

# MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

## NEWS & FEATURES

May Teaching Ideas  
[Page 2](#)

If You Mush Know  
[Page 3](#)

K9 Reporter: Zuma  
[Page 4](#)

Kate's Sled Bag  
[Page 5](#)

Meet Maggie Hamilton  
[Page 7](#)

### Last Newsletter of the School Year!

By Linda Fenton

Getting ready for the end of the school year always brings such mixed emotions. Classrooms are getting packed away, testing is getting wrapped up, and students are ready to move on to the next grade level.

Teachers, being teachers, are also preparing for the next school year as are members of our Iditarod EDU staff. The 2025 Teacher on the Trail, Maggie Hamilton is getting herself organized to take on the experience of a lifetime. As you do your planning for next year think about coming to our 2025 Winter Iditarod Conference or even applying to be the 2026 Teacher on the Trail.

This newsletter is put out by a handful of volunteers to keep you up to date on the latest Iditarod news. Special thanks to Jane Holmes, Terrie Hanke, Heidi Sloan, Kelly Villar, Lynne Witte, Jon VanZyle, Nancy Wendt, and Kate Newmeyer for always coming up with interesting material to pass along to teachers and students each month. This could not be done without your help.

Have a great end of the year and Mush On!



Let's compare:

1973 Red Lantern winner  
John Schults  
32 Days 5 Hours 9 Min.

2024 Red Lantern winner  
Jeff Reid  
12 Days 11 Hours 22 Min.

## May Teaching Ideas

by Heidi Sloan

### Character Education

Are your students getting restless as the school year winds down? Here is a lesson on kindness and camaraderie from the Iditarod that might give the climate of your classroom the boost it needs. It includes a link to the Good Samaritan Rules in the rulebook as well as a film clip of kindness being demonstrated on the Iditarod Trail.

#### Camaraderie

### Geography

An oval is formed in the center of Alaska when the Iditarod map shows northern and southern routes. What is in that oval? Are communities being missed by the Iditarod? This article contains good map skills and thinking questions for your students to research facts which back up their opinions.

#### As The Crow Flies

### Creative Writing

Your students write as a dog, filling in an application for the position of lead dog! A cover letter goes along with the application. Young writers can learn to use persuasion and descriptive adjectives through this writing activity!

#### Lead Dog Wanted!

Iditarod EDU  
March 19 · 🌐

Kate Newmyer, 2024 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail, handing off the Red Lantern, symbol of perseverance, grit and determination, to rookie musher Jeff Reid as he entered Nome.



Photo by Terrie Hanke

# How Do the Dogs Get Home After the Race?

by Lynne Witte

Listening to the lyrics of The Iditarod Trail Song by Hobo Jim there is a tale to tell once back home:

“Hey I can tell my tale, I did, I did, the Iditarod Trail.

Well give me a team and a good lead dog and a sled that’s built so fine,

And let us race those miles to Nome, one thousand forty-nine,

When I get back to my home, then I can tell the tale.

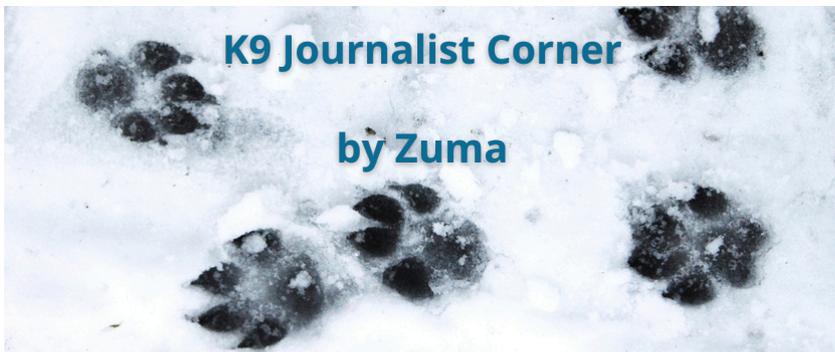
I did, I did, I did the Iditarod trail.”

After the 29 teams finishing the 2024 Iditarod crossed under the Burlled Arch in Nome, each musher and their dogs are led to the Nome dog lot just a few blocks from the finish line. Awaiting the dogs are warm cozy straw beds specially prepared for each team. The musher and handlers will continue to feed, massage and care for their team. It is the responsibility of each musher to make their own arrangements with a freight carrier to fly their team of dogs and sled from Nome back to Anchorage or Fairbanks.

It is a priority of each musher to ensure their team is flown out as soon as possible by one of the local air cargo carriers or Alaskan Airlines They want their dogs safely back in their home kennels for best rest and recovery. Mushers have previously sent airline crates for each dog to Nome for the trip back home.

Once landing in Anchorage or Fairbanks, the dogs are greeted by family or friends who transport them back to their home kennels in their dog trucks. Each Iditarod team’s journey is complete once the dogs and mushers are safely home.





Hello friends,

With a wag of my tail, I'm happy to announce the success of the 2024 Iditarod Sled Dog Race. As you all know, Dallas Seavey won the race with my friends Sebastian and Aero in the lead positions. Besides winning the race, Dallas also won the Dorothy Page Halfway Award and the Achieve More Award. Aero, the true hero, won the City of Nome Lolly Medley Memorial Golden Harness Award for outstanding lead dog. High paws to Aero!

Dallas and team weren't the only ones to earn awards during the race this year: Nicolas Petit was the recipient of the First Musher to the Yukon Award as well as the Nome Kennel Club Fastest Time from Safety to Nome; Travis Beals won the Bristol Bay Native Corporation Fish First Award; Jesse Holmes took the Ryan Air Gold Coast Award; Rookie of the Year went to Josie Thyr; Lara Kittelson won the Howard Farley Sr. Memorial Award; the Lynden "Committed through the Last Mile" Red Lantern Award went to Jeff Reid; Wally Robinson earned the Most Improved Musher Award, and the Leonhard Seppala Humanitarian Award; Jessica Klejka won the Most Inspirational Musher Award; and finally, Matthew Failor won the Donlin Gold Sportsmanship Award and the Northern Air Cargo Herbie Nayokpuk Memorial Award.

What do all those awards mean? [Check it out!](#)

Maybe for an end of the school year treat (did someone say treat?) you could piggyback off of some of these awards for your students. Enjoy your summer break and join us next year as we follow the 2025 Iditarod.

Tail wags,  
Zuma



# What's In Kate's Sled Bag?

by Kate Newmyer

When I think about my experience on the Iditarod Trail for the 2024 race, the place that comes to mind most frequently is Nome. To me, Nome is evening twilight, the widow's lamp, strings of Christmas lights, dog mushing at The Dog Lot, the iconic voice of the Nome checker, Nicolle Wisniewski, people-watching and souvenir shopping on Front St., qiviut knitting, and the blue-white expanse of Bering Sea ice. Nome to me is finish line, destination, culmination—and there's nowhere quite like it.

At the race start, knowing I was about to go out on the trail, I was excited and curious, but it felt familiar. After all, as a 2023 finalist, I had seen the race start in 2023. I watched the careful turns on Cordova, crowds cheering, and welcomed the happy teams back with fellow spectators at the Campbell air strip. At Willow the next day, I cheered as mushers, wearing their game-day faces, took off along the starting chute and disappeared into the trees.

This year, I got to ride in a sled Josi Thyr's grandfather had built for her. As we wound through the snow-covered bike trails of Anchorage, I thought my face was going to get stuck in the biggest grin I've ever had. In Willow, after the last musher took off, I grabbed my trail bag and my backpack and hurried to catch my ride to the airstrip, where I flew to Skwentna, the first of my overnights on the trail.

If I had visited Nome as a tourist watching the Iditarod competitors finish the race, I would be excited and happy. But being on the trail and seeing their experiences first-hand made the Nome finish line so much more meaningful. I wasn't a tourist—I had a job. People kept asking me, what exactly is your job? I responded, I am working to connect learning and the Iditarod to teachers and students everywhere. In other words, my job was to be a teacher!

People also asked, do you already know what you're going to write about each day? While I was on the trail, I constantly kept my eye out for two things: what is happening on the race each day, and what curriculum connection can I make. Depending on the day, I had my curriculum connection all set, but wanted the right Iditarod moment to share it. For example, I knew I wanted to connect the Iditarod with some depth and complexity ideas—Details, the Big Idea, Language of the Discipline, Ethics. I was thrilled to be able to write about Big Ideas after the day I flew several stops from McGrath to Unalakleet, over Old Woman Cabin and down the Kaltag Portage with pilot Jason. Other days, I'd experience something profound, and I'd search for a way to connect it. My experience as Josi Thyr's IditaRider and each snowflake, cheering voice, rhythmically trotting dog, and bump on the trail became my invitation to explore sensory language in writing.

On the trail, I got to observe mushers and their dogs in the process of completing the race. In Skwentna, I helped park dog teams, and when I finally got a few hours' sleep, I grabbed a foam mattress next to Aaron Burmeister, crashed out in his orange down jacket. In Takotna, I literally bumped into Gabe Dunham, who was heading into the musher's bunk, and after I apologized, she graciously shared with me how her race was going. In Galena, I tiptoed around Jason Mackey's earnest conversations with fellow mushers and tried my best not to trip on anything as I tiptoed to bed.

(Cont. next page)

As we progressed further up the trail, the mushers' faces became more sun-drenched, their lips more chapped, their eyes heavier. In Unalakleet, about 15 minutes before the first team arrived, a fresh hot pizza arrived from Peace On Earth, and for the next day and a half, the deliveries never slowed down. The community center was full of pizza boxes, camaraderie and a fog of bacon grease. I remember how Mille Porsild, tired as she was, graciously talked to fans and friends with her lovely smile.

What impressed me so incredibly, even more than seeing the mushers push through fatigue and cold temperatures, was how the Iditarod's nearly 2,000 volunteers came together. These were the most warm, welcoming, hard-working and selfless people I've ever met. The willingness to work for this race is something I will not ever forget. For example, I wrote about the River Crew, a group of friends from Seattle that come up each year to set up and break down the entire Skwentna checkpoint. There was the community center in Galena, where volunteers made a clean, cheerful place for the mushers and local people brought food. There were many generous and talented pilots, vets, and others with the professional skills specifically needed for the Iditarod. There were trail crew volunteers whose sole purpose was to be outside at all hours of the day and night, bringing Heet, water, and straw to mushers, and then cleaning up waste and returning the checkpoint to its original state. There was the Iditarod Insider crew, who worked tirelessly to bring wonderful race coverage to subscribers around the world. So when I finally reached Nome and watched mushers and their happy dog teams cross the finish line, I knew a tiny bit of what they had been through--sleeping on the floor, relying on the kindness of strangers, and perfecting their checkpoint routines.

I was at the finish line when Dallas Seavey completed his record 6th win, trying to catch a good photo of Aero, his lead dog, through the crowds, and I was there when Matt Hall, sporting his beautiful trail sweater, came in second, beaming and speaking sweetly to his team, already rolling in the snow. Josi's handlers welcomed me up under the arch and we cheered crazily as she finished first among the rookies. As we waited, I met a local woman wearing a beautiful blue parka with arctic fox trim. She heard our live interview on the radio and told me how she thought, my name's Josie too, I'll come out and welcome Josi to the finish line! I heard Joshua Robbins' wonderful speech dedicating his race to soldiers everywhere as members of the local chapter greeted him with POW/MIA flags. And finally, in the darkest part of the night, I stood on Front St. next to Doris, working to keep the Red Lantern flame from going out, and got to say congratulations to Jeff Reid as he made his way off the Bering Sea.

As my year of being 2024 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™ comes to a close, I want to thank the amazing Teachers on the Trail who have come before me and provided me with guidance and support, especially Jane, Linda, Erin, Jim, and of course, Terrie. I'd also like to say congratulations to Maggie as she gets ready for her tenure. Thank you to Iditarod Education and to the Iditarod Trail Committee, and the entire Iditarod community. As many people already know, there's no place like Nome!



# Meet Maggie Hamilton!

By Jane Holmes



Maggie Hamilton, the 2025 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™

Join the Iditarod Education Department in welcoming our 2025 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™, Maggie Hamilton, to the elite group of educators to earn this honor. After completing an involved and thorough application, and the selection process as a finalist in Alaska prior to this year's race, Maggie accepted this year-long job. All finalists have an in-person interview, write daily website postings, attend and present at the EDU Winter Conference, volunteer for the race, and other tasks. She is the 26th Iditarod Teacher on the Trail.

Currently a 5th grade teacher in Mitchell, IN, Maggie has incorporated the race in math, reading, social studies and other academic areas. Her entire school uses the theme of Iditarod to motivate students to achieve their goals. With a passion for new opportunities and a dedication to education, Maggie inspires young minds through her diverse experiences and worldly perspective.

*"I am extremely excited about being selected as the 2025 Teacher on the Trail™ and I can't wait to share my journey and passion for the Iditarod with students and educators around the world."*



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