

# MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

## NEWS & FEATURES

December Teaching Ideas  
Page 2

If You MUSH Know  
Page 3

K9 Reporter: Sled Dog Ed  
Page 4

Paws & Get Ready  
Page 5

Air Mail Express?  
Page 5

Mark Your Calendar  
Page 7

Educator Conference  
Page 7

### Table Centerpieces Still Needed! By Linda Fenton

The pre-race Musher Banquet will be held on Thursday, February 27 in Anchorage. Iditarod Educators (*that's you!*) have been asked to supply the centerpieces for the 200 tables. We have some table centerpieces coming in, but we could use a few more classes to be involved. Can you help us out? Simply email me with a design plan (*it doesn't have to be elaborate!*) and I'll send you the address where to send your finished centerpieces. They will be due in Alaska by Tuesday, February 18. Thanks in advance for your help!

[linda.fenton@iditarod.com](mailto:linda.fenton@iditarod.com)





Stuart Nelson, DVM  
December 15, 1952 - September 20, 2024



## December Teaching Ideas

by Heidi Sloan

### Reading/Writing

If you are anything like me this year, fitting in Iditarod content is tough. Our district is dictating strict pacing. Using the Iditarod to illustrate academic topics can be done, though! This article about the drop bags mushers prepare and send ahead could be used for reading comprehension. Former Teacher on the Trail, Brian Hickox, also gives an idea for having students make drop bags. Maybe you could have students “fill their drop bag” with study flashcards or a review sheet, reiterating advanced planning when you have a goal.

[Drop Bags Lesson](#)

### Preparing for the New Semester in January

Kick off 2025 with a fun new bulletin board and glyphs the students make to represent themselves! This lesson has a technology aspect, should you wish to incorporate digital art.

[Dog Glyphs Lesson](#)

### Math for Mini Mushers

This lesson utilizes hands-on math activities for creating patterns with paw stamps, setting up paper dog teams with even and odd numbers, and more.

[Math For Mini Mushers](#)

*The philosophy of the Iditarod veterinary program has evolved over the history of the race. Proper animal care is vital to the success of the sport. Our role as stewards of working sled dogs requires that we do everything possible to assure their well-being. To accomplish this, it is absolutely essential that mushers and veterinarians work together of behalf of the dogs.*

Quote from:  
Iditarod, The First Ten Years

Dr. Stu Nelson was a good friend of  
Iditarod Education.  
He is missed by all of us.

# If You Mush Know

by Lynne Witte

## How do the dogs stay warm living outside during the winter?

Sled dogs are born and bred to live in northern cold environments. Their fur, circulatory system, and tails are bred for cold temperatures. Mushers add houses, meals, and extra care to have the dogs enjoying their life outdoors.

Sled dogs have a double coat of fur acting as their weather protection like our winter coats. The under layer is a soft fur like the fleece and down in our coat. The outer layer of dog fur is a longer coarse fur. It acts as the water repellent protection or the outer layer of your winter coat. The dogs have a furry tail they curl around their nose while resting or sleeping adding its own heating system.

Scientists have reported the dogs have a “countercurrent” circulatory system. The blood vessels below their skin in their feet are arranged tightly together. Like a penguin’s feet this tightly woven vessel allows heat to be exchanged as the blood flows in opposite directions. The dogs have gel in their pads that does not freeze to equip a dog with warm feet.

Mushers add to their dog’s comfort by ensuring warm houses and hot meals. Clean fluffy straw is added to the insulated houses regularly. Straw does not absorb water and will help a dog retain its body heat. The opening for the dog is a good size for it to come in and out but not too large so it will also block wind from blowing bedding out of the house. Dogs are served a warm stew like meals of meat, kibble, and water daily.

The sled dogs are born with many natural adaptations we do not have. As you prepare for winter, you will add a warm layer of snow pants, parka, boots, mittens. You will have a cup of hot chocolate and a bowl of warm soup. Sled dogs are amazing animals who are adapted to the Arctic environment. Their fur, tails, and feet suit them for the cold temperatures. Mushers add cozy straw filled houses, warm meals and lots of love. Combined with the desire and love to run and play in the snow makes it a joy to see sled dogs living their best lives.



Artwork by  
Jon VanZyle



What Does “Exemplify” Mean?

In 2017, at the winter conference for teachers sponsored by Iditarod Education, Katie Manglesdorf, author of a book on Joe Redington, Sr., shared that the #1 musher for the first race of the Iditarod in 1973 was to “honor” Leonhard Seppala. Joe Redington, Sr. had chosen Leonhard to be the #1 musher, which is traditionally considered the “Honorary Musher”, as he felt Leonhard exemplified mushing.

Who was Leonhard Seppala? What qualities did he exhibit that made Joe Redington, Sr. feel Leonhard “exemplified” mushing? In 1925, the town of Nome, Alaska, had a diphtheria outbreak. The children of the town desperately needed serum to combat the illness. The doctor in town sent word to Anchorage where a large amount of serum was located. A plan to get the serum to Nome ensued. The serum would travel by railroad to Nenana. At that point, men and dogs would volunteer to race the serum westward to Nome for a total of 674 miles. One of those mushers who volunteered was Leonhard Seppala, a Nome resident. Leonhard came to Nome in 1900 during the gold rush. He worked as a dogsled driver to move workers and supplies to outposts in the area. During the Serum Run, Leonhard would travel from Nome eastward 300 miles to a waiting spot for the parcel of serum, a spot now known as Unalakleet. Then he would head back going westward. Both times he had to cross the difficult Norton Sound on the Bering Sea. His lead dog was the famous Togo. The trip was difficult with dangerous sea ice and storm conditions. However, Leonhard took good care of his 12 dogs, lead by Togo, and they made it to Golovin where they passed the serum on to the next musher heading to Nome. After two more musher handoffs, the serum finally made it to Nome and saved the children. From [Alaska Mushing School](#).

This brings us back to the title of this article. What does “exemplify” mean? If one looked up the word “exemplify” the meaning would be “to show or illustrate by example.” Process with your students what they think Leonhard Seppala showed or illustrated by example during the Serum Run that made Joe Redington, Sr. want to honor him. Then, have your students think of their own life. What have they accomplished, what do they hope to achieve, and what qualities do they exhibit? Were their actions, thoughts, feelings, or behaviors affected by someone they looked to as a role model or one that illustrated by example for them?

Numerous takeoffs from this discussion could be pursued. First, students could write a biography on the life of the person whom they feel exemplifies life to them the best citing examples from that person’s life. Next, students could write a letter to the person explaining the influence they have felt from knowing, watching, or reading about the chosen individual. Also, you could refer to Sled Dog Ed’s article from January 5, 2017, entitled [“The Honorary Musher”](#) This article encouraged students to look at who has been honorary mushers in the past, what were their contributions, and then write a persuasive essay on who they think should be the next “Honorary Musher”.

Lastly, one of the awards given to a musher after the race is completed is the “Leonhard Seppala Humanitarian Award”. This award is presented to one musher that demonstrates outstanding dog care while running the Iditarod Race. Ask your students to speculate why this award is given each year and why it was named after Leonhard Seppala. In the upcoming race of 2025, have your students watch closely to try and predict who they think will be given the award for 2025.

Remember, that each and every day as a teacher, you exemplify certain characteristics, qualities, actions and feelings for your students. Who knows, some day you may be the next “Honorary Musher”!

## Paws and Get Ready!

*Check out some of the exciting plans for the month of December from Maggie Hamilton, 2025 Teacher on the Trail™.*



Maggie Hamilton, the 2025 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™

## Paws and Get Ready!



**A Classroom Without Walls:** The lesson this month is science based with a focus on the difference between a sled and a sleigh. Students will discover the purpose of each mode of transportation, then design a dog sled through a STEM activity.

**More to Discover:** Find out more about the history of the dog sled and how it has changed throughout the years, the excitement of a trail crew volunteer, and how mushers are training in December. Plus you can learn more about how I am using the race in my school and classroom!

CLICK [HERE](#) TO FIND ALL OF MAGGIE'S LESSONS!



## Eye on the Trail: Serum Run Series - Air Mail Express?

With no roads, no trains and a frozen Bering Sea, shipping options were limited back in 1925 when Nome desperately needed diphtheria anti-toxin. Ground transport by experienced mail carriers and their trusted dog teams would be the tried and true method but aviation enthusiasts were quick to suggest air mail would be a much faster way to deliver the serum.

Could the airplane save the children of Nome? There was a long list of concerns, yet there was one compelling advantage for using the airplane – TIME. An airplane could cover the distance between Fairbanks and Nome in 6 hours compared to dog teams taking weeks. Would the reward of time outweigh the risks of flying? The difficult decision would fall on the shoulders of Scott Bone, Governor of the Territory of Alaska.

The full Eye on the Trail: Serum Expired story can be found at this link: [Air Mail Express?](#)



Air mail in Alaska – Mail DH fitted with skis on the frozen surface of the Tanana river, Nenana, Alaska, March 12, 1924 during a flight from Fairbanks to McGrath.

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Feb. 25-28, 2025: Iditarod™ EDU Winter Conference
- Feb. 27: Musher Banquet
- March 1, 2025: Ceremonial Start
- March 2, 2025: Start of 2025 Iditarod™
- June 24-26, 2025: Iditarod™ EDU Summer Conference in McCall, ID



## Iditarod Education Winter Conference At the Lakefront Hotel Feb. 25 - Feb. 28, 2025 in Anchorage, Alaska

Whether you are a “veteran” or “rookie” Iditarod educator, or just want to include an adventure learning project in your classroom, this conference will be one to remember. Walk away with full lessons and ideas to adapt for your own students and classrooms back home. Learn how to use the tools offered through the Iditarod, Iditarod EDU and the many programs we offer during the school year. You will hear from past Teachers on the Trail™, this year’s Teacher on the Trail™ finalists and some special guest presenters that include:

- Maggie Hamilton - 2025 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™
- Jeff Schultz - former Iditarod photographer
- Jon Van Zyle - Official Iditarod artist
- Barb Redington - Junior Iditarod board member
- Emily Robinson - 3x defending Junior Iditarod champion and musher
- Katti Jo Deeter - Iditarod finisher & Insider Correspondent
- PLUS MORE TO COME!

More information [here!](#)



# Iditarod<sup>®</sup> EDU

### Editors:

Linda Fenton  
Terrie Hanke  
Jim Deprez

### Contributing Writers:

Lynne Witte  
Linda Fenton  
Terrie Hanke  
Maggie Hamilton  
Heidi Sloan  
Nancy Wendt

### Photography:

all by Iditarod.com  
unless otherwise credited

### Artwork:

Jon VanZyle

Newsletter feedback, questions, or suggestions?

email: [linda.fenton@iditarod.com](mailto:linda.fenton@iditarod.com)