

# MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

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## Countdown...

BY JEN REITER

The official countdown is on! If you are anything like my class, your eyes are glued to the countdown clock on [iditarod.com](http://iditarod.com) as you anxiously await March 5th. If you are like me, you are also simultaneously having mild panic attacks about all that has to happen between now and then, especially if you are planning to come to Alaska for the Winter Educator's Conference!

We are excited this month to introduce our newest feature, **Dog of the Month!** Inspired by a reader request, we invited Kelly Villar, 2020 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail to revamp her popular column for the newsletter. We hope you'll enjoy sharing about a special canine athlete with your students each month!

We'd like to send a big congratulations to **If You Mush Know** columnist, Lynne Witte, for her first-place finish in the ten-dog mid-distance Tahquamenon Country Sled Dog Race! Way to go! Speaking of Lynne's articles, are you loving the addition of Jon Van Zyle's artwork? Well, he has generously agreed to sell the originals of those monthly pieces as a fundraiser for the Education Department. If you are interested in purchasing one, please reach out to [jane.holmes@iditarod.com](mailto:jane.holmes@iditarod.com)

Speaking of countdowns, here's a great one to help track of the wait til the start! Annie McGuire (2017 Teacher on the Trail) was inspired by one of our conference attendees, Julie Marie, to create this countdown board. The class removes one dog a day until the teams hit the trail!





## February Teaching Ideas

BY: HEIDI SLOAN

### Movement and Music

Sitting too long in a classroom makes students need movement breaks. Incorporating the Iditarod can break up your typical Go Noodle options. Try these yoga poses through [this lesson](#) using sled dogs and arctic animals as examples!

Learning some of the geography along the Iditarod goes with [this movement activity](#). Students can take turns being the leaders of the chant with others echoing and doing the movements.

### Science

[This lesson](#) overlaps the science of snow as matter with vocabulary study. Students read about and learn terms for the [varied forms of snow](#) and then can use sensory description language to describe each. Ideas are included for varied levels of students.



**Hoar** has to do with graying hair. How does the name hoarfrost go with that definition?

Photos: Heidi Sloan

### Design a Toy...

This sled dog puppy at Iditarod Headquarters made a quick toy out of rope! Have your students design and sketch a toy for a sled dog puppy. They can give the toy a name and even create a quick advertisement or commercial for it! Click the photo for a larger image.



"Dogs' lives are too short. Their only fault, really."

~Agnes Sligh Turnbull



# 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

February is here and that means race day is right around the corner. For those following and racing in the Junior Iditarod, this is the month! The junior race will take place a week before the Iditarod, and the youngsters are all ready to go. Check out the Junior Iditarod website and have your class practice using the tracker and following a junior musher over the weekend prior to the 50th Iditarod. <https://jriditarod.com/>

For the posts this month, they are mainly geared towards the races themselves. For my Classroom Connections, we do an amazing STEM activity that is a perennial favorite of my students. For the Voices of the Volunteers, I talk with trail breaker, Spencer Pape. He and his team are busy this month prepping the trail to make sure it's ready come race time.

### Classroom Connections: Mush Madness!

This lesson is one of my students' favorites each year. It is also the perfect activity for the last week of class before spring break as a wrap-up to our Iditarod unit. The students are put into groups and challenged to design and build a sled in a derby-style race! Teams are asked to submit a blueprint to the teacher for approval prior to the building process. The ramp I use is about 9 feet long and has 3 chutes. The sled base is provided for each team, and then the construction is up to the teams. Each group can choose materials from a provided set of options for their sled. There are a few requirements, however. Each team must be able to carry a returned dog (also provided) and 3 of the required gear items in their sled without spilling. The gear they choose must also be created from the provided materials. Competitions are based on which sled goes the farthest distance and/or the fastest to the bottom.

As the name alludes to, we model this STEM project after the March Madness basketball tournament. So each team is put into a random bracket-style tournament until the winner is crowned! The team names are always very creative and the sled designs are incredibly different. I hope your classes have fun with this! Come back on the 15th for the full lesson plans.



Mush Madness (2019)  
Photo: Jim Deprez

### Voices of the Volunteers: Spencer Pape

Spencer Pape has been arguably one of the most important and least recognized members of the Iditarod volunteers. He is a member of the team whose job it is to go out on the trail weeks before the race comes through to make sure there is a path for the mushers to follow. His team repairs and builds the bridges over the water, places trail markers and signage, and determines the route for the mushers each year. He has some of the first eyes on the trail and his team of 5 other trail breakers work tirelessly to get the roughly 1,000 miles of trail-ready for the first Saturday in March. In my interview with him, he shares an incredible story from 2014 in White Mountain as Jeff King, Aliy Zirkle and Dallas Seavey were all vying for the win. Hear the full story on the 30th!



Photo Courtesy of: Spencer Pape





## K9 Journalist Corner

by: Sanka

### Warm Up with the Junior Iditarod



Hi Everyone,  
It's Sanka W. Dog here. I always say the Iditarod starts on the last Saturday of February. Some of you race fans out there would beg to differ and say the race begins the first Saturday of March. Here's my take on things. The Jr. Iditarod starts the last Saturday of February, one week prior to the Iditarod. All the festivities of the Iditarod sort of kick-off with the 150-mile junior race. Plus there is the fact that many young mushers compete in the Jr. Iditarod then eventually enter and compete in the Iditarod. So for them, their Iditarod DID start the last Saturday of February, with the Jr. Iditarod.

The Jr. Iditarod is a very exciting race, conceived by young mushers as a way to hone their long-distance mushing and camping skills. The 2022 race marks the 45th running of the Jr. Iditarod. Young students who enjoy learning through the real-life/real-world applications of Iditarod can warm up by following the Jr. Iditarod where the mushers are kids ranging in age from 14-17. The Jr. Iditarod website can be accessed from the main Iditarod page or at [jriditarod.com](http://jriditarod.com).

How can the 150-mile race that starts on Knik Lake, runs out to the Yentna Station Road House then finishes at the Willow Community Center help your students warm-up for Iditarod? The Jr. Iditarod presents a number of smaller scale and introductory activities. Here are a few ideas we (myself and my teammates at Just Guts Kennel) have come up with.

Get out a map of Alaska and the United States and mark the hometown of all the Jr. Iditarod mushers. How many miles will each musher have to drive to get to the Knik Lake start? What percentage of mushers are from the United States? What percentage of mushers call Alaska home? What percentage of mushers are female and what percentage are male? Compare this to the 2022 Iditarod.

Read the biographies of each of the Jr. Iditarod mushers and look at their Jr. Iditarod career in the Jr. Iditarod archives. Make a list of the veterans and the number of times they've participated in the Jr. Iditarod along with their finish position. Sort the list by musher's last name. Sort the list by number of races. Sort the list by finish place from the 2021 race. For older students, sort using an Excel Spreadsheet.

Figure out the start differential for the race. There are sixteen mushers. Bib #1 always goes to the Honorary Musher. This year Bob Morgan's service to the Jr. Iditarod is being celebrated. He will likely head down the trail from the start banner on his snowmachine at exactly 10:00. Two minutes later bib number 2 will depart. Two minutes later, bib #3 will depart, etc. When will the 16th musher leave the starting line? What bib number will the final musher be wearing?

You might wonder how the first musher to cross the finish line can be the winner when the mushers don't all start at the same time. Here's how that works. The teams all take a required 10-hour rest at the Yentna Station Roadhouse checkpoint. Their start differential is added to the 10 hours of rest to equalize the 2-minute start intervals. As an example, if there were ten mushers, the final or tenth musher to depart the start wouldn't have any time added and would leave Yentna after 10 hours of rest. The 9th musher to leave the start would have 2 minutes added to the 10-hour rest so would leave Yentna at 10 hours and 2 minutes after arriving. Following this pattern, the first musher to leave the starting line would have 18 minutes added to the 10-hour rest. This same concept applies to the Iditarod with 54 mushers. Use the smaller Jr. Iditarod field to help your students understand the start differential. Have them create a chart to figure out the required rest plus differential for each of the Jr. Iditarod mushers.



Photo: Terrie Hanke

Another concept the Jr. Iditarod can give young race fans practice with is adding time to time. Check the Jr. Iditarod Yentna Station inbound times. Add the ten hour rest and differential to the arrival time to see when the mushers would be eligible to depart Yentna Station. Check the outbound Yentna times to see if the musher departed on time. Using Jr. Iditarod helps the students understand the same concepts in Iditarod.

To avoid the confusion between AM and PM, Jr. Iditarod and Iditarod times are reported in military time. The Jr. offers students the opportunity to adjust their thinking from standard or civilian time to military time. For practice, take the inbound times from Yentna Station and convert to civilian time or take the finish times for all the mushers and convert to civilian time.

*continued on the next page*



Jr. Iditarod mushers all carry the same tracker the Iditarod mushers carry. Students can become acquainted with the tracking information by following the Jr. Iditarod mushers. They can follow speed, time, distance, rest, and other numbers. They can see who's in the lead AND they can realize that until the required rest is taken and the differential is added, the musher who is first to make Yentna Station may not actually be the musher leading the race. The same would be true in Iditarod. The musher leading the pack prior to the 24-hour layover is probably not in the lead.

Here's another challenge for students. Compare the current list of Iditarod mushers to the Jr. Iditarod archives to see who has run Jr. Iditarod and now takes to the 1,000-mile trail in the 50th running of Iditarod. Has a Jr. Iditarod Champion ever gone on to win the Iditarod?

There are so many basic concepts from the Jr. Iditarod that help students understand the Iditarod. With smaller numbers in the Jr. Iditarod, projects are more manageable. It's a very unique experience for younger students to follow kids racing sled dogs who are close to their own age. These young mushers are amazing and receive praise from race officials every year for their mushing, dog care, and camping skills. Enjoy the race!

Born to Run,  
Sanka



Mike Kenney

**DALLAS SEAVEY**  
5-TIME IDITAROD CHAMPION  
AVAILABLE LATE JANUARY

**PETE RIPMASTER**  
IDITAROD TRAIL INVITATIONAL CHAMPION  
AVAILABLE LATE JANUARY

**RYAN REDINGTON**  
2-TIME JOHN BEARGREASE CHAMPION  
AVAILABLE FEBRUARY

**HUSKY TALK**  
A PODCAST BY THE STUDENTS OF  
CAMANCHE MIDDLE SCHOOL

**HUSKY TALK**

We wish you clear weather  
To help run the race  
To see what's ahead  
Helping to keep a fast pace.

We wish you good health  
For both the dogs and you  
So that the whole team  
Will run the race through.

We wish you safety  
From dangers along the way  
From the start to finish  
The first to last day.

We wish you good luck  
As you try to get home  
Racing through Alaska  
From Anchorage to Nome.

We wish you success  
In all you want to achieve  
You'll need persistence and bravery  
Most of all you must BELIEVE!

Mrs. Navo's 3rd and 4th Grade  
Missouri



# If You "Mush" Know...

by: Lynne Witte

Illustrated by: Jon Van Zyle

This month's question comes from.....

From Mrs. Tarbell's 3rd grade class:

**We read the article about how sled dogs stay warm in their dog houses, but how do they stay warm when they are on the trail racing and stop to sleep?**

## All Snuggled In

Sled dogs love to run! But like us, they need to rest. In a race like the Iditarod, many dog teams will run and rest equal hours. For example, they may run for four hours and then rest for four hours. This rest stop may be along the trail or at a checkpoint. Either place, the musher is prepared to care for their dog team by providing straw to make each dog a warm soft bed to snuggle and sleep. Dogs may have been wearing a special dog jacket for wind protection as they run. This jacket is left on a dog to sleep for extra warmth. The musher will have a blanket for each dog that they either carried in their sled bag or sent to each checkpoint in their drop bags.



Photos: Lynne Witte

Sled dogs are a northern breed dog and are able to tolerate the cold. They have a double coat of fur. The undercoat is short and warm. It insulates the dog's body. Their outer coat is longer and water-resistant, helping prevent the build-up of ice and snow.

Sled dogs can stretch out or curl up on their bed of straw and snuggle under the warm blanket. They wrap their tail around their nose as their breath will warm them. It protects their face from the snow and cold.

Sled dogs love to run, but when it's time to stop, they have learned the routine to snuggle in and enjoy a good rest!

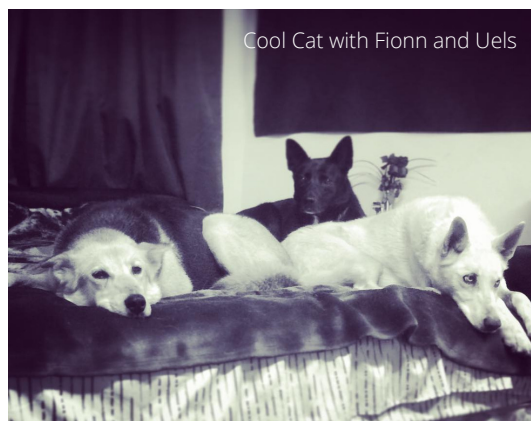




# Dog of the Month!

by: Kelly Villar, with photos by: Matthew Failor

Introducing the canine athletes of the Iditarod! Each month, we will feature one canine athlete who has made their way down the trail and learn their unique character traits, some history, and all-around fun stories. This month we travel to 17th-Dog to meet Matthew Failor's Cool Cat!



Let me introduce Miss Cool Cat. She was the most skittish, shy dog in my kennel when I adopted her at five months. I actually couldn't even approach her; she was so shy. Realizing I wasn't making the situation any better, I decided to let Fionn and Uels (pronounced 'Yools') work their magic. I let those two dogs run free, opened the pen to Cool Cat, and let her run free! Next thing you know, she was accepted into the pack. However, this was just the beginning of the 'work,' as I still hadn't even been able to pet or touch Cool Cat because she was so shy and unsure of her surroundings. I decided to get a little smart about the current situation since Cool Cat still wouldn't come to me, even as she saw how much Fionn and Uels trusted me. So I opened the door to the handlers cabin I was staying in at the time, and naturally, Fionn and Uels ran inside. Not knowing that this was a setup, Cool Cat ran through the door chasing her new friends. I quickly ran over and shut the door before Cool Cat could figure out what had just happened! We must have spent a full 24 hours in there, patiently getting to know each other, building trust, and working on confidence. We became best friends that day. She has always been 'my dog,' one of those shy dogs that latch on to one person and no one else. Fionn, Uels, Cool Cat, and I were best buds from that day onwards.

It turns out that Cool Cat has quite an impressive lineage. Her parents were part of the team that won the Iditarod in 2011! Knowing that she has come from good stock, I wanted to breed her to several other great dogs of the Iditarod, so I reached out to my friends Martin Buser and Pete Kaiser. Cool Cats' first litter goes back to Pete's main lead dog Palmer. Palmer would eventually go on to win the famed Kuskokwim 300 an impressive four times in a row, win the Denali Doubles, as well as finish the Iditarod several times! That litter in my kennel is known as 'The Heavy Metal Litter.' For Cool Cats' second litter, Martin allowed me to breed her to his famous dog Roll! (Roll has a brother named Rock...get it, Rock n Roll!). Roll is a special dog to me as I got to help train him when I worked for Martin in 2010-2012 and Roll also took me down the trail of my rookie Iditarod in 2012! Roll went on to win several races in his career with Martin, including the Knik 200, Denali Doubles, and Kuskokwim 300, and finishing the Iditarod! This litter from Roll X Cool Cat is known as our 'Glam Rock Litter!' So we have the Heavy Metals and the Hair Metals! Miss Cool Cats' third litter here at 17th-Dog (Premier X Cool Cat), and they were dubbed 'The Car's Litter.'

Cool Cat is the Matriarch of our pack. She is the toughest female in the yard, probably one of the most confident in the yard. It's funny to think back when she was so young and shy that she would grow into this role here as such a confident powerhouse of a dog.



Before Cool Cat became the mom to so many of our dogs, she actually had a slow start to her career and wore a cast on her wrist for a good bit of time. She broke a bone in her ankle by stepping on a rock when she was 1.5 years old. The vet took good care of her, and she has not seen any issues. It took a lot of work and patience to get the kennel to where we are now, so Cool Cat, unfortunately, didn't get many opportunities to 'race' as it seemed she was always training puppies and running easy 'yearling' schedules in Iditarod. She finished Iditarod a couple of times, but she has really shined through motherhood. Hands down the best mama dog I have ever seen. Many of her older pups still go over to her circle when let loose to kiss her snout and submit for belly rubs. It is quite the sight to see her still patient with her grown children. Not all mamas acknowledge their pups when they are full-grown, but Cool Cat will do this, which is a cuteness overload, by the way!

Miss Cool Cat started out as an extremely shy and timid dog but gained her confidence through running with the pack, learning in harness, being an outstanding friend and world-class mama lead dog here at 17th-Dog. We love her and are in debt to her!



# Mark Your Calendar

February 1: Educational Trail Mail Projects Due

February 15: Final Centerpieces Due in Anchorage

February 16 and 17: Food Drops

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

March 5: Iditarod Start

March 6: Iditarod Restart

March 20: Nome Finisher Banquet



Matthew Failor and Cool Cat on the Trail

**Iditarod**<sup>®</sup> **EDU**

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