

MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

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Let's Get This Season Started!

BY JEN REITER

Many of this year's Iditarod mushers started 2022 standing on the runners during the Knik 200 and 100 races which launched from Knik Lake at 10:00 am Alaska time on January 1st. The teams were anxious to get started with the racing season as anticipation builds towards the excitement of the 50th Iditarod.

Following the early season races is a great way to get your students familiar with some of the Iditarod mushers and is a fun way to build anticipation for the upcoming season. As many of these races serve as qualification races for Iditarod, it's also a great way to meet the future of the sport. You can learn about Iditarod's system for qualifiers at [this link](#). Also at that link, you will find the rookie assessment that each musher who is completing a qualifying race has to complete. This form is a great reminder to mushers about the expectations for themselves and their teams if they want to participate and be successful in an Iditarod.

With classes starting back up, it's also a great time to re-establish routines and expectations in your classroom. Why not use the discussions surrounding the early races, qualifiers, and musher assessments to create your own version of the "musher report card" to have students review classroom expectations and do some self-evaluation and reflection. You can find an [example here](#).

Enjoy following the early race season with your students!



Photo Courtesy of: Kevin Paolini

January Teaching Ideas

BY: HEIDI SLOAN

Snowshoes Are Mandatory Lesson

For our more advanced students in math and science, here is a challenging exercise in surface area; it involves snowshoes, one of the required items for a musher's sled, and how arctic animals' feet act or don't keep them on top of the snow. Students will use ratios to determine how well adapted each arctic animal is for staying on top of snow and then rank each animal. This real-life **problem-solving project** is geared toward grades 7-12 but can be adapted for younger students.

Rookie Meeting Math

Each year, rookie mushers join the team, competing in the Last Great Race! There is a meeting to advise them on all the rules and expectations for the race. Here are some **math problems** for your students to do in order to help them better understand preparation for the Iditarod.

Language Arts

Are your students struggling with grammar following the pandemic learning losses? **This lesson** on poetry and embellishing sentences through the Iditarod lens will make it more concrete for students and engage their creativity.

Reading and Writing on the Iditarod Trail

Get ready! This amazing **collection of literacy lessons** will keep you going for a long time and give your students engaging, standards-based lessons for improving their reading and writing skills. From dog care to comparing the Yukon Quest and the Iditarod, and everything in between, this resource will prove to be valuable to any level.

Speech Bubbles...

Here is a photo to share with your students for a quick writing activity. What is going on in the dog's head? Have the students create speech bubbles to accompany the photo! Accompany the photo with the Oprah Winfrey quote above. Why might someone want to be an Iditarod sled dog like this one? Click the photo for a larger image.

"I want to work like a dog, doing what I was born to do with joy and purpose. I want to play like a dog, with total, jolly abandon."

~Oprah Winfrey

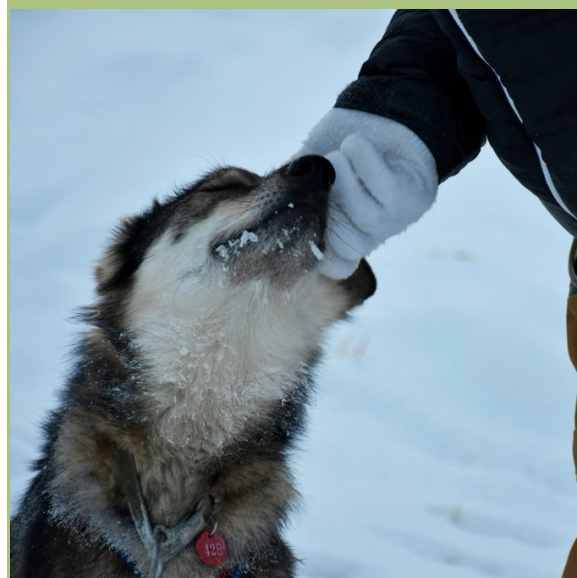


Photo: Heidi Sloan

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

2022 is finally here. The golden anniversary of the Last Great Race; the 50th running of the Iditarod. The reason that this sport continues to have such a following is due to the incredible athletes that are at its heart. I'm not referring to the mushers in this case, although the amount of training and time dedicated to improving their skills is nothing to scoff at. In this race, it is the dogs that are front and center. For both posts in the month of January, dogs will be the topic of discussion.

Misconceptions and More: Why Dogs?

On the 15th, I will take a deeper look as to why dogs are the chosen work animal in the Arctic. Certainly, there are a number of arctic animals that are well suited to help people in daily tasks. But for thousands of years, native peoples have relied on their canine companions to make life a little easier in some of the most inhospitable conditions on the planet. Sled dogs have numerous adaptations that they have developed over that time to help them survive in the harsh arctic weather. This post will not only look more in-depth at those adaptations but also look at some attempts at domestication of other arctic animals. Moose, reindeer and other animals have been tried, but dogs continue to be the animal of choice. Check back in on the 15th to see why this might be.



Photo: Terrie Hanke



Photo Courtesy of: Wayne Randolph

Voices of the Volunteers: Veterinarian Wayne Randolph

Continuing with the focus on dogs this month, I had the pleasure of talking with Iditarod 2000 race volunteer veterinarian, Wayne Randolph. Like myself, Wayne is a graduate of the College of Wooster in Ohio and shares a passion for this sport. Although he has only been able to volunteer as a vet for one year, his memories of his time on the trail will stay with him for a lifetime. He is a lover of all types of animals and has had some amazing adventures. His most memorable moment from the 2000 race speaks volumes to the connection between musher and athlete. Be sure to check out this post on the 30th for the full account of his Iditarod experience.



K9 Journalist Corner

by: Gypsy

Dear Friends,

Winter is here and we sled dogs are loving our training runs with the mushers! Many of you know that we wear cloth booties on our feet when we run the Iditarod. These fit over our four paws and a Velcro strip keeps each snug on our ankles. The reason we wear them is because snow can pack between our toes when we run on wet snow.



Photo: Heidi Sloan

Have you ever tried to put a bootie on your pet dog's paw? Often, they don't like it and won't even step down when it covers their feet. That makes kids wonder how the sled dogs of the Iditarod are so willing to allow booties after each stop along the trail.



Martin Buser Booties His Team
Photo: Heidi Sloan

Two mushers shared their training tips. They both said that the main way to ensure that dogs allow booties is to touch their feet often when they are puppies. This is from musher Kristy Berington of Seeing Double Kennels:

"We start fussing with our dogs' feet when they are puppies. They are used to us handling them in all sorts of ways. Our dogs also hold a foot in the air at first when a bootie is fitted, being confused about what is on their foot; with repetition, they learn to accept the foreign object. Rewarding the dog with playtime, treats, or a walk can help associate a dog bootie with something fun. In our case, it's a run out on the trails!"

Shayne Traska shared about training sled dogs to accept booties:

"I would say part of it starts when they are very little pups. We play with their feet a lot to get them used to all the handling they will get when they are big. This helps greatly with clipping toenails, checking the inside of their feet, and putting booties on. The younger you can put boots on them to get an idea of what it will be like, the better."

Since our handlers start us early, we usually don't mind wearing booties for runs through the snow. Once the team stops, however, we are ready to take them off, just like you like to take off your shoes. Hope this answers some questions for you about why sled dogs willingly accept booties on our feet!



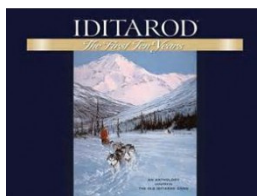
Photo: Heidi Sloan

Until next time,
Gypsy



Teaching with the First Ten Years

by: Jane Holmes



IDITAROD: THE FIRST TEN YEARS

reading informational text to compare, contrast, analyze, and synthesize

This month's **lesson** prompt about the stars of the race is based on the book The First Ten Years pages 274 – 285 from the chapter **"Unstoppable Dogs"**. On these pages, early mushers describe their iconic dogs.

Teachers should read and preview all pages before deciding how to use them in the classroom. With teacher accommodations, these ideas can apply to a wide range of grade levels. Students can read the pages themselves or a teacher can read aloud these pages as students take notes in graphic organizers or in a class set of notes.

Lesson Ideas:

Compare/contrast the dogs in these ways: name, physical attributes, personalities, and accomplishments. Identify common characteristics as well as unique characteristics. Then summarize the qualities that make a musher's "dream dog."

Create and give a presentation showcasing these special dogs.

Design a brochure or museum display highlighting one or more of these notable canines.

Survey current mushers and their "star" team members to analyze if current desirable traits in dogs match the original mushers' needs and wants.

These accounts are excellent for examples of **personification** as well.

Educators may purchase a copy of **The First Ten Years** at cost, \$30.00. Email jane.holmes@iditarod.com for the discount code.

HUSKY TALK
A PODCAST BY THE STUDENTS OF CAMANCHE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Libby Riddles
1985 Iditarod Champ

HUSKY TALK
COMING
IN JANUARY

Jane Holmes
Iditarod Director of EDU

Blair Braverman
Author of new book
"Dogs on the Trail"

If You "Mush" Know...

by: Lynne Witte

Illustrated by: Jon Van Zyle

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

From Mrs. Gotschall's 3rd grade class:

How do the dogs see and run at night?

Eyes All Aglow

"In the full moon when it is blue and white on the snow at the same time, so bright and clean and open you could read a book, we harness the dogs and run at night." Gary Paulsen writes in his book **Dogteam**, the dogs run a well-lit trail by the moon. But, what about those dark or whiteout snow conditions on a dog trail? Can the dogs see?

Yes, dogs can see. They rely on all of 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 the increased size of a dog's pupil which allows 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, which increases the opportunity for a dog to see an object in dim light. This reflecting light improves a dog's vision and is why their eyes seem to glow colors in the dark. Because of the rod cells in the tapetum behind the dog's retina, dogs have increased motion sensitivity as well. This allows dogs to see movement more clearly.

Dogs will travel a trail using increased vision and their keen senses of smell, hearing, and increased motion awareness. Mushers often compliment their leaders who ran through a whiteout or very dark conditions when humans have been struggling to see the trail. The dogs are focused on the smells, sounds, and motions along with their quality of vision at night to run!



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



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