain and the dust storms are ruining the crops. Consequently, the farmers don't have enough wheat to sell. Sometimes, they lose the whole crop. In the poem "Beat Wheat," Billie Jo says that County Agent Dewey came by to say "Soon, there won't be enough wheat for seed to plan next fall." (p.39) In other words, Billie Jo's family isn't growing enough wheat to sell or to save for seed for the coming year. Frequently, Billie Jo talks about not having enough money for basic things, like a doctor when Ma has her baby. One example from "Mr. Hardley's Money Handling," is when she says Ma baked Daddy a birthday cake because "there wasn't money enough for anything like a real present." (p.17)

The most significant problem is that the dust is actually killing people! Something called "dust pneumonia" killed Pete Guymon, who drove a delivery truck with produce for stores. It says in poem "Dust Pneumonia" that "Calb Hardly teased Pete Guymon about his wheezy truck sucking in dust." (p.140) This tells me that he probably breathed in some of that dust. In the poem "Following in His Steps," Billie Jo tells us, "Haydon Parley Nye's wife, Fonda, died today, two months after she lost her man. The cause of death was dust pneumonia, but I think she couldn't go on without Haydon." (p.149) Later in the same poem, Billie Jo says "I don't want to die, I just want to go, away, out of the dust." (p.149) It must be very sad for the townspeople to watch their friends and neighbors die.

The people living in the Dust Bowl area are struggling physically and financially, and their lives are often miserable. Billie Jo and her neighbors are poor, their animals are dying, and they are becoming sick and sometimes dying themselves. Surprisingly, they manage to get together and have fun by attending dances and enjoying the good weather outside when it arrives. How can they have fun when there is so much to be miserable about?