

Neither Rain, Sleet, Nor Snow The Mail Must Go

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Discipline / Subject: Social Studies

Topic: History of the Iditarod Trail as a mail trail

Grade Level: 3-8; others with modifications

Resources / References / Materials Teacher Needs:

- Champion of Alaskan Huskies by: Katie Mangelsdorf (quotation included with lesson –used with permission of the author)
- Alaskan Dog Sled, Smithsonian collections:
<http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=2&cmd=1&id=63027>
- Photograph of Postcard of Transporting US Mail in Alaska, Smithsonian collections:
<http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=2&cmd=1&id=207602>
- Photograph of Seward and Susitna Mail Team, Smithsonian collections:
<http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=2&cmd=1&id=207599> Photo of Postcard of US
- Mail Leaving Seward for Anchorage, Alaska, Smithsonian collections:
<http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=2&cmd=1&id=207600>
- Dog Sled coil single postage stamp, Smithsonian collections:
<http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=2&tid=2038112>
- Alaska 50th Anniversary postage stamp:
<http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&tid=2051393>
- Along Alaskan Trails, Adventures in Sled Dog History by: Helen Hegener Northern Light Media ©2012 (available for purchase here: http://northernlightmedia.com/?page_id=1023) or article at this website: <http://northernlightmedia.com/?p=85>; scan of pertinent chapter included with lesson by permission of the author
- Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race mail cachets (scans included with lesson)
- 2014 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Rules: <http://d3r6tlk4mqz5i.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/2014-Rules-first-draft-06-07-13.pdf?352efd> (quotation included with lesson)
- Shadows on the Koyukuk, An Alaskan Native's Life Along the River by Sidney Huntington Alaska Northwest Books ©1993

Lesson Summary:

Through inquiry based study of objects, the students will discover the connection between the delivery of mail in Alaska by dog sled, the Iditarod Sled Dog Race, and the carrying of mail cachets during the race.

Standards Addressed: (Local, State, or National)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information..

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Learning Objectives:

- **The learner will identify the connection between the Iditarod Trail as a mail route and a race route.**
- **The learner will explain the reasoning for mail cachets to be a required item in the mushers' sleds during the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.**

Assessment:

Method of assessment for learning

Students could be assessed on their gathering grids and on their synthesis of their discoveries.

Procedural Activities

1. Prior to the start of the lesson, teachers should select and set up stations for the students to visit. Stations could be combined or eliminated as needed depending on the time available. (see resources section for details)
 - a. Alaskan Dog Sled: should be presented on a computer or Smartboard so that it can be manipulated by the students. Note: When you open the screen, you can click on the “enlarge” button which will bring up the sled image in a new window. You can then close the main window. That will allow the students to see and manipulate the image without being able to read all of the information about the sled which would give away some of the answers to what they are trying to discover. Flash player is required to do this.
 - b. Photos (3): could be printed or shown as digital images
 - c. Stamps (2): should be printed
 - d. Mail cachets: should be printed. They could also be cut out and glued to envelopes to give a better sense of their true purpose. Cachets are frequently available for sale on ebay and at the Iditarod Headquarters gift shop.
 - e. Primary Source reflection (Huntington): should be printed or highlighted in the actual book for students to read.
2. If an introduction to the race is needed, this video shows a good overview and touches on the idea that sports have histories and change over time:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do6l_5Pv2Uk
3. Explain to the students that while the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race is a relatively modern sporting event, it has ties to many different facets of history and honors many historical events. Their job today is to discover one of those ties.
4. The students will move through the stations examining the materials found there. They will record their observations on the Gathering Grid sheet. Students could work with a team or partner and be allowed a set amount of time at each station, or they could move through them at their own pace.
5. When the exploration time is complete, bring the students together and have them begin to put the pieces together. What did they discover? How does it all fit together? What’s the big picture?
6. Tell them that you have two more pieces of information to share with them (they can then complete their chart):
 - Read aloud the quotation from Katie Mangelsdorf’s book.
 - Share with the students rule number 16 from the 2014 Iditarod Trail International Sled Dog Race rules.
7. Continue the discussion about the connections between the Iditarod Trail as a mail trail, the race and the cachets.
 - Essentially, one of the mandatory items today’s mushers are required to carry on the trail are the mail cachets that are stamped in Anchorage and Nome and then signed by each musher. The cachets are sold as a fundraiser for the race. The race was started in part to honor the Iditarod Trail’s historic significance. That significance includes its use as a mail trail.
8. The first chapter, “Dogteam Delivery,” in Helen Hegener’s book Along Alaskan Trails, provides a great read aloud summary of what the students have just discovered. A scan of this chapter is included with permission of the author.
9. Each year a different artist is commissioned to do the artwork for the cachet cover. As a follow-up the students could design a cover for this year’s race.

Materials Students Need:

Gathering Grid (included)

Technology Utilized to Enhance Learning:

See Resources Section

Other Information:**Extension Idea 1:**

The John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon is run in honor of mail carrier John Beargrease who delivered mail by dogteam along the North Shore of Lake Superior. There is a great kids' book called Fearless John, the Legend of John Beargrease by Kelly Emerling Rauzi that could be used to extend the idea of mail delivery by dogteam even further. More information from the US Postal Museum can be found here: <http://postalmuseumblog.si.edu/2010/02/by-sled-or-by-sail-native-american-mail-carrier-john-beargrease.html> More information on the race can be found here: <http://beargrease.com/>

Follow-Up Video about how some unusual mail routes still in use today:

http://www.collections.si.edu/search/tag/tagDoc.htm?recordID=yt_xfsdE-HWr1Q&hlterm=dog%2Bsled%2Bmail

Modifications for Special Learners/ Enrichment Opportunities

For younger students, you could limit the number of materials shared to just the sled, one postcard and one mail cachet and do the exploration phase together.

For older students, they could do the research independently. Instead of providing the primary sources, the students could research and find them independently.

Quotations from Shadows on the Koyukuk by Sidney Huntington, as told to Jim Rearden

©1993, Alaska Northwest Books

(for Station Five)

“Lawrence was a colorful old-timer who had a contract to haul mail by dog team from Kaltag to Holy Cross, two Yukon River villages. The last run of that route, driven by Lawrence’s son Herbert, was in 1920. I saw Herbert when he pulled into Anvik - the first time I had seen a team of twenty dogs. They were hooked up to two large mail sleds.” (page 46)

“The monthly mail run was the sole contact with the outside world for miners and prospectors who lived in the Koyukuk in the early 1900s. There was no radio. There were no airplanes. Dog teams carried everything in winter, riverboats carried everything in summer. Before regular mail routes, prospectors or miners carried mail to the mining district it was bound for and left it at trading posts. Letters from loved ones, magazines, and newspapers were treasures beyond value for those isolated men. In remote villages and mining camps, I’ve seen magazines with loose pages, the print worn from handling, treated as if they were valuable documents, as they were handed from man to man. Small wonder that mail drivers were considered special.” (page 83)

(teacher shared document A)

“Always striving to find ways to get the trail recognized, another idea was hatched at one of the many meetings. The Iditarod Trail was a mail trail, so why not have each musher carry mail? An arrangement was made with the U.S. Postal Service to carry cachets, packets of letters, over the Iditarod to Nome. Joe [Redington, Sr.] asked his artist friend, Bill Devine, if he would design an Iditarod Trail Logo for the envelopes. These would be postmarked in Anchorage and Nome and used as a fund-raising project.

At a prerace meeting this idea was presented to the mushers. Surprisingly, it was met with some resistance. There was already enough to do. Carrying mail was too much to ask. Joe did not react, he responded in a good way, and came up with a solution – ‘I’ll carry yours,’ was all he said.

‘He was one of a kind,’ said Norman. ‘Joe had such a unique, easy way of looking at things.’

His positive attitude turned the whole negative thought around. To have the U.S. Postal Service support the Iditarod Race added credibility, recognition, and needed funds. And Devine’s logo became the official Iditarod logo.” (page 185)

Quotation from the 2014 Iditarod Trail International Sled Dog Race Official Rules - <http://d3r6t1k4mqz5i.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/2014-Rules-first-draft-06-07-13.pdf?0238e3>

(teacher shared document B)

Rule 16 -- Mandatory Items: A musher must have with him/her at all times the following items:

- Proper cold weather sleeping bag weighing a minimum of 5 lbs.
- Ax, head to weigh a minimum of 1-3/4 lbs., handle to be at least 22" long.
- One operational pair of snowshoes with bindings, each snowshoe to be at least 252 square inches in size.
- Any promotional material provided by the ITC.
- Eight booties for each dog in the sled or in use.
- One operational cooker and pot capable of boiling at least three (3) gallons of water at one time.
- Veterinarian notebook, to be presented to the veterinarian at each checkpoint.
- An adequate amount of fuel to bring three (3) gallons of water to a boil.
- Cable gang line or cable tie out capable of securing dog team.
- Functional non-chafing harness for each dog in team and a functional neckline

When leaving a checkpoint adequate emergency dog food must be on the sled. (This will be carried in addition to what you carry for routine feeding and snacking.)

Gear will be checked at the Re-Start and during the 24 hour layover for conformity to minimum standards as set forth above. Gear may be checked at any other time during the Race at the discretion of the Race Marshal and or the Race Judges. Gear may be checked at all checkpoints except Safety.

Vet books will be signed by a veterinarian or in the absence of a veterinarian may be signed by a designated race official. The musher will also sign the vet book.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Analyzing objects

Examine the items you find at each station carefully and discuss each question as a group. Answer the questions based on what you can actually tell by observing your objects. If there is not enough information to support an answer, write NEI (not enough info!) in the box.

	Station 1	Station 2	Station 3	Station 4
<u>Physical Features:</u> What color is it?				
Is it complete?				
Has it been adapted or mended?				
<u>Material:</u> What is it made from?				
Is it made from natural or manufactured materials?				
Was it made by hand or machine?				
<u>Size:</u> How big is it?				
<u>Date:</u> When was it made?				
How do you know?				
<u>Function:</u> What was/is it used for?				
What is the object?				
How do you know?				

Written Source Analysis:

	Station Five:	Teacher Shared Source A:	Teacher Shared Source B:
When was the document written?			
What time period is it representing or reporting on?			
Who is the author?			
Why was the document written?			
What new information does document tell us?			