

MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

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The 2025 Junior Iditarod

By Linda Fenton

The 2025 Junior Iditarod will begin on Saturday, February 22 at Knik Lake. This is a 150 mile race with teams leaving Knik Lake and traveling to Yentna Station where they will take a mandatory 10 hour layover. Sunday morning they will leave and follow the same route back to Knik Lake.

14 mushers between the ages of 14-17 are entered in this year's race. Females are dominating the field with 10 young women vying for Iditarod gold. These junior mushers are the future of the Iditarod and the ones to watch for in the future.

Your class can follow this race. Check out the website and read the musher bios.

[Junior Iditarod](#)





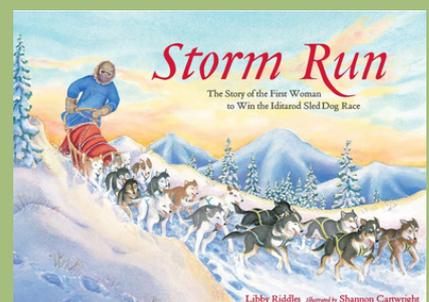
Libby Riddles First Woman Iditarod Winner 1985



Musher Libby Riddles finished a respectable 18th in 1980, her rookie year. In 1985 she rocked the world by making a mad dash through a brutal storm to become the first woman to win the Iditarod.

Iditarod: The First Ten Years

We have been so busy commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Serum Run, and the new Burled Arch in Nome, we almost let it slip that 40 years ago Libby Riddles made history becoming the first woman to win the Iditarod. The book, *Storm Run* is the story of her race.



February Teaching Ideas

by Heidi Sloan

Reading

Mid-year benchmark data is in. Am I alone in knowing my students need to read more to improve? Here are a couple motivating lessons for your students, one using Iditarod-themed books to encourage increased reading. The other is a timeline to get started with the Iditarod, including reading and research.

["Harness Up" Reading Stamina](#)

[Getting Started with the Iditarod](#)

Math

Are your students learning statistical measures or landmarks? Mode, median, range, and mean? Use the Junior Iditarod race data to help them analyze the stats! You can also adapt this to past races, clicking on Iditarod.com, Race Center, Race Archives for additional practice with their chosen veteran mushers!

[Mushing With Math and the Junior Iditarod](#)

If You Mush Know

by Lynne Witte

How do dogs know where they are going at night on the trail?

Many mushers prefer to run their dog team at night. The cooler temperatures at night make it better running for the dogs. But can the dogs see in darkness? Are their eyes like a glowing headlamp?

Yes - dogs can see but still rely on some light to illuminate shadows. They rely on all their senses to safely run at night, but we know they have better vision than humans. We know dogs see differently than their human driver because of the differences in the retina of a dog's eye and increased size of a dog's pupil allowing more light to enter the eye. Dogs have something called a tapetum lucidum. Humans do not. The tapetum is a layer of reflective cells called rods behind the retina. The tapetum acts like a mirror in the dog's eye. It reflects the light so a dog has another opportunity to see the light increasing the chances for a dog to see an object in dim light. This reflecting light improves a dog's vision and why their eyes glow colors in the dark.

Because of the rod cells in the tapetum behind the dog's retina it increases a dog's motion sensitivity as well. This allows dogs to see movement. Dogs will travel a dark trail better than a human but best with some light that a musher's bright headlamp can provide. The light is to illuminate a trail marker in the distance. Along with the dogs' vision they have keen senses of smell, hearing, and an increased awareness to run a trail.

Mushers often compliment their leaders who run through a whiteout or very dark conditions when humans would have been struggling to see the trail. The dogs are focused on the smells and sounds, along with their quality of vision at night to run!



**Artwork by
Jon VanZyle**

K9 Journalist Corner by Libby



Libby here! Brrr! The Iditarod is coming soon, and we are celebrating a special event that took place a long time ago.

Have you ever gotten sick and had to take medicine? Dogs don't get sick that often, but kids do! And then their families can get really worried. Usually, you can go to the doctor and get medicine, and you feel better in a few days. But one hundred years ago, some children got really sick in Nome, Alaska, and their families were really worried! Nome was far away from the nearest big hospital. Nome was so small that the town only had one doctor. He was a really kind man named Dr. Welch, and he worked with a nurse named Emily Morgan. When the children started getting sick, it was Nurse Morgan who figured out it was diphtheria (dip-THEER-i-a). Well, even though Dr. Curtis had asked for more medicine for diphtheria, it was never sent to him. So the sick children had no medicine to cure them. That's where my hero, Togo, comes in! In a [previous post](#) I told you about how Togo was a small, energetic dog. He struggled to get his human, Leonard Seppala, to understand that Togo really could run with a team and even lead the team. When Seppala was asked to help carry the medicine in his sled, Togo jumped up and barked, I'll help!

The medicine went as far as Nenana by train. That's a town outside of Fairbanks. But from there they had to carry it by dogsled, and they had to go fast! They wrapped the bottles of medicine in straw and put it in a box. Then they wrapped the box with a quilt to keep it safe. Many mushers including Leonard Seppala helped mush the medicine to Nome, but he and Togo and the other dogs went the furthest. When the medicine finally arrived in Nome, it was Togo's friend Balto leading the way with his musher, Gunnar Kaasen. Dr. Curtis and Nurse Morgan brought the serum to the children and finally, the diphtheria outbreak was over. Today, we call this great race to bring medicine to Nome the "Serum Run."

How can you learn about the Serum Run at school? Well, there are lots of great books to read about it. My favorite is called "Togo & Balto: The Dogs Who Saved a Town" by Jodie Parachini, illustrated by Keiron Ward. You can also design and make a serum container of your own—use small plastic bottles, shredded paper, a box, and a towel or blanket. You can practice your math and counting skills by carrying the box from classroom to classroom around your school in your own relay, counting your steps and recording the distance. Then add up how far you and your classmates walked to deliver your "serum!" You can also do this in PE class by making a relay race with teams. Once you learn more about the Serum Run, you can try creating a diary entry or fiction story about the dogs. You could even practice art skills by creating images of the Serum Run.

Well, it's been fun telling you about the Serum Run. When the Iditarod finishes in Nome this year, I hope you will think about the brave mushers who raced there 100 years ago to bring medicine. We know that taking medicine is no fun, so I also hope you'll wash your paws and stay healthy!

Love,
Libby



Nenana Train Station

Paws and Get Ready!

Check out some of the exciting plans for the month of February 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: In the lesson this month, students will get to research checkpoints then write informative compositions. This multi-day english/language arts lesson can easily be adapted to all grade levels.

More to Discover: Find out more about some of the unique checkpoints along the southern route, the power of volunteering as a dog handler, and how mushers are fitting in last minute training in February. 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: 1995 Commemorative Run Relay

The 70th Anniversary Commemorative Serum Run was not a race against time as in 1925 but it was a time to remember the twenty men who carried the serum to Nome. The 1995 run would also help build awareness of health through vaccines in the trail villages. The Commemorative Run built momentum for the Shots for Tots initiative. The goal was to have every child in the villages between Nenana and Nome fully immunized by the age of two

On January 27th of 1995, mushers waited in Nenana to depart on the Commemorative Serum Run organized by Joe Redington, Sr. Not only the date corresponded but also the temperature. The KTUU - Channel 2 reporter covering the story in Nenana held a thermometer with a very short red line that didn't even reach the coldest reading of minus 40 degrees. History was in the process of repeating itself. Thankfully, it was only the weather and not another outbreak of diphtheria in Nome.

Joe truly wanted to help the native villages with vaccinations for all the toddlers and along the way he hoped to promote the tradition of sled dogs. Through the 1995 Commemorative Run Joe was able to achieve both. To learn more about the 1925 Serum Run and the 1995 Commemorative run, read the Eye on the Trail Serum Run Story – 1995 Commemorative Relay.

The full Eye on the Trail story can be found at this link:

[1995 Commemorative Relay](#)



Photo from Popular Science Magazine April 1925

A Magic Weapon Against Plague

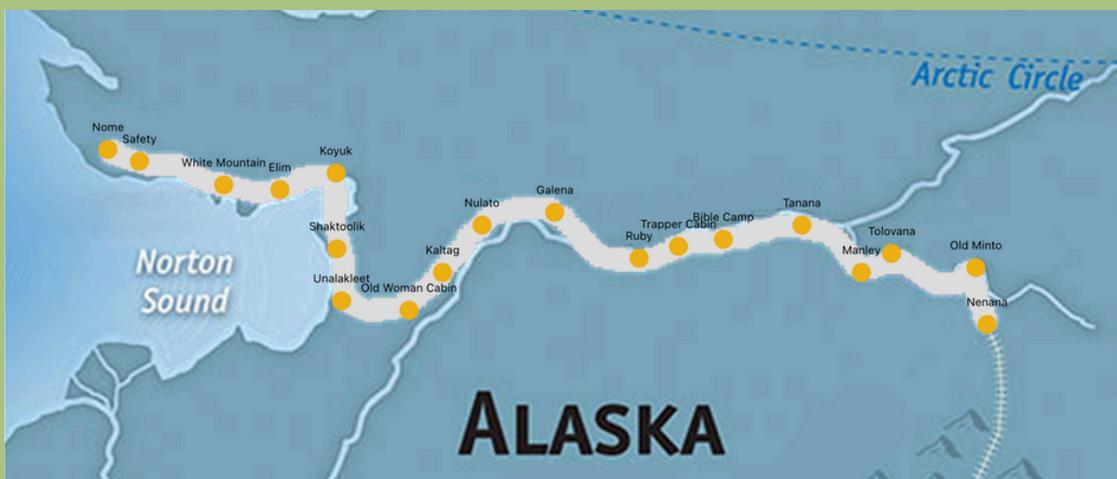
This little bottle contains 10,000 units of diphtheria antitoxins, sufficient for one treatment. Thirty times this amount was carried in the dramatic dash over the snow to Nome, where 27 persons lay sick of the dread disease

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Feb. 22: Start of Junior Iditarod
- 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



1925-2025 Centennial Seppala Expedition Nenana - Nome



While Iditarod Education acknowledges the fact that Joe Redington did not start the Iditarod Sled Dog Race to commemorate the Serum Run, we do acknowledge that this event is a part of Alaska History that champions sled dogs. Right now, Jonathan Hayes of Poland Springs Kennel in Maine is in the middle of an expedition to follow the route of the 1925 Serum Run mushers. His expedition began January 27 in Nenana. It will take Jonathan much longer to get to Nome than the original mushers because he is not a part of a relay, but is doing this solo. Click on the map above to get more information on Jonathan's quest.



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