



MUSH ON!

YOU CAN LEARN A LOT FROM A TEAM OF DOGS

OCTOBER 2026

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EDU PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: TRAIL MAIL ART DESIGN CONTEST



During the Iditarod, one part of each musher's mandatory gear is a cache of trail mail. This is to honor the past: *The tradition pays homage to the historic Iditarod Trail, which originally served as a vital winter mail and supply route across Alaska delivered by dog teams.*

To get 3rd-12th grade students involved in this tradition, each year we run a Trail Mail Art Design Contest. The winner of the art contest will have their design printed on the envelopes that are placed in the musher's sled. This is quite an honor for a young artist as their artwork will be seen by Iditarod fans all around the world.

To salute our young mushers and future Iditarod competitors, the theme for the artwork this year is "50 Years of Junior Iditarod". The words of the theme do not have to be in the design, but it must reflect the theme. The design must include the words "Junior Iditarod" and the year "2027".

All the information about this year's contest can be found [here](#).

RETURN DOG BLANKETS

Not all dogs can run all the way to Nome. There are times a musher and veterinarian will make the decision to send a dog back to their home kennels. We like to help keep these dogs warm on their journey, so we have the Return Dog Blankets program.

Last year we put out a call for teachers, students and other organizations like scouts, to make blankets for the canine athletes and the response was incredible! We collected blankets from 32 states and we are so grateful for your support. Our goal this year is to receive blankets from ALL 50 states!

If you want to participate, there is more information [here](#).



TAMI'S TRAIL NOTES: TEACHER ON THE TRAIL

Mush into October, where no one runs the trail alone.

As your 2027 Teacher on the Trail, here is a sneak peek for October:

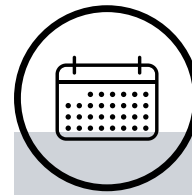
The 5th — Paws to Learn:

This month's lesson will focus on creating a Husky Head with a math lesson. Students will have a fun way to practice identifying the x and y coordinates, plotting points accurately, and following directions—while adding an Iditarod twist to their math practice. I hope you will "paws" and check it out on the Iditarod EDU website.

The 25th — Paths to Connect:

This month's path will lead you to a simple way to connect a school fundraiser to the Iditarod while helping students discover the power of giving back. We'll also explore the important role volunteers play in making the Iditarod possible and connect that spirit of service to our own communities through a monthly Paw Print Badge Program.

I hope you'll take a few minutes to check it out, give it a try with your students now, or save it in your teaching sledbag for when Iditarod 2027 gets closer. However you choose to use it, I hope it gives your students a chance to have fun, make connections, and learn as they follow the trail toward new discoveries!



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November:

20 - Trail Mail Art Contest Due

December:

1 - 2028 Teacher on the Trail

Application Due

18 - Dog Blankets due at Iditarod Headquarters

31 - Sign up for **Winter Conference** (\$300 Discount!)

March, 2027:

2-5 **Education Winter Conference**



IDITAROD DOGS LOVING THEIR BLANKETS!

If You Mush Know . . .

By Lynne Witte

"I have heard of puppy teams. How old are the dogs on a puppy team, and how do they learn to pull a sled?"

Puppy to Yearling Teams Learning in Progress

Sled dogs are like children growing up. The newborn puppies are loved with mom's care of feeding and daily care. Before their first birthday the puppies will learn to wear a sled dog harness and be hooked to a gangline. With the help of adult experienced dogs the puppies will begin running in the harness. Normally this is a very natural skill for the puppies. Short runs with adult dogs sets an example for the young dogs.

To continue the learning of sled dog commands, building endurance to run, and confidence to run with focus. This is a yearling stage for sled dogs when they are normally 1-2 years old.

Young dogs like young children when paired with experienced confident adults they can copy the behaviors. Yearlings will have the opportunity to run in different positions in the dog team. This is like little league sports. Every dog gets the opportunity to try different positions in the team.

Yearling sleddogs are like young preschool-elementary students. They practice the skills on a regular basis with plenty of positive energy. A classroom of young children may have buddies from older classrooms to read, write and play with the young children for learning by example. A yearling (puppy) team of sled dogs will run with experienced dogs to learn by example and graduate to the adult team as they grow.



Jr. Iditarod Turns 50 in 2027

By Sanka W. Dog

It might be a few months early but **HAPPY 50th BIRTHDAY Jr. Iditarod!** How exciting is that?!?! The Jr. Iditarod began as a dream. Eric Beeman, had this idea – have a distance race to prepare teenagers for the “Big Iditarod.” He and his mushing friends would take their dogs on winter camping trips. Sitting around the campfire, Beeman shared his idea of a junior sized Iditarod. His friends and a lot of other folks liked the idea! With the help of parents, other musher people and encouragement from Joe Redington, Sr. the Jr. Iditarod was born.

Here's some interesting history and stories from the previous 49 years of Jr. Iditarod. Click to read and learn more about the race kids beg their parents to participate in.

[Junior Iditarod Turns 50!](#)

Born to Run,
Sanka



Julia Cross (above) and Calvin Daugherty (below) at the 2020 Junior Iditarod.

Photos by Terrie Hanke.



Emily Robinson in 2025 - winningest Jr. musher ever!



Iditarod **EDU**

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VOCABULARY WORD OF THE MONTH

Lead Dog or Leader: Dog who runs in front of others. Generally must be both intelligent and fast.



Jessie Holmes with leaders Polar and Zeus.

Checkpoint of the Month

Takotna

POPULATION: 56

Affectionately dubbed “the friendliest little checkpoint on the Iditarod Trail,” Takotna is a quaint community brimming with warmth. Here, mushers will take the opportunity to pause for a delicious meal and a slice of freshly baked pie. During the race, the spirit of community shines brightly as the townsfolk unite to greet the teams journeying through.

Nestled along the Takotna River, which is frozen from November to May, this charming town sees few reporters or spectators during the race, given its limited lodging. Mushers seeking a restful night are welcomed to find a place to bed down on a floor.

Are you tempted to visit Takotna? Absolutely! You can fly in by plane, glide in by boat (during the summer months), traverse by snow machine, or journey with a dog team (in the winter months). Maybe you'll get a piece of pie.

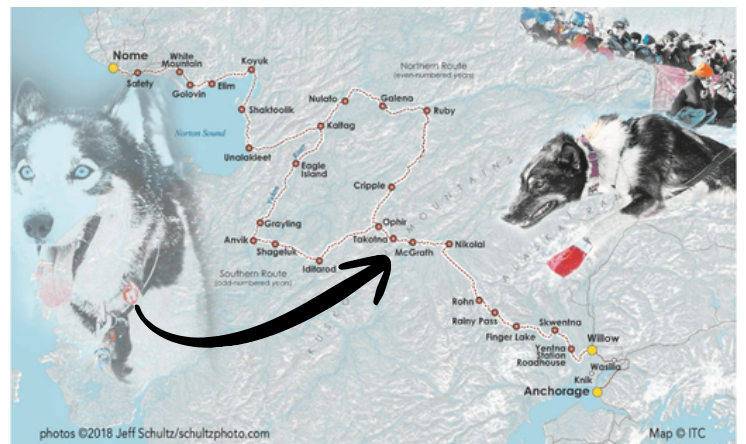
THE JUNIOR IDITAROD

One of the rules of the Iditarod Sled Dog Race is that you have to be 18 years old to enter. No worries. If you're between the ages of 14 & 17 you can enter the Junior Iditarod.

Teams start this 150 mile race on Knik Lake. It will take them 3-4 hours to reach the first checkpoint of Deshka, then another 3-4 hours to reach Yentna where they will all camp for the night. The first into Yentna is responsible for starting the campfire they will all use. (This is an unofficial rule.) 10 hours after they arrive in Yentna, they will do the same course in reverse. In 2026 all mushers started this second leg between 2:30 AM and 5:20 AM.

The Junior is held the weekend before the official start of the Iditarod. Young mushers must follow many of the same rules as the Iditarod: mandatory items, vet checks, sportsmanship and A1 dog care.

These young racers are the future competitors of the Iditarod.



TAKOTNA

YOU ARE THE MUSHER!

YOU ARE A MUSHER WHO IS PLANNING ON RUNNING THE JUNIOR IDITAROD.
ONE OF THE DOGS IN YOUR KENNEL JUST HAD A LITTER OF PUPPIES.
EACH NEW LITTER HAS A THEME TO NAME THEIR PUPPIES.



WHAT IS YOUR KENNEL NAME?
WHAT IS THE THEME OF YOUR LITTER?
WHAT ARE THE PUPPIES NAMES?

EXAMPLE

Kennel Name: Blue Ridge Kennel

Litter Theme: Heeler Family & Friends

Puppy Names: Bluey, Bingo, Bandit, Chilli, Coco, Lucky

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Kennel Name: _____

Litter Theme: _____

Puppy Names:
