

I'm Reading About the Iditarod Book Club Book by Carole Marsh

Goals and Teacher 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 in Alaska including the Iditarod trail, equipment, and the care of sled dogs.
- Students will compare and contrast the lives of mushers /sled dogs and life in Alaska to their own lives.

Tips:

- Pick and choose the questions and activities you would like to use. More are included than you will need. Some questions may be more appropriate for some ages of children than others. Several links to websites and documents are included below.
- Divide your time as you wish. Perhaps you decide to read two sections per book club meeting. Perhaps you read one and do a follow-up activity or maybe one day is solely filled with a follow-up activity.

Before Reading:

- Introduce the book (hard copy). Show the cover.
 - Ask students what they see in the photo.
 - What is on the ground and in the trees in the photo?

- Ask if they have heard about the Iditarod and what they already know about it.
- Remind the students of where Alaska is on the map.
- This book is full of information. We call it a nonfiction or informational book. It will teach us a lot about the Iditarod! Nonfiction books teach us new things.

Introduction -

- What is an introduction?
- Talk about nicknames or shortened versions of longer names for people, places (Southeast vs Southeast Elementary School), and things (MickeyD's for McDonalds).
- Some dogs are working dogs and some dogs are pets. Discuss or do a sort. Other working dogs would include seeing eye dogs and therapy dogs.
- What are good things to remember when you see a dog you don't know? Always ask permission before touching it. Wash your hands after petting a dog. Keep your hands/fingers away from its mouth...
- "Teams of sled dogs" - What other teams do you know about? What does it mean to be in a team? How do you treat your teammates when you are on a team?
- What is a musher? Say, "I'm going to read the rest of the page. Listen to see if you can figure out what a musher is." Discuss.
- Look at the newspaper in the photograph. How many miles is the race?
- Active learning - Practice some mushing orders!

- **Active Learning - Play Red Light/Green Light or Musher (Simon) Says with mushing terms**

Mushing terms:

Location:

- **The heading on this page says "Location." That means where something is.**
- **We live in the country of the United States of America. There are 50 states. We live in the state of Connecticut. Alaska is a state, too.**
- **Talk about what each landform looks like and create hand signals for each of the following, then reread and "act it out"**
 - **Snow-capped mountains**
 - **Vast glaciers**
 - **Lush forests**
 - **Rushing rivers**
- **What do you wear to stay warm in the winter? Winters are really cold in Alaska! What kinds of things do you think the mushers wear to stay warm? Do you think the dogs get cold? How do they stay warm?**
- **Dress Warmly Riddles from KidSoup**
<https://www.kidssoup.com/craft-and-resource/keeping-warm-winter-clothing-riddles-rhyme-game-and-more>
 - **In a winter storm, I keep your neck warm. What am I? (scarf)**
 - **I start with the letter J, and keep you warm on a cold day. What am I? (coat)**
 - **I protect your hands from snow and ice. Fingers think I'm very nice. What am I? (mittens)**
 - **I start with the letter B, and your feet go inside of me. What am I? (boots)**
 - **I can't help your nose but, I'm very good at warming toes. What am I? (socks)**
 - **If your head might freeze, put me on please. What am I? (hat)**

History:

- History means what happened in the past.
- Why would people need sled dogs to survive if there were not many roads?
- Think-aloud -- "Hmm...I learned on this page that the Iditarod Trail wasn't always for sled dog racing. The sled dogs were used to get from place to place because there weren't many roads."
- What does the author mean by, "These dogs served as a lifeline for Alaskans."
- The dogs were important to Alaskans because they carried mail and supplies. What carries mail and supplies for us today?
- The sled dog teams carried mail and supplies from the coast to the middle of Alaska. What is a coast? How did the mail get to the coast?
- What do you notice about the photo in the book? What do you wonder?
- Active learning - Build a sled dog sled out of Legos, popsicle sticks, or blocks. Consider using a Maker Space Lab/Rigamajig.

History (spread #2):

- Talk about the text. Paraphrase after reading, as needed.
- The closest supplies were 700 miles away. How far is one mile? Two miles?
- Active Learning - What is a relay? Do a relay indoors or outdoors passing something special like a message from beginning to end.

Iditarod Begins:

- Talk about the word *annual*. What is *annual* in your life? What holidays are *annual*?
- What are snowmobiles? Why might people use snowmobiles instead of sled dog teams to get supplies from place to place? Sometimes snowmobiles are called sleds. Confusing, right? :)
View photos of snowmobiles in Alaska
- Joe Redington, Sr. started the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. What kind of races are there? What type of race or fun activity would you like to start?
- Trace the Iditarod Trails with your finger.
<https://iditarod.com/race-map/>
- What is a river? How is a frozen river different from one that is flowing?
- Talk about even and odd. What route will the Iditarod use this year?
- Look at/draw a compass rose. Talk about how it is used.
- Active Learning - Play *Four Corners*. Use cardinal directions instead of numbers.
https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/friday/friday010.shtml

Teamwork:

- Before reading - What are some characteristics of dogs you know? Playful? Smart? Mischievous? What do you think are characteristics of good sled dogs?
- Why do the dog teams have so many dogs?

- Why does the musher go in the back instead of the front?
- Why do mushers have their dogs change positions during a race?
- Active Learning - Print these labels for the names of the dog positions.

• **Wheel Dog**

• **Wheel Dog**

• **Team Dog**

• **Team Dog**

• **Swing Dog**

• **Swing Dog**

• **Lead Dog**

• **Lead Dog**

• **Musher**

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 using the photo from the book to guide them.

Challenge: Have students do it without your help. **For Fun:** They can make up their own sled dog name.

Sleds and Supplies:

- The sled dogs have learned commands. What kinds of things do we teach pet dogs that live in our homes? How do you teach a pet dog something new?
- Why do mushers need to protect their dogs feet? (from the cold/cracking skin, injuries from sticks, etc...)
- What else might the musher need to pack? How is that similar or different from what you would pack to go on a trip?
- What is an ax? Why do you think a musher might need one?
- What are snowshoes? Ask to borrow a pair from Amanda or Betsy, if you'd like.

Mush:

- Short video of sled dogs mushing and more
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nVfFNbxX7s>
- Active Learning - Practice some mushing orders! Play Red Light Green Light or Musher (Simon) Says

- **Mushing Terms** 
- **Gee - right** 
- **Haw - left** 
- **Mush - go forward, run**
- **Whoa - stop** 
- Do the Sled Dog Pokey - Scroll down to slide 6.

Sled Dog Pokey

You put your right paw in.

You put your right paw out.

You put your right paw in, and you shake it all about.

You do the sled dog pokey and you turn yourself around.

That's what it's all about!

Tail

Nose

Commands:

- Talk about some of the unique names of the Iditarod Checkpoints. Map: <https://iditarod.com/race-map/>
- Pronunciation and information on the checkpoints: <https://iditarod.com/zuma/virtual-trail-journey-checkpoint-pronunciation-and-quick-facts/>
- 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! <http://www.dogflying.com/>
- Why is it important for the dogs to rest and eat their special food? How do you stay healthy?

Husky:

- What breeds of dogs do we know about? <https://dogtime.com/dog-breeds/profiles>
- What makes the Alaskan Husky a good dog for sled dog racing in Alaska?
- What is a kennel?
- What is a good attitude? Why would you want a sled dog with a good attitude? What would a sled dog with a bad attitude be like? What can a person do to change their bad attitude to a good one?

- Dog jokes! Some are better than others ...enjoy.
<https://www.care.com/c/stories/7403/the-40-funniest-dog-jokes-for-kids-of-all-age/> Can anyone come up with their own dog joke?

Dangers:

- Before reading - What do you think are some dangers that the dogs and mushers might face on the Iditarod Trail?
- Let's learn about moose! Here's a two minute video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nzUseMaIE0>
- Snowstorms can be lots of fun! What is fun about them? Snowstorms can be dangerous if you are a sled dog or musher. Discuss why.
- Active learning - Pretend you are trying to walk through a snowstorm with strong winds wearing lots of winter gear. There is two feet of snow. Snow is hitting your face! Wind is whipping around your head.

Traditions:

- Before reading - What is a tradition? Does your family have any traditions - maybe around the winter holidays? Share. A race like the Iditarod has traditions, too. Listen for them as I read...
- Active learning - Make an arch with your body. Now try to build an arch with supplies/toys we have in the classroom. What supplies will you gather?
- What is perseverance? Share examples in students' lives. Why do you think the last-place finisher gets an award for perseverance?

- What is a tradition that the Iditarod might want to add? Why would it be a good tradition?

Junior Iditarod:

- Junior Iditarod link <https://jriditarod.com/>
- How many years until you will be 14 years old?
- Would you like to be in the Junior Iditarod? Why/why not?

Did You Know?

- The race usually last between 9 and 15 days. When the 2020 Iditarod begins, we can follow along on this website:www.iditarod.com. The race will start on Saturday, March 7, 2020.
- What else goes 5-12 miles per hour? (An average person runs 6 miles per hour.) Do you think that is the sled-dogs' top speed?

Amazing Race:

- What additional words describe mushers and sled dogs? What words describe you?
- What did you learn when reading this book?
- What do you still wonder about the Iditarod Race, the sled dogs, and the mushers?
- Would you like to learn to mush? Would you like to own sled dogs? Why/why not?

Celebrate your reading of I'm Reading About the Iditarod