

Sled Dog School

Iditarod Book Club with Grades 2, 3, and 4

Book by Terry Lynn Johnson

Teacher Info and Tips

- **Goals:**
 - Students will develop their communication skills as they interact with the text, their peers, and their teachers.
 - Students will deepen their understanding of sled dog mushing including the dog positions, equipment, and the care of sled dogs.
 - Students will share about character feelings, traits, motivations, and character change.
 - Students will talk about author's craft, such as the use of similes and description.
 - Students will discuss themes in the book and relate the story and themes to their own lives.

Tips!

- **Please read the book aloud during the book club.** The children will not be reading the book at any other times. The book is theirs to keep after the book club! The teacher books are yours to keep!
- There are 15 sessions in the teacher's guide. Feel free to modify the sessions, for example you could do two sessions of reading one day and discuss/do an extension for the whole time the next day.
- Pick and choose the questions and activities you would like to use. **More are included than you will need!**

- Approximate read aloud times do not include time for discussing the text.
- The summaries are for teacher use. They are intended to give you a little information about the content of the chapter before reading it aloud.

Sled Dog School

Session 1

Before reading:

- Give each child their own book. They may put their names in them. Let them know that they may keep the books, but the books should stay at school during the Book Club.
- Discuss expectations for the Book Club
 - Eagle Expectations
 - Enjoy the chapters with our club. Please don't read ahead.
 - Take risks. Share ideas, even if you aren't sure.
 - Ask questions.
 - Have fun!
- Read the back blurb.
 - What do you know about dog-sledding? (turn and talk)
 - What does "unpredictable" mean?
 - What does it mean to "blaze a trail"?
 - "Barking up the wrong tree." What does that mean?
 - Have you ever tried to run your own business?

Chapter 1

Pages 1-7

Approximate time read aloud: 8 minutes

Summary: Matt races with a sled and four sled dogs to the mailbox at his home to intercept the mail and get a letter from his school. As he makes his way there, he gets interrupted by his younger sister, who took out a sled and an untrained sled dog to catch up with him. Matt's parents are a bit out of the norm, which bothers Matt.

Possible discussion questions:

- What experience does Matt have as a sled dog musher? Why do you think that?
- Dad said "errant children" after Lily and her mom greeted one another on page 6. What does *errant* mean and what kind of voice do you think Matt's dad used when he said that?
- What do we know so far about Matt and his family?
- "Mom reached out like a cobra and plucked the letter from his hands." Act that out. Why did the author use that simile?
- What are you curious about?

Related projects/extensions:

- Look at the labeled sled dog drawing on pg. 190, in the Glossary of Terms. Also, check out the glossary. What do you notice about the sled and the dogs? What do you wonder?
- Talk about potters/pottery and different supplies and tools potters use. Has anyone ever made pottery? An expert making a bowl on a wheel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9ZAvmDDTbU>

Session 2

Chapter 2

Pages 8-15

Approximate time read aloud: 8 minutes

Summary: Matt is teased on the bus because his home-life and parents are not typical. He lives at a home without electricity. Matt got in trouble at school for fighting because kids made fun of his mother. He needs to do an extra credit project in math - to run a business - to pull up his math grade. He decides to run a sled dog school.

Possible discussion questions:

- On page 9, what is going on when the author writes, "Dog song. Smiling, Matt jogged down the driveway to greet the dogs in the yard and let their howling fill him."?
- What challenges does Matt have?
- Matt's family doesn't have any electricity. What would that be like? What would be nice about it? What could be challenging?
- Pg 11 - Matt's extra-credit assignment included, "You must have at least three clients to show it is a thriving business." What are clients? What is a *thriving* business?

Related projects/extensions:

- Talk about whittling. Perhaps you want to whittle soap.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y17RweezGi8> (to soften soap, warm it in the microwave for 10-15 seconds)
- Carving soap
<https://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/metkids/metkids-create/create-a-soap-carving>

If anyone can find an appropriate video on whittling wood, please create a link here.

- Look at Advice from a Sled Dog on page 11. Think of a different type of dog or animal. What advice could be shared from that animal's perspective?
- Discuss off-the-grid life, no electricity, propane lamp - Some examples of modern off-the-grid homes:
<https://inhabitat.com/7-charming-off-grid-homes-for-a-rent-free-life/wohnwagon-2/>
- An example of a dog song can be found at about the 2 minute 50 second mark of the following video
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/1/150131-sled-dog-alaskan-husky-racing-itarod-winter-video-culture/#close>

Session 3

Assignment Report #1 and Chapter 3

Pages 18-32

Approximate time read aloud: 16 minutes

Summary: Students share their business plans for the extra credit assignment. Matt is nervous to share his, but he manages. Matt's teacher offered for Matt to go to an easier math class. Matt declines, although he is struggling to understand the business concepts. Matt is looking for clients for his dog sled business and he gets a call from a boy named Tubbs, who asks to bring his dog. When Tubbs and his dog arrive at Matt's house, the dog, Flute, almost becomes a meal for the sled dogs.

Possible discussion questions:

- What new things do you know about Matt?

- Are sled dogs pets? On page 26 Matt said, "They don't like pets." when Tubbs asked to bring his dog.

Related projects/extensions:

- Pg 25 -What is an "old-fashioned land line" telephone? See photos of phones with cords.
- Pg 27 - Check out a wood stove and water pump photos online.
- Matt's family has Alaskan huskies. What are other kinds of sled dogs? <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/lifestyle/meet-todays-sled-dogs/>
- What kind of business would you like to run? Why? Make your own business plan. Pages 5-6 of this guide contain a kids' business plan template that can be printed.
<http://www.terrylynnjohnson.com/pdfs/sled-dog-school-curriculum-guide.pdf>
- "About the author" web-site
<http://terrylynnjohnson.com/terry.php> and/or passage in the back of the book after the glossary and acknowledgements.
Option: This could be used at a later session.

Session 4

Chapter 4

Pages 33 - 42

Approximate time read aloud: 11 minutes

Summary: Matt is hoping to be friends with Tubbs. Matt thinks that because he doesn't go on the bus with Matt or to school with him, that this is a fresh start. Tubb's positivity and out-going personality is a bit of a shock to Matt. Tubbs likes Matt's family's style of living. Tubbs seems to enjoy Matt's family and his home more than learning about sled dogs! Turns out that Tubbs wants to

train his wild dog so his mother will let him keep it. It was his mom who wanted him to learn about mushing. Matt is worried that Tubbs will drop out of the class. Matt made a deal with Tubbs. If Tubbs can find him three more clients for the dog sled school, then Matt will help him train his dog.

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 34 -Have you ever thought some people or some things looked exactly the same when those who knew them better could tell them apart?
- Pg 34 -What is Matt learning about teaching when he introduces all of the sled dogs to Tubbs?
- How does Tubbs react to Matt's family living without electricity?
- What kind of person is Tubbs?
- What does living "off the grid" mean? What grid is Tubbs talking about?
- What does "We are wasting daylight" mean?
- What do you predict will happen with Matt's business?

Related projects/extensions:

- Visualize and draw the dog yard at Matt's house - Reread the description on page 34, towards the top, "Matt led the way...during the summer."
- What's a free-range kid? In your opinion, is it a good thing or bad thing and why?

Session 5

Chapter 5

Pages 43-49

Approximate time read aloud: 5 min

Summary: Matt's family clothed Tubbs with all kinds of dog sledding clothing to keep him warm. Matt is eager to get Tubbs out on a dog sled and the dogs are very hyped up.

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 47-Predict. What should Matt have done to start teaching Tubbs? What's wrong with his approach?
- Predict at the end of the chapter! Explain your prediction.
- What does the author do to make the book interesting to you?

Related projects/extensions:

- Pg 44-How many different ways can you think of to make a warm scarf?
- Pg 46-What are some alternative power sources?
<https://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org/alternative-energy-sources/>

Session 6

Chapter 6

Pages 50-56

Approximate time read aloud: 4 min

Summary: Tubb's first dog sled run was a disaster!

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 52-How is Tubbs feeling about dog sledding? How do you know?
- On pg 56, why did Tubbs smile?
- What did Matt learn from this experience?

Related projects/extensions:

- How do sled dogs keep warm and how do you know if they are too cold? <https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/cold-weather-safety-for-dogsinsights-from-a-sled-dog-veterinarian/> scroll down below advertisement
- Have students give directions to other students on how to do something. The student listening should follow the directions exactly...

Session 7

Assignment Report #2 and Chapter 7

Pages 57-68

Approximate time read aloud: 7 minutes

Summary: Matt doesn't have data to share with his class about his extra credit assignment. He still needs two more clients. Matt isn't sure how to train Tubb's dog, Flute, but he knows that was his part of his bargain with Tubbs. He also needed a new plan for teaching Tubbs how to handle the sled/dogs. Matt was nervous.

Flute was introduced to Bandit and it went well. A new student was coming for a lesson, Alex. The boys were surprised when a girl showed up.

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 61-What does "get back on the horse" mean? How has or could it apply to your life?
- Pg 63/last paragraph/pg 64 -What is Matt realizing about teaching?
- Pg 64-How is Matt feeling? Why?

Related projects/extensions:

- Pg 58 - Can the students do the math? *Reproduce for smartboard*
- What would the expenses be for your business?
- How are sled dogs and pets different?
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sled_dog
<https://www.yukonquest.com/about/sled-dogs/modern-sled-dog>
- Sled dog adaptations:
Paws- <https://iditarod.com/edu/these-feet-were-made-for-walking/>
Fur-<https://iditarod.com/edu/got-to-love-all-that-fur/>
Tails-<https://iditarod.com/edu/fluffy-tails/>
Tongues-<https://iditarod.com/edu/keeping-it-cool/>
Countercurrent Circulation-
<https://iditarod.com/edu/a-super-circulatory-system/>

Session 8

Chapters 8 and 9

Pages 69-80

Approximate time read aloud: 8 minutes

Summary: Alex and her mother are very pretentious. Alex asks a lot of questions about the dogs. She's the opposite of Tubbs. Matt is knowledgeable and has thorough answers. Alex and Matt both have strong personalities. They go out on the sleds - Matt and Tubbs in the lead sled with Alex and Lily following behind. Alex is a quick-study and did well on her first sled dog ride. Matt doesn't want to like her, but kind of does anyway.

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 70/71-What are Alex and her mother like? What does the author mean when she wrote, " 'We're here for the classes.' the lady said in a clipped voice."?
- What kinds of things do you think are taught in an Etiquette and Manners Club?
- Pg 74-What is going on in the last paragraph?
- Pg 74-Predict! Explain your prediction.
- Pg 76-What do you think Alex needs to write down and why?
- Pg 77-Do you think relationships between pets and people are special? If so, what is special about them?
- What brings Matt joy? What brings you joy?

Related projects/extensions:


- What are dressage lessons? Dressage is the art of riding and training a horse in a manner that develops obedience, flexibility, and balance (Oxford Dictionary).

Play Simon Says with Mushing terms -

Gee - right 

Haw - left 

Mush - go forward, run 

Whoa - stop 

Session 9

Assignment Report #3 and Chapter 10

Pages 81-92

Approximate time read aloud: 6 minutes

Summary: The other students in Matt's class have data and charts to share for their small businesses, but Matt does not. He's confused about what he needs to do. Matt continues to be made fun of by Jacob on the school bus, which really bothers Matt. Matt asks his father about operating costs for the sled dogs. Also, Matt isn't sure how to approach his next lesson with Alex and Tubbs, since they have different skill levels.

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 86-If you were Matt, what would you do to help yourself complete the small business project and figure out the data?
- Pg 91-Dad offers Matt this thought - "Do you think sometimes it's more important to be kind to people than to be better?" Do you agree? How does it apply to your life?
- What life lessons (theme) is Matt learning in this book, so far?

Related projects/extensions:

- Find some quotes that are useful messages/reminders for people, for example: "Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud."

-Maya Angelou Talk about what the quotes mean.

<https://www.greetingcardpoet.com/inspirational-quotes-for-kids/>

Session 10

Chapters 11 and 12

Pages 93-108

Approximate time read aloud: 11 minutes

Summary: Matt takes Alex, Tubbs, and Lily out in one sled with seven dogs. That number of dogs makes him nervous. Matt leaves Lily at home when they go for their run, which is against his father's directions. When the dogs almost run off, Matt gets angry at his students, but he hadn't taught Alex what he was upset that she didn't do. Lily took off to join them with Bandit and a sled, but Bandit reached base camp and not Lily. The group goes back on the trail to search for Lily. It was hard to find Lily and Matt was afraid she hit a tree and was unconscious in the snow somewhere. When they got home, Lily was still missing.

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 95-What does Tubbs mean when he says that being able to cut the chicken into pieces that are exactly the same size would make him irrationally happy? What makes you irrationally happy?
- Pg 97-Do you agree with Matt's decision to leave Lily at home? Why or why not?
- Pg 102- Predict! Support your prediction with evidence.
- Pg 102 - What kind of person is Lily?

Related projects/extensions:

- What would you name eight sled dogs?

- Review the dog sled positions in the glossary. Create a picture or diagram of your own and label the parts of the sled and dog positions. Use information from chapter 11 and the glossary to add definitions for the terms you have labeled. Who could you teach about the positions? Have students organize the labels like a sled dog team. Give each student a label. Arrange students in your class like a team of dogs:
<https://iditarod.com/zuma/dog-jobs-on-a-team/>
(Sled Dog School shows a team of six.) Challenge: Have students do it without your help. For Fun: They can make up their own sled dog name.
- Make copies of the hard-copy handouts to choose which dogs would be best in which sled positions, based on their personalities. Have students work in groups to put together a team.

Session 11

Chapters 13, 14, and 15

Pages 109 - 124

Approximate time read aloud: 11 min.

Summary: Lily is still missing out on the trail. Matt is very nervous, but doesn't tell his parents yet. He, Tubbs, and Alex go back out and search for her and Alex spotted her. She was safe! When they got back to Alex's house, later than they were supposed to and in the dark, their parents were upset. Alex's mother wants to pull her out of the lessons due to the incident. Alex lies about what happened, blaming herself, and clearing Matt of being at fault.

Possible discussion questions:

- **What did Lily learn after the sled dog mishap? What did Matt learn?**
- **Pg 117-Why did Alex cover for Matt?**
- **Is Alex changing? Is Matt changing?**
- **Pg 121-Why does Matt like to whittle? Are there activities that you do that ease your mind/distract you from something that is bothering you?**
- **Pg 123-It is good to talk to your family about what is bothering you. Why didn't Matt want to do that?**
- **How does the author keep you interested in this book?**
- **Is anything suspenseful in this book? Provide examples and talk about how the author made it suspenseful.**

Related projects/extensions:

- **What are survival tips if you are lost in the woods in the summer? In the winter? Link to a kids survival guide**
- **Whittling links**

Session 12

Assignment Report #4 and Chapters 16 and 17

Pages 125-144

Approximate time read aloud: 14 minutes

Summary: Matt is not prepared with data when he has to present his current sales, etc...to the class. He has one more week to run the small business and complete the assignment. Matt and Tubbs run a team of dogs including Flute in an effort to train Flute.

Tubbs was successful in taking Flute out with some of the other dogs. Both Matt and Tubbs were very proud of Tubbs' and Flute's success! Alex gets to return to the sled dog school on one condition

- Her mother wants to visit with her local news team and do a feature on Alex (not Matt) and the dogs. Alex's run ended up a mess because the puppies got loose and disrupted the sled dogs. Alex wasn't pleased with having the news team come, and loved the chaos (although her mother didn't). Matt was finally feeling successful in his teaching of mushing (in spite of the puppy incident) and the three kids were bonding. Matt was upset that he doesn't have three clients and he's worried that he won't pass his math class.

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 132-What does Matt's dad's favorite saying mean - "Good judgement comes from experience, and experience comes from poor judgement."
- Pg 142-What does Matt's mom's quote mean - "Success against hardship and challenge builds confidence and self-esteem."
- What fills you with joy and pride?

Related projects/extensions:

- Find some quotes that inspire you! Write them/illustrate them in a way that is meaningful to you.

Session 13

Assignment Report #5 and Chapter 18

Pages 145-160

Approximate time read aloud: 10 minutes

Summary: Matt is worried about his project for math class because he doesn't currently have three clients. Some of his classmates had issues with their businesses in the last week. Tubbs calls Matt to

give him a play-by-play of the news report about the sled dog school. Right afterward, Jacob calls to sign up for the sled dog school. Matt doesn't like the idea, but he signs him up. When Jacob makes fun of Tubbs, Matt stands up to Jacob and then sends him home.

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 147-148 - Look at the graphs and draw conclusions.
- Pg 155- Matt "Felt like a dog with his pack at his back" What do you think that means?
- Pg 160-Do you think Matt made the right decision? Why/why not?
- Which characters have changed in this story? How have they changed? What caused that change?

Related projects/extensions:

- Learn about wolves here: <https://wolf.org/wolf-info/wild-kids/>
- Research similarities and differences between dogs and wolves.

Session 14

Chapters 19 and 20

Pages 161-177

Approximate time read aloud: 11 minutes

Summary: Tubbs dropped off the payment for his lessons and for someone else...Fluke. That makes three clients. Matt was thrilled! On the bus ride to school, Jacob was mean to Matt again. The bus driver gave Matt some advice and she helped him with his final report. In class, students were excited about his business after

seeing it on the news and were planning to sign up for lessons.
Matt was thrilled!

Possible discussion questions:

- Pg 169 - After reading the letter from Tubb's mother, what are you thinking?
- Pg 174 - "You should remember everyone you meet is fighting a battle you don't know anything about." What do you think this means?
- What was Mrs. Wilson's advice? What do you think of it?

Related projects/extensions:

- Learn more about the Iditarod! See the links at the end of this doc.

Session 15

Chapters 21, 22, and 23

Pages 178-188

Approximate time read aloud: 8 minutes

Summary: When two local businessmen share during Matt's math class, he realizes the connection to real life. Matt realized that a math class that would be more suited for him would be useful and more pleasant. Mr. Moffatt gave him a 100% on his project. Matt's mother isn't as thrilled about his grade as he thought she would be. She talks to him about how she is proud of how he shared his talent and his passion for mushing. Matt asks Tubbs and Alex to be his business partners since he has new clients.

Possible discussion questions:

- How does Matt change throughout the story?

- What lessons does Matt learn? How can you apply those lessons to your life?
- Matt lives in Michigan, not Alaska. Where else in the US might people dog sled? Website that lists races/locations: <https://www.sleddogcentral.com/racelinks.htm>
- What have you learned about mushing? What do you wonder?

CELEBRATE! Congratulations on reading and sharing in a fabulous book club!

Some **Iditarod** links that might be interesting:

Iditarod Trail Map with Check Points

<https://iditarod.com/race-map/>

Pronunciation and information on the checkpoints:

<https://iditarod.com/zuma/virtual-trail-journey-checkpoint-pronunciation-and-quick-facts/>

Short video of sled dogs mushing and more

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nVfFNbxX7s>

There are no roads to and from some of the checkpoints. If you didn't go by sled dog, how do you think you could travel to the checkpoints? By plane, on the Iditarod Air Force.

www.dogflying.com

Junior Iditarod link from 2018 <https://iditarod.com/zuma/junior-iditarod-5/>