

MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

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At the Starting Line!

BY JEN REITER

It's hard to believe we are at the starting line for the 2021 Iditarod! In so many ways it seems like this year has flown by, but in so many other ways it seems like it has taken forever to get here.

We know that Iditarod is taking centerstage in classrooms around the county and world as students eagerly choose their mushers to track, teachers check their Insider subscriptions, and everyone anxiously turns their attention North to Alaska...

But what happens after the race? How can we keep that excitement and energy going? Don't worry, we'll be back in April and May with two more newsletters full of ideas on how to make Iditarod last well into the spring.

In the meantime, enjoy the race.... and Go Dogs, Go!



March Teaching Ideas

HEIDI SLOAN

What do you need to get started in order for your students to follow the Iditarod Race? We at the Iditarod EDU routinely say that we don't teach the race, we USE the race to teach math, reading, STEM, writing, and more. It's a huge motivator for student engagement. Here are some activities and informational articles to help you refresh your unit or get started!

Important links that make finding information and navigation easy can be found here.

- [**Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race: 101 What you need to know!**](#)
- [**Tips on Getting Started Using the Race With Students**](#)
- [**5 Lessons and Ideas to Kick Off Your Iditarod Unit**](#)
- [**Five W's of the Iditarod Jeopardy Game**](#)

If you missed this in December, here is an Iditarod art lesson that can be successful in person or virtually.

[**Classroom Connections: Husky Art Drawing \(Virtual Lesson Possibility\)**](#)

Are your students following the Iditarod Trail beginning March 6, 2021? Try this STEM activity with electrical circuits to make your science unit come alive!

[**STEM: Light up the Checkpoints**](#)

Have your students create a non-fiction booklet on an Iditarod topic to emphasize research, writing, text structures, and text features. This can also be adapted into an ebook. Speaking of reading, is your class signed up for our new Iditaread program? See the link below.

[**Text Features and Structures Iditaread**](#)

Tell the Story

Imagine these two dogs are at their truck, getting ready for the 2021 Iditarod Race. What do you think the conversation is that they are having? Are they talking about their musher? The other teams? The weather? Have your kids write the dialogue that is happening! Click [**HERE**](#) for a larger photo.



"Even with the struggle you face with the race, the satisfaction and pleasure stand out so much, that until I can't keep up, I'll never stop mushing the Iditarod Trail."

~Joe Redington, Sr.

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 January Teacher on the Trail Posts

Jim Deprez,
2021 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail

It's finally here! March. Race month. Go time! Just a few more days until the 49th running in the 49th state. It is gearing up to be quite the memorable one too. There is a new course, and with it, new challenges. There is a fairly long list of "Rookies" this year and no one really knows what to expect from many of them. So many unknowns!

What I can say is that I cannot wait to keep you all updated on the race in a totally new way this year! Since I will not be attending the race in person, I am really looking forward to sharing updates and information with you with the help of my students and will be able to provide insights from a musher who actually did the trail in reverse just last year!

So there is a lot to look forward to. Be sure to check in during the race for some updates from the virtual trail this year!

Moments With Mushers: How Has the Race Changed?

The hindsight of this question is really something given all of the changes due to Covid this year. This was a question that I posed to some of the mushers over the summer, before the route was changed to the "2021 Gold Trail Loop". Given what we know NOW, I'm sure many of them would talk about the differences and new challenges that lie ahead of them with running the route in reverse from Iditarod back to Willow.

However it was interesting that the commonality between their responses was the pace of the race. However, it is a RACE and people want to win. So it makes sense that mushers will do anything necessary to help improve their time, and therefore, their own chances of winning. Check out the responses on the 15th!



These two mushers represent the slowest and the fastest winning Iditarod times.

Left: Carl Huntington won the race in 1974 with a time of 20 days, 15 hours, 2 minutes, 7 seconds

Right: Mitch Seavey won the race in 2017 with a time of 8 days, 3 hours, 40 minutes, 13 seconds

Classroom Connections: Race Reporting (Virtual Lesson Possibility)

This is something that I will be trying for the first time this year! Since I will not be reporting live from the trail, I am going to have my students give updates about the conditions, standings and happenings on the trail from my classroom. This is something that could easily be turned into a quick lesson to hit some "speaking and listening" standards in the curriculum. We also have a standard that talks about reporting on a topic that this will be perfect for.

Be sure to check out some of these updates throughout the Iditarod race with my 3rd graders!

It's All About the Dogs

by: Zuma

It's almost here! The running of the 49th Iditarod. Musherers have packed their drop bags, assembled meals and snacks for the trail, repaired their sleds, and so many other things to prepare for the race. But really, it's all about the dogs. My canine racing friends have been preparing by doing what they love - running.



Before the race starts, all dogs will have physical examinations that will include EKGs and blood tests. Dogs will be microchipped and will need proof of updated vaccinations. Not my favorite process, but a necessary one, is the de-worming for *Echinococcus multilocularis*. Awwwwwooooo! That's a pawful to say. But that's not all. The "Pee Team" will be collecting urine before the race, at a checkpoint during the race, and after the race. While 14 dogs will start the race for each team, mushers are permitted to have 24 dogs go through this screening. If, for any reason, the Chief Veterinarian believes a dog is not fit for the 800 plus mile journey, it will be removed from the team. All of this, and more, is done for the well-being of the dogs - the true athletes of the race.

Once the 14 dogs have been chosen for the team and are in the staging area for the start of the race, they are under the jurisdiction of the Race Marshal. They remain there until 72 hours after they have been released by ITC veterinarians or 48 hours after the final musher finishes the race. We love the volunteer vets who donate their time to make the race safe for all the canines involved. They're grrrrrrreat!

Read all the rules for more information about what is expected of mushers and the care of their teams. After all - it's all about the dogs. Click [HERE](#) to read the rules for this year's race!

Tail wags,
Zuma



Some of our favorite people are vets!
Photos: Linda Fenton

Teaching with the Insider: Race Edition

by: Jane Holmes

Ok race fans -we hope you are deeply immersed in pre-race activities and lessons with your students and ready for the race. Here is the Insider broadcast schedule.

Broadcast Schedule for Iditarod 2021

You can be part of the pre-race and race start activities through the free events.

Thursday, March 4

Pre-Race Show – Free broadcast on Iditarod.com
5 p.m. AK, 6 p.m. PT, 7 p.m. MT, 8 p.m. CT, 9 p.m. ET

Friday, March 5

Rookie Musher Panel, 4 p.m. AK – Insider Ultimate PLUS*
Women in Mushing Panel, 5 p.m. AK – Insider Ultimate PLUS*

Saturday, March 6

(Ceremonial Start Canceled)

Champions of Iditarod Panel, 5 p.m. – Insider Ultimate PLUS*
2020 Ceremonial Start rerun, Time TBD – Free broadcast on Iditarod.com with
Greg Heister & Bruce Lee Live from Deshka Landing

Sunday, March 7

Live Start at Deshka Landing, 1:30 p.m. – Free broadcast on Iditarod.com

If You "Mush" Know...

by: Lynne Witte

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

Grant:

How big do sled dogs get? Do they have to be a certain size to race?

Willingness and Heart

Sled dogs come in many sizes with mushers' preferences ranging from larger dogs with muscular strength to smaller quicker runners. Martin Buser, 4 time Iditarod champion, once wrote, " A good sled dog is a lot like a good person: honest, hardworking, friendly, with a positive attitude and curious." The physical and mental health of a sled dog is important. They will be nourished by good nutritious food along with regular dog care for overall health. A musher will train and prepare dogs for running the miles needed. Some of the best leaders, even though they are small females weighing 35-40 pounds, excel in races. The average size of a dog might be 50 pounds but what counts most is the dogs' hearts.

Primary Source of the Month

Jen Reiter

One of the iconic images of the Iditarod is the Burled Arch that stands at the end of the epic journey the teams take across the state of Alaska. But, did you know the current Burled Arch is actually the second arch in Iditarod History?



Using the Source With Students

1. Display the historic photo above for your students and have them share what they See, Think, and Wonder about the artifact.
2. Obviously, this arch marks the finish line in Nome. Since the race isn't traveling to Nome this year, an alternative finish line will be needed.
3. Share with the students that legend has it that during the first Iditarod, the winner was coming down Front Street in Nome when the gathered fans realized there was no finish line! Someone ducked into a shop, grabbed some Kool-Aid and drew a line in the snow!
4. Have them think about what could be done to mark the finish line this year. They could brainstorm a list of ways to show the finish line or draw a picture to show their plan.
5. Students could compare and contrast the original arch with the current arch (shown below) using a Venn Diagram. You can click on both pictures to get larger images.
6. If you have more time, here is a building challenge that has the students build their own version of the finish line: [Reaching the Finish Line Lesson](#)
7. This lesson plan above also includes an excerpt from [Iditarod: The First Ten Years](#) compiled by The Old Iditarod Gang that would make a great reading for the students to learn about the arch.

Associated Resource:

- More about the arch from Iditarod.com:
[The Burled Arch](#)



Gold Trail Loop Information Update for Teachers

Story and Photos By: Terrie Hanke

As Iditarod approaches, I can imagine teachers and students getting more and more excited about using the real life applications for learning that Iditarod offers. You've been working on musher biographies, maybe life-sized mushers profiles, checkpoint information and likely you've been revamping your classroom trail map to reflect the Gold Trail Loop of 2021.

Mushers are very excited that Iditarod will happen in 2021. A great deal of science has been considered in making the race safe for everyone involved. Recently Iditarod CEO, Rob Urbach, announced that the Ceremonial Start in Anchorage was cancelled for the health and safety of the community as well as the mushers and volunteers. The start of the race will take place near Willow at Deshka Landing and follow the normal route out to Iditarod then swing through Flat and return to Deshka Landing.

Perhaps you have questions about the checkpoints on the Gold Trail Loop, required rests and mushers withdrawing from the race. I'm happy to share what I know so you can better prepare your students for following the race and learning through Iditarod.

Iditarod has 40 hours of required rest. Rule #13 has been amended for the 2021 race and explains WHERE teams must rest. On the traditional route, a team must take a 24-hour rest and two 8-hour rests. The same will be true for the Gold Trail Loop. Rest regulations for the 2021 race are easier to understand when using traditional race terminology.



Skwentna, the "new" White Mountain

The **8-hour required White Mountain rest** will be taken at Skwentna on the return trip to Deshka Landing. In other words, Skwentna is the White Mountain of the Gold Trail Loop. This plays out well as White Mountain is 77 miles from Nome and Skwentna is 67 miles from the finish at Deshka Landing. There is some tricky trail between White Mountain and Nome, namely the infamous blowhole. Nothing of that sort exists between Skwentna and the finish. Likely the run to the finish line from Skwentna will be speedy.

The **8-hour required Yukon River rest** can be taken at any checkpoint from Rohn and back to Rohn. For the 2021 race, one could call it the 8-hour Interior rest. Rohn is the first interior checkpoint after descending the Alaska Range on the way out to Iditarod. Rohn is the final interior checkpoint before climbing the Alaska Range and leaving the interior on the way to the finish.

The **long 24-hour rest** may be taken at any checkpoint up to and including Iditarod, but not after. Watching where mushers decide to take the long rest will be very interesting as it is every year. A few folks have camped at Rohn. On occasion a musher will stay at Nikolai. Usually mushers choose to put more trail in the rearview mirror and rest at McGrath or Takotna. Takotna won't be an option this year as it's not a checkpoint and mandatory rest must be taken at a checkpoint. In the past, some mushers have strategized that taking the long rest at the halfway point on the trail is a wise move. Iditarod is the traditional halfway point of the southern trail and is the halfway point for the Gold Trail Loop. It's all about strategy, weather and trail conditions.

A couple of traditional checkpoints won't be hosting mushers and volunteers during the 2021 Gold Trail Loop. Teams will pass on by the Yentna Station Roadhouse as well as Takotna. Mileage between checkpoints is a factor in making the change.

At the beginning of the race, the dogs are excited and ready to run. In the past, very few teams rested at Yentna Station. Most checked in and continued on to Skwentna for their first rest, a distance of 72 miles from the start. Some choose to go beyond Skwentna and camp a few miles down the trail where it was quiet. Now with the race starting at Deshka Landing, the distance to Skwentna is 67 miles and it's a flat easy run along rivers. Bypassing Yentna actually makes the distance to the first checkpoint very similar to the Fairbanks route – Nenana at mile 60. Of course, teams can carry straw and camp before Skwentna if they desire.

The distances from McGrath to Takotna and Takotna to Ophir are the shortest distances between checkpoints on the entire route. McGrath to Takotna is 18 miles while Takotna to Ophir is 23 miles. By-passing Takotna and combining the two runs, the distance is 41 miles. Again it makes sense to cut back on the number of checkpoints in an effort to minimize contacts and keep mushers, volunteers and villagers as safe as possible.



McGrath

The number of teams running Iditarod XLIX is now at 47. Just recently Alan Eischens, Gabe Dunham and Karin Hendrickson have withdrawn due to COVID concerns. Other mushers have withdrawn over the same concern and still others have withdrawn because they simply can't get to Alaska due to current travel restrictions.

Indeed the Gold Trail Loop of 2021 will be like no other Iditarod. Iditariders and spectators won't enjoy the excitement of the Anchorage Ceremonial Start. Mushers won't experience the usual traffic jam while checking in at Yentna Station nor will they enjoy pie at Takotna. Coastal wind and storms won't impact the outcome of the race. But if snow permits, they'll swing through the old gold mining town of Flat before heading back to the finish line at Deshka Landing. They'll make two passes through the Dalzell Gorge and the Happy River Steps – down and up. Those looking forward to standing under the burlled arch in Nome will need to extend that goal to 2022 and the 50th running of The Last Great Race. God speed to mushers and volunteers as they take to the trail for the 49th Iditarod!

Trail Flavor and Color Commentary for the Gold Trail Loop

Story and Photos By: Terrie Hanke

Beginning in 1999, when Andrea "Finney" Auf der Heyde was the first Teacher on the Trail, there's been a teacher out on the trail every year since – until this year. Adaptations have become the standard way of life over the past year. Iditarod is no exception and neither is Iditarod EDU.

Jim Deprez, the 23rd Teacher on the Trail, will be connecting with teachers during the race from his classroom. He and his students will be sharing their race experience and daily activities as they follow the race. It's an opportunity for teachers to see what goes on during the race in the Teacher on the Trail's classroom, an opportunity that's never before been possible. Weighing the uncertainties of travel restrictions along the trail, the rerouting of the race and just being generally cautious about long distance travel – not to mention it's discouraged, Jim has chosen to delay his trail experience until the 50th running of Iditarod in 2022.

Alumni or Teachers FROM the Trail will be contributing to bring teachers and students the flavor and color of the race by posting on the front page of Iditarod EDU. Students are VERY interested in hearing stories from the checkpoints, stories about mushers and stories about hero dogs. That's the information the alumni will be providing based on their own experiences.

Kelly Villar served on the trail in 2020 just as COVID-19 made its way to the United States and into Alaska. Things at the beginning of the race looked very normal – there was a musher banquet with meet and greet and bib draw, a Ceremonial Start with excited Iditariders and thousand of spectators as well as the Restart held in Willow with race fans lining the trail and cheering the mushers on to Nome. Then things began to change. During the race some checkpoints asked specifically that Iditarod stay outside the village. Shaktoolik was one but they created the "remote" checkpoint. There was an old unused house outside of the village. They shoveled the snow out, covered the broken windows, made sure the wood stove was working and even supplied firewood. Nome, being concerned about the number of visitors coming from the outside to view the race, put many precautions in place and mushers departed for home as soon as possible after completing the race. Kelly returned home early too but has many tales from the trail to share.

Middle school literature teacher Brian Hickox uses Jack London's Call of the Wild as a read for his students. Brian incorporates Iditarod with the study of literature and says it brings stories like Call of the Wild to life for his students. Hickox was on the trail in 2019. Each teacher's journey is unique. He was in Nome for the finish of the race to see Peter Kaiser earn his first Iditarod title then Brian flew via Iditarod Air Force back out to White Mountain to take in the experience of the final 8-hour required rest. He'll have unique perspectives to share as the mushers arrive in Skwentna (the 2021 White Mountain).



Brian Hickox



Kelly Villar



Heidi Sloan

Heidi Sloan, fifth grade teacher from Virginia, experienced the trail in 2018. That was the year the race returned to the southern route for the first time in five years. People in the southern route communities of Shageluk, Anvik and Grayling were extremely excited to have the race come through their villages after rerouting from Fairbanks in 2015 and 2017. Heidi has first hand experience from her interaction with Anvik elders as to what it means to the people of the southern villages to host the race. Interaction with villagers during the 2021 race will be at a bare minimum making this piece of trail color very enlightening for students.

Eye on the Trail journalist and former Teacher on the Trail from 2006, Terrie Hanke, will also share stories about her trail experiences over the past sixteen years. Terrie is one of the few teachers who visited the Finger Lake and Rainy Pass checkpoints. She has also served on the comms crew at the Skwentna checkpoint for ten years. The 2021 race will pass through each of these checkpoints twice. Terrie will be working from home in 2021, writing for both Eye on the Trail and Iditarod EDU.

Don't forget about other resources on Iditarod EDU that are available to enrich the Iditarod experience for your class. The K9 reporters will be pawing away at their keyboards – Zuma, Gypsy, Libby, Sanka and Sled Dog Ed will help you and your students understand the race and keep track of what's going on.

Interim Associate Education Director, Jane Holmes who served as the 2008 Teacher on the Trail will be sharing lesson ideas available for Insider subscribers using awesome video clips shot at checkpoints on the trail. Video clips created by the Insider crew allow students the opportunity to see their favorite mushers on the trail, hear their stories and have a look around the checkpoints. Insider combined with Tracker is the next best thing to being on the trail!

About the time the Iditarod turned 10, Andrea "Finney" Auf der Heyde was looking for a theme to make learning exciting for her first graders. The importance of first grade can't be overstated – it's the initiation into life-long learning. That's when Finney began teaching about Alaska and the Iditarod. She found it to be the best hook ever to get kids enthused about learning. She continued to develop her lessons for the next 15 years. Her passion for Alaska and Iditarod grew stronger each year. In 1998, she felt it was time to present the idea of a teacher going out on the trail and sending messages back to students about all the life skills that were being used by mushers and dogs in achieving their goal of getting to Nome. The Teacher on the Trail would be a direct link between the trail and classrooms around the world and the teacher would create and showcase lessons for teachers to use. Finney says, "It gives me goosebumps just thinking about it!!! It was not an easy task to convince those in charge that this idea was not a lark but had sound educational value for students and teachers." Finney then served as the first Iditarod Teacher on the Trail in 1999.

Today teachers know the value of using Iditarod as a tool for education just as Finney did thirty years ago. Everyday they see the motivation and excitement it generates within their students. The Gold Trail Loop for the 2021 Iditarod is new and exciting. The learning experiences brought to teachers from Jim Deprez's classroom will also be new and exciting. Contributions made by Teacher on the Trail Alumni will be inspiring and informative. Stay tuned and enjoy the great learning adventure of Iditarod XLIX.



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The original Burled Arch is seen in the Nome Recreation Center in this photo from the 2018 Finisher Banquet.

Mark Your Calendar

March 7, 2021, 2pm: Iditarod ReStart

EDU

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