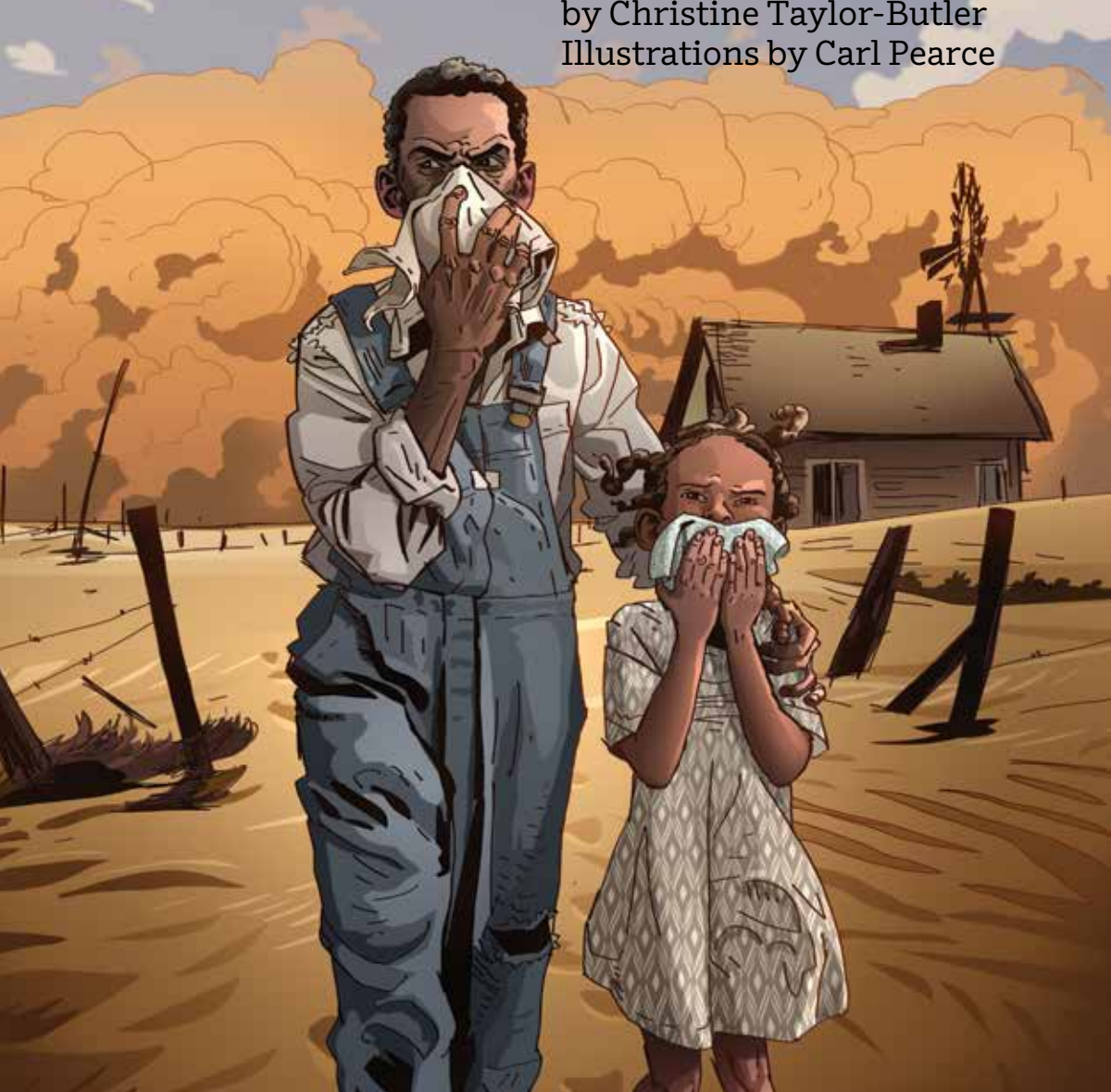


Beating the Dust

by Christine Taylor-Butler
Illustrations by Carl Pearce



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Texas, 1935

The sun's heat wrapped around us like a thick blanket. The wind, when it came, offered no relief, just more dust that bit into us like bits of broken glass. For years, our family had worked the rich, black soil for crops, but we didn't count on nature turning against us. What the dust didn't destroy, the grasshoppers finished.

Amplify Atlas™

Amplify Education, Inc.
55 Washington Street
Suite 800
Brooklyn, NY 11201
www.amplify.com

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Beating the Dust

Level S

Author: Christine Taylor-Butler

Image Credits

Illustrations: Carl Pearce

ISBN: 978-1-941554-57-9

Printed in the United States of America



“We can’t stay,” my mother said, pointing to the dust swirling outside the window. “It hasn’t rained for years. So many of our neighbors have moved to California. Shouldn’t we?”

My father’s pen hung over the government forms on the table, forms that would let him sell our farm to the government. Then it dropped from his hand to the floor. “Get the Johnsons,” he said, “and the Millers, and everyone who hasn’t left already. Tell them to come to the house tonight. Either we all go, or we all stay.”

My brothers and I ran from house to house, finding some already empty. I couldn’t escape the taste of dirt in my mouth even with a handkerchief held to my face, but we pressed on. Some people, like Ms. Hattie, turned us away until I said we’d be serving supper, sharing the last of our potatoes and apple cider.

That night, fourteen families packed tightly into our tiny home, each holding the same government form, and I could tell by the looks on their faces that their hope was gone. Before my father could even speak, Mr. Miller walked to the table, picked up the pen, and began to sign his form.



“Wait!” I yelled, surprising even myself.

“Hush, Abigail, there’s nothing left for us here,” my mother said gently.

But she couldn’t stop me from speaking my mind. “Papa once said nothing could ever take this land away from us. That weather can crush our farm but not our hope!”

I saw the light in Papa’s eyes return as Mr. Miller put down the pen.

That night, our family of six became a family of sixty-two. Everyone promised to stay on their farms. To get by, we’d all help each other, sharing food, clothing, whatever each family could spare. And when the next dust clouds rolled into town, we stood strong together.



Level S

Literary

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Total Running Words: **374**

Lexile: **810L**



Published and distributed by **Amplify.**

