

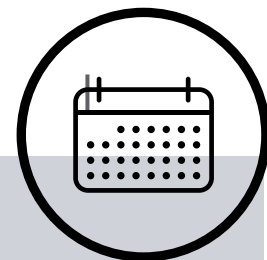


# MUSH ON!

YOU CAN LEARN A LOT FROM A TEAM OF DOGS

JANUARY 2026

VOL. 6, NO. 5



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January:

9 Return Dog Blankets Due

February:

13 Trail Mail Due

20 Centerpieces to Anchorage

March:

3-6 Winter EDU Conference

*Please consider joining us for this conference adventure!*

7 Ceremonial Start

8 Iditarod Re-start

## EDU PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

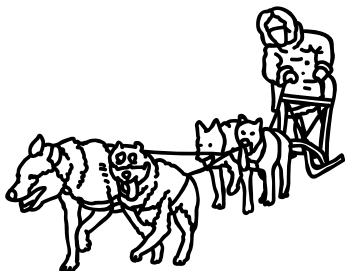
### TRAIL MAIL

It's time to secure your class's part in history by sending a piece of mail down the trail in an Iditarod musher sled!

Would you like to participate in the Iditarod without actually running? Create a one page letter that will be put in one of the 2026 student designed cachets, placed securely in a musher's sled where it will arrive under the Burled Arch and then mailed back to you. The cost is \$10 - click on the picture below for more information.



Giving Trail Mail to Musher Hunter Keefe.  
Photo Credit: J. Westrich



### Iditarod Education Winter Conference

It's not too late to sign up for the Winter Conference held in Anchorage, AK. Join teachers who share your passion for Iditarod in the classroom. Speakers include mushers, race volunteers, and educators. There will also be a field trip to Iditarod Headquarters and Martin Buser's Happy Trails Kennel. Click [here](#) for more information.



### KARI'S CORNER TEACHER ON THE TRAIL

Happy New Year to you all! I hope this newsletter finds a you happy, healthy, and rejuvenated. As we get back into the classroom after a much-needed break, we are already thinking about what is to come. Finding ways to tie in winter, snow, new beginnings, and exciting topics into learning becomes the top priority. This January lesson is definitely one that will have us "kicking off the new year... Iditarod Style"! The lesson will walk you through using robotic technology and block code to travel the trail in your classroom, complete with stopping at checkpoints, mandatory layovers, and creative features. Check out the website later in the month for our Trail Word Tuesday where we will hear from an always-smiling, just happy to be a musher, Hunter Keefe. You also won't want to miss our Fun on the Trail Friday where you will find an easy- to-use, print-and-go, Iditarod Bingo game. So, let's jump in and get our journey through January started! Click [here](#) for Kari's lessons.

### WHAT'S NEXT IN EDU?

#### Banquet Centerpieces

We need your help! Centerpieces are needed for all of the tables at the Musher Banquet. They don't need to be elaborate, there are some examples as well as more information [here](#).

*Provide your students with an opportunity to be involved in a service learning project. You can't always be somewhere 'physically', but what you can do is help to create an environment for this exciting event. Be with us through your students' art and creative endeavors.*

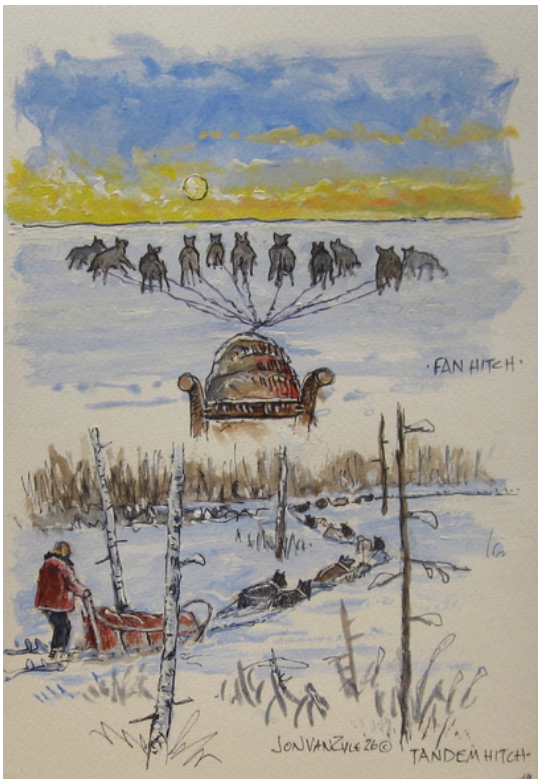
## If You Mush Know By Lynne Witte

**Why are dog teams hooked up in a straight line and not fanned out?**

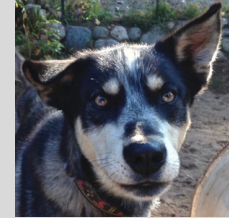
In early polar expeditions, a team of dogs was often arranged in a fan formation to travel across frozen water. Each dog was attached to the sled at a single attachment point using a tug line, creating a fan-like formation. This allowed the weight to be distributed across the ice and areas of no trees.

In the Iditarod and other Alaska races you see sled dog teams in a straight line. The dogs are harnessed and attached to the sled using a main gangline with dogs in single or tandem formation. This is best for pulling a sled on trails and through wooded terrain.

A comparison would be if a group of students used a fan formation to cross a football field allowing students to spread out. In contrast, students and a teacher walk in single file or tandem in more congested school hallways. Jon VanZyles illustration below compares both.



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**Linking the Iditarod  
by Sled Dog Ed**

What is a chain? According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, a chain is a series of things linked, connected or associated together. The serial assembly of connected pieces can be called "links". A chain, in and of itself, lacks distinguishing features or purposes. However, the links each embody a meaningful action and create unity, interconnectivity or interdependence for the whole chain.

Can you and your students think of expressions that use the idea of a chain being a series of items connected together? (Click the link below for possible answers)

Do any of these ideas relate to the Iditarod Sled Dog Race? How and where are "chains" used in the Iditarod? Keep a watchful eye for them before, during and after the race. (Click the link below for possible ways)

A "Chain with Links" prompts a few teaching ideas for your classroom. (Click the link below for descriptions)

*Goals are the links in the chain that connect activity to accomplishment.* ~Zig Ziglar (American Author)

If your goal is to immerse your students in the Iditarod Sled Dog Race, hopefully these activities will lead to that accomplishment. Enjoy!!

Click [here](#) for the activities above.

## Iditarod<sup>®</sup> EDU

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## VOCABULARY WORD OF THE MONTH

### Gee

PRONOUNCED "G"

Sometimes when we're disappointed we say "aw gee", but the term Gee in dog sledding means we want the team to turn to the right.



## Checkpoint of the Month

### Finger Lake

Population: 2

Brace yourself for the bustling metropolis of... Finger Lake! Just kidding, with a population of two, it's more of a dot on the map. The lake's real name is Winter Lake, but the old-timer Alaskans thought it looked like a 2-mile-long finger, so Finger Lake it is! Nestled among majestic mountains and blanketed in heaps of snow, it's a checkpoint straight out of a snow globe.

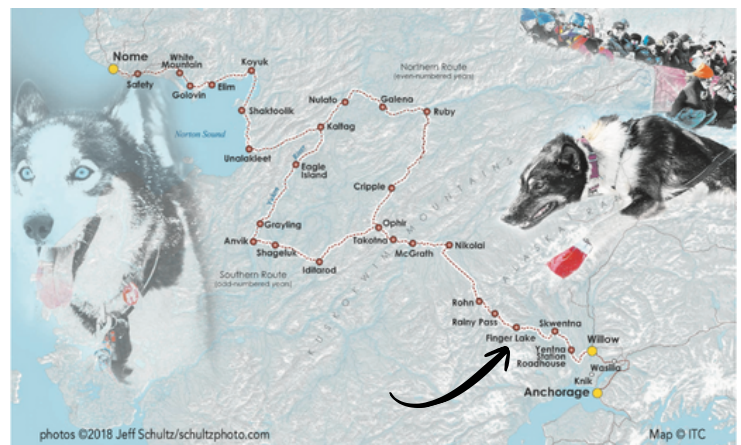
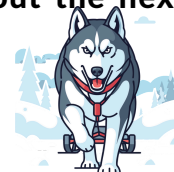
Dog traffic is still close together around this snowy pit stop. It's typically busy on day two of the race, with teams excited to dash onward. But before they hit the trail, they can grab a bite at Winter Lake Lodge, then zoom off to the next snowy adventure!

## IDITAROD MUSHERS

Mushers in the 2026 Iditarod are busy preparing for the 1,049 mile race. This year there are 40 mushers who will be leaving the starting line and making their way to Nome. One of the coolest things about the Iditarod is that men and women compete equally. This is also true of young and old, rookies and veterans.

New this year is the first ever Expedition Musher. Kjell Inge Rakke will be participating in the Iditarod with a few special privileges. He will be able to bring a support team and his own veterinarian. He can't officially win the race, he's just there for the experience.

While most mushers are from Alaska, they also come from other areas of the United States and the world. Check out the next page and do some research!



Finger Lake



# 2026 IDITAROD MUSHERS



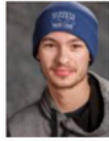
[Sydnie Bahl](#)



[Travis Beals](#)



[Richie Beattie](#)



[Grayson  
Bruton](#)



[Rohn Buser](#)



[Jeff Deeter](#)



[Paige Drobny](#)



[Gabe  
Dunham](#)



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[Jessie Royer](#)



[Joseph Sabin](#)



[Josi \(Thyr\)  
Shelley](#)



[Chad  
Stoddard](#)



[Jesse Terry](#)



[Bailey Vitello](#)



[Thomas  
Waerner](#)

**Do some research:**

How many women? \_\_\_\_\_

How many men? \_\_\_\_\_

How many rookies (first timers)? \_\_\_\_\_

How many mushers are from Alaska? \_\_\_\_\_

How many mushers are from other states? \_\_\_\_\_

What other states? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there mushers from different countries? \_\_\_\_\_

What countries? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is YOUR favorite musher? \_\_\_\_\_

Why is he/she your favorite? \_\_\_\_\_

*If you have your students do this research, go to [Iditarod.com](http://Iditarod.com) - musher profiles - change to "view as a list".*

Answers (But keep in mind that this is fluid and can change with added or withdrawn mushers):

Do some research:

How many women? \_\_\_\_12\_\_\_\_\_

How many men? \_\_\_\_28\_\_\_\_\_

How many mushers are from Alaska? \_\_\_\_30\_\_\_\_\_

How many mushers are from other states? \_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_

What states? \_\_\_\_Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Montana \_\_\_\_\_

How many mushers from different countries? \_\_\_\_7\_\_\_\_\_

What countries? \_\_\_Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Denmark\_\_\_\_\_

Who is YOUR favorite musher? \_\_\_\_\_

Why is he/she your favorite? \_\_\_\_\_