

MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

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It's Beginning to Look A Lot Like...

BY JEN REITER

Mushing Season!

Anticipation is definitely building up as some of the early season races are underway. This year's Iditarod first-timers had their rookie meeting the first weekend in December, the official Trail Mail has been designed, and plans for the Winter Conference and the Iditarod Start are well underway!

This month, we are thrilled to share with you a new treat that will be featured in each newsletter... original art by Jon Van Zyle! Jon and his wife Jona have been long-time supporters of the race and the EDU component of the race, so when he offered to create original art for each newsletter, you can imagine the reaction from the newsletter staff! We hope that you enjoy using his artwork with your students this month as they discover how sled dogs stay nice a warm in their houses.

Art is definitely a theme this month as we are also thrilled to share with you the art of our finalists for the Iditarod Trail Mail! Congratulations to 13-year-old Jadae from North Carolina who has created this year's winning design!

We hope you have a relaxing winter break and we'll see you in the new year!



December Teaching Ideas

BY: HEIDI SLOAN

Reading

There are so many books that highlight the nostalgic poem, "The Night Before Christmas," many of them themed to match states or regions. In the midst of educating about December holidays, you can use this Iditarod version! Within the [lesson plan](#) is the comprehension strategy of comparing and contrasting with a Venn Diagram.

Building Community

Students can conduct research and then create a [Heroes of the Iditarod Wax Museum](#)! Teachers can adapt this virtually if their schools are restricted with visitors. Within this post, there is also a suggestion for peer tutoring with younger students. Again, this could be adapted to virtual calls between classes. The Iditarod can build bridges between people of all ages!

Science and Art

When mushers are traveling with their teams at night on the Iditarod Trail, they often see the Northern Lights, or [Aurora Borealis](#), in the sky. Your students can learn about that scientific phenomenon while also studying the Iditarod.

Geography

Teaching map reading skills is a requirement in many grade levels. Students are often more engaged in lessons when the Iditarod is involved! Use or adapt this [lesson on map skills](#) and allow your students to learn the Iditarod Trail ahead of the race, making them even more aware of the route before the race begins.

What If...

Here is a photo to share with your students for a quick activity. What if dog sleds had to have license plates? What would they look like? What could they say? Have your kids design a sled license plate for their favorite musher! Click the photo for a larger image.

"I'm convinced there is no more noble creature on earth than a good sled dog doing what it loves best."

~Rick Armstrong,
Iditarod Finisher

Photo: Martha Dobson



Updates from the EDU Trail

Checking in with our EDU Team to see what you can expect this month:



A Sneak Peek at the Upcoming Teacher on the Trail Posts

Jim Deprez,

2021/2022 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail

With the holiday season upon us and families and friends coming together, I thought it appropriate to focus on giving and communication with this month's posts. The Serum Run of 1925 was truly a selfless act conducted by mushers and citizens across the state of Alaska; all in an effort to save those in the coastal gold rush town of Nome. In my classroom each year we focus on the history of mushing through this historic event. For my monthly volunteer post, I thought it was necessary to highlight an integral member of the COMMS team. Communication is arguably the most important facet of the race. Therefore, highlighting the COMMS team during this month, in particular, was fitting.

Classroom Connections: Togo and Balto

For this lesson, students get to look back at what mushing was like before the Iditarod was ever around. Togo and Balto played integral roles in the delivery of a life-saving serum to the isolated town of Nome during the winter of 1925. Known as the "Great Race of Mercy" or "The Great Serum Run," students learn about the character traits of each of these heroic dogs and then write an opinion paper defending their stance on which dog they think was more important. Included are some great read-alouds about each dog to provide the background information necessary for formulating an opinion. Students will learn how to write a multi-paragraph essay using multiple character traits, and evidence from the text to back up their stance. If any of your districts use the Lucy Calkins writing program, this lesson ties in beautifully. When their writing is complete, students get to create a dog head (and paws) of their own to hold up their written piece. The final product looks incredible when displayed in the hallway. Check back on the 15th for this full lesson plan!

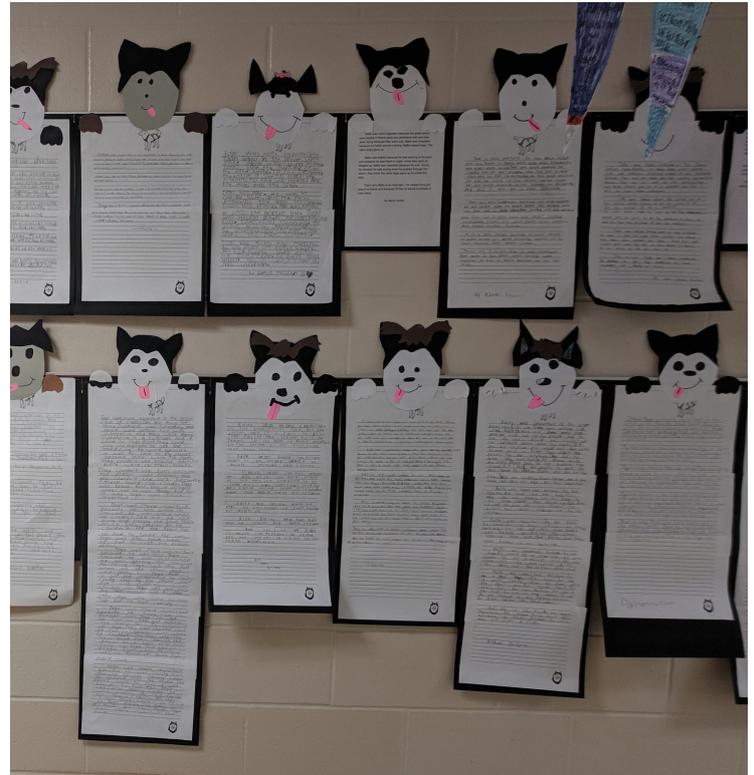


photo: Jeff Shultz
Faces of Iditarod

Voices of the Volunteers: Jennifer Dowling

Originally from Texas, Jennifer Dowling has lived in Alaska since 1996, and has been a race volunteer for the Iditarod since 2009. Since then she has taken on the role of the Race Comms Coordinator since 2015, and the Trail Crew Coordinator since 2019. Along with these positions she has taken on a lot of responsibilities that help make the race run smoothly; many of which you may not have considered. Be sure to check back at the end of the month (and year) to learn more about what makes the Iditarod run.

The Determination of Togo by: Libby Littles



Photo: Blair Braverman

Leaping Libby here, the puppy who dreams of being a real sled dog someday.



[Photo Link](#)

Now that the snow is flying, it's getting more serious around here. The team gets howling when it's time to hook up to the sleds. They focus on pulling-pulling-pulling. They slam into their harnesses, trying to get the sled to go even before the musher pulls the hook that holds them back. Then off they go, and go, and go. They come back tired and happy, proud to have put more "miles under their paws".

The only not-so-happy dog has been me. I have to stay home and don't get to run alongside them anymore. Not that I'm complaining. Well, maybe I am just a bit. I get to be the porch puppy, and I do free runs around the kennel. Some of the Big Dogs still play with me, but a lot of them just say, "Go away Puppy!"

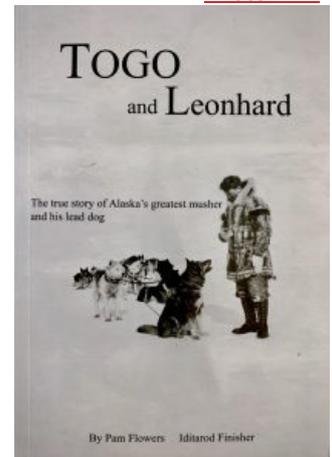
I don't know about you, but I feel kind of sad when the Big Dogs say I'm too little to be one of them. Some of them have been downright bullies, pushing me aside. But not all of them.

Wise Pepe, the queen, is the leader and smartest dog on our team. She pulled me aside one day. Pepe told me the story of Togo, one of the most famous sled dogs ever. When Togo was a puppy, he was the smallest one. The other dogs called him "runt," and his musher thought Togo would only be good as a pet, not as a sled dog. Togo showed them all that he was determined to be a sled dog, and the best one ever.

When Togo was sent to be a pet, he escaped and ran back to the kennel. One day, when he was eight months old (just a couple of months older than I am) the team drove off without him because he was too young to be put in harness. But Togo wouldn't be left behind. He escaped the kennel and chased them down. He wanted to be a sled dog so bad that no fence was going to hold him back. When he ran alongside the team, Togo teased and distracted them so much that their musher, Seppala, finally put him in a harness, just to keep him out of trouble.

Togo was younger and smaller than most sled dogs, but he worked harder, and pulled harder, and focused on where they needed to go. Before long, Togo was moved up the line of dogs to become the leader. When they ran sled dog races, Togo helped Seppala become the fastest musher in North America. When Nome, Alaska, was in need of medicine to save the town from a horrible disease, many dog teams helped, but it was the team led by Togo and Seppala that ran the hardest and farthest. They were true heroes.

[Photo Link](#)



[Photo Link](#)

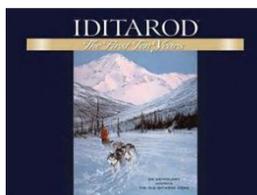
Pepe's story about Togo reminded me that I won't always be a puppy. I may be too little to run with the team today, but I am getting bigger and stronger, and I am determined to work hard and earn my spot on the team. Pepe says that I have the determination of Togo, and I will be running with the Big Dogs before I know it.

There have been many stories written about Togo. "Togo," by Robert J. Blake, is one of my musher's favorite picture books about the determined sleddog, Togo. <http://robertjblake.com/books/togo>

There also are many ways to learn about character traits from the Iditarod with the [Eight Great Traits of Iditarod](#).

Teaching with the First Ten Years

by: Jane Holmes



Visual Arts

The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race has been represented through art almost from its very beginning. Paintings, posters, patches, badges, belt buckles, and buttons have all been created to celebrate, commemorate and spread the word of The Last Great Race.

Chapter 8 of [Iditarod: The First Ten Years](#) is titled "The Creatives: Putting the Race in the Public Eye". Read these pages and the full article [HERE](#) for lesson ideas for visual arts projects. The anchor standards cited are National Core Arts Standards 2014. Grade-level specific visual arts standards can be found [HERE](#).

NOTE: Respect all copyright guidelines.

pg. 155 - The Iditarod Shield, designed by Bill Devine. It is one of the most iconic symbols of the Iditarod. Originally made of wood and hand-painted, the shields were used all along the Iditarod Trail as trail markers.

pg. 158 - The Official Finisher's Patch, designed by Rod Perry, worn exclusively by finishers of the race. Read the article, "The Finishers' Patch, an Exclusive Icon" by Rod Perry and how he describes his vision of what it should be like and why.

pg. 167 - The Iditarod's Official artist, Jon Van Zyle, describes how art and mushing combined to lay a lifelong path of success and inspiration. Read "Art and Mushing: Two Trails that Converged". He states "...each of us played an important role during those early years of conveying the spirit of the race and the mysterious allure of Alaska."

pg. 175 - "Fred Machetanz: Alaska's Eminent Artist" by Jon Van Zyle Fred's style was unique, beautiful, and based on the color blue. Blue is a cool color, lending itself well to his paintings of Alaska and dog sleds that graced the covers of "Iditarod Trail Annuals". Some of those covers can be found [HERE](#). Other examples of his art can be found [HERE](#).

If you are an educator, you can purchase the book for \$30 plus \$15.50 flat rate shipping in the U.S. (International shipping is not available at this time.) Email Jane Holmes at jane.holmes@iditarod.com for more information.

Photo Credits:
Amanda Otto &
Black Spruce Dog Sledding

If You "Mush" Know...

by: Lynne Witte

Illustrated by: Jon Van Zyle

Snuggled In...

It's cold and snowing outside, but inside a sled dog's house, they are warm and cozy. Sled dogs keep very warm in their weatherproof houses.

Being outside running and living in cold, snowy conditions seems natural to a sled dog. They are a northern breed dog that is suited for outdoor living. They have a thick undercoat like our extra layer under our snow pants. Sled dogs are fed warm, high-energy meals with extra fat for warmth.

Sled dogs have weatherproofed houses built for protection and warmth. They are built with insulation and sized with easy access in and out. Special care is taken to have easy access in and out of the door, which is also small enough to protect the dog from wind and snow drifting into their house. Their house is like a cozy den. If needed, the dogs will curl up into a ball, putting their tail over their nose for extra warmth. Mushers will add layers of fresh straw, which is terrific insulation to an animal. Each dog's house is checked frequently to ensure there is enough dry straw. When needed, more straw will be added, or

the straw will be completely changed. The insulated houses may vary slightly in the design, but the basic features of insulation, smaller openings, and additional fresh straw are the same.

All snuggled in their house, even with snow and wind outside, a sled dog will sleep cozy and warm.

This month's question comes from.....
Mrs. Randolph's Second Graders
How do sled dogs keep warm in their outside houses?
Are all dog houses the same?



Trail Mail Art Contest

Over 40 pieces of art for the Trail Mail Art contest were received from across the US this year. We are grateful to Wendy Brott for her continued support of this program, and to Jon and Jona Van Zyle who served as judges and selected this year's winners. The decision was very difficult for the Van Zyles, but in the end, they took into consideration the criteria and theme of the contest, and how the artwork might look and fit on an envelope.

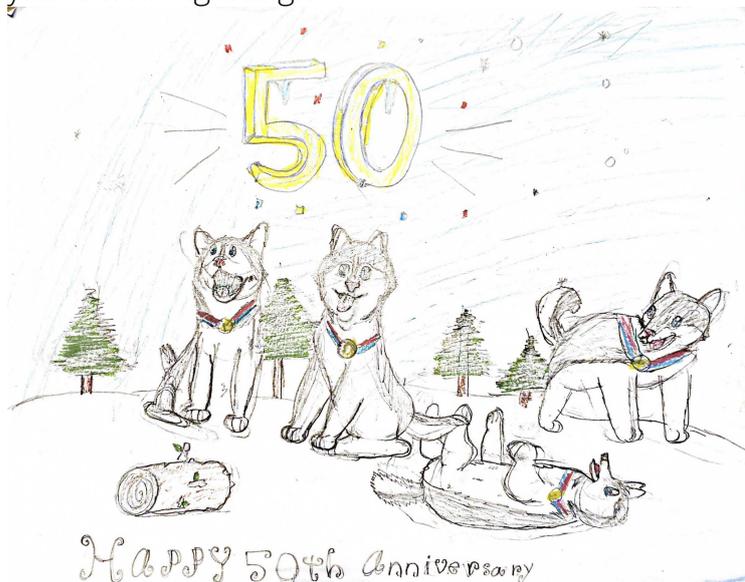
Please help us celebrate all of our winners! Be sure to check out all of the finalists on the next page, and check page 9 for details on how you can send mail down the Iditarod Trail in an envelope featuring this year's winning design!



First Place and the Official 2022 Trail Mail Design:

Jadae, age 13

North Carolina



Second Place:

Trey, age 9, California



Above:

Third Place:

Finn, 6th Grade, Wisconsin

Right:

Honorable Mention:

Natalie, age 11, Virginia

2022 Trail Mail Finalists



Adelaide, 6th Grade, WI



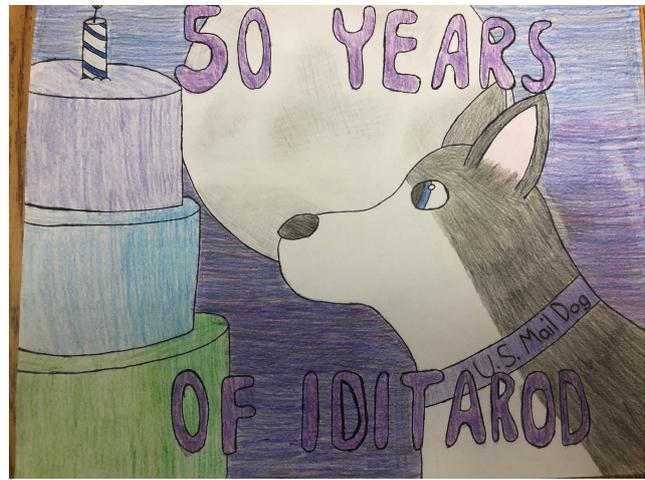
Caitlyn, 6th Grade, WI



Etta, 6th Grade, WI



Joshitha, age 10, CA



Kelsey, 6th Grade, WI



Leia, age 11,



Mischa, age 10, WI



Willow, 6th grade, WI

Risha, age 10, CA



2022 Iditarod Trail Mail Project

By: Jen Reiter

We are so excited to announce that sales for the Educational Trail Mail Project are open! This is an amazing chance for your class to send a piece of mail down the trail in one of the 2022 student-designed cachets, and help us raise funds for our education programs at the same time!

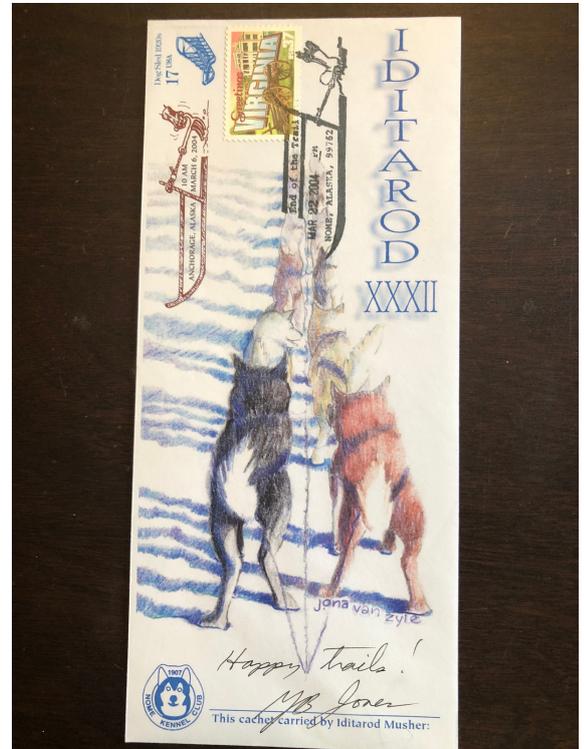
It's very simple for your class to participate:

- Head over to our [sales link](#) to purchase your spot on a sled for just \$5.
- Once your purchase is complete, you will be emailed further directions about how to send your piece of mail to be included. Basically, you will be sending one 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper down the trail. What is on your paper is totally up to you! Your students could write a poem or story, they could create a piece of artwork, they could all include their signatures... whatever you and your students decide.
- Once your piece of mail is received by our program coordinator, it will be put into an Educational Trail Mail envelope that will feature this year's winning student art piece.
- Your now filled cachet will be taken to the Musher Meeting in Anchorage that is held on the Thursday before the race. Your musher will sign the envelope and it will be collected back by our volunteers who will have it postmarked in Anchorage and then packaged for safe travels down the trail.
- Your mail will next be delivered to your musher at the race restart on Willow Lake and will be packed safely on his or her sled for its journey to Nome.
- Once it arrives under the Burred Arch, your letter will be postmarked in Nome and put into the mail stream to make its way back to you!

Please note: We are unable to honor requests for specific mushers to carry the mail. We are also not responsible for mail being lost in the US mail system.

Each musher is limited to carrying Trail Mail from 4 classes, so be sure to take advantage of this opportunity soon! Sales begin on November 3rd and are limited to one piece of mail per class or homeschool family. If you have questions, please email

trailmail@iditarod.com



Mark Your Calendar

Until January 1: **Educational Trail Mail Sales**

February 1: Educational Trail Mail Projects Due

February 20: Final Centerpieces Due in Anchorage

March 1- 4: **Winter Conference for Educators - Anchorage**

March 5: Iditarod Start

March 6: Iditarod Restart



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