

MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

NEWS & FEATURES

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Photo: Jim Deprez

The Race Before the Race

by Jane Holmes

The Jr. Iditarod Sled Dog Race is held each February the weekend before the Iditarod starts.

It has run for 45 years now, and the field this year is at 16 mushers, ages 14 - 17. Started in 1978, it was dreamed up **by kids for kids**. Make sure to include the Jr. Iditarod in your teaching - what is more inspiring to students than other young people doing amazing things? You can find many articles about it on the [Iditarod Education Department](#) website (search for Jr. Iditarod) and the [2023 Jr. Iditarod](#) website. You never know what the power of bold, strong, responsible, caring and smart athletes like the Junior Iditarod mushers might spark in your classroom.



January Teaching Ideas

by Heidi Sloan

Geography with Reading:

[Sanka W. Dog's Virtual Trail Journey](#)

Have your students been hearing you talk about the Iditarod race checkpoints where the mushers check in? Do you wonder what those communities nestled in Alaska's interior look like? One of the canine reporters, Sanka W. Dog, wrote wonderful articles on the various checkpoints. These articles are titled "Virtual Trail Journey." As a teacher, you can glean great information to pass along to your students about these spots, or have your older students read them for themselves to be prepared for following the race!

Math with Art:

[Parky Symmetry](#)

Symmetry is the math objective for this art lesson. Science can also be incorporated, studying the aurora borealis! Students read about, view images, and then create a symmetrical "parky." Use this lesson to touch on a variety of learning objectives.

Reading Skills:

[Practicing Reading Skills With Iditarod Photos](#)

Busy teachers need lessons that are fully ready to use. This is one of those! Photos from the Iditarod are provided along with lessons and activities for students to practice their reading strategies. Experience a win-win for your literacy lesson!

[Book Highlights for Morning Meetings](#)

A great read for your classroom is *Granite* by Susan Butcher and David Monson. After reading the book to your class, students could delve into this article which adds more to the story. Good discussions for a morning meeting can result from this book and article about Susan Butcher, the famed Iditarod musher.

Sanka W. Dog's Zoom Lens Photo

2011 Champion John Baker slips the booties on and secures the elastic velcro all while looking at the belly and chest for harness rub. Kill two birds with one stone - sounds efficient. Brainstorm how mushers can be more efficient.



Wind pants and parka permeated with dog food and mystery stains.

Outer clothing displays random burn holes from campfire sparks.

Rips and tears held together with dental floss and safety pins.

Caribou, seal-skin, or army surplus canvas mukluks...

~Portrait of a
70s-Era Musher
by Joe May
in
"Iditarod: The
First Ten Years."



Click on the image to enlarge it.

Photo: Terrie Hanke

If You "Mush" Know...

by Lynne Witte

This month's question comes from...
Send your question for our musher to:
jane.holmes@iditarod.com

Do dogs run over, under or through the snow?



Dashing Through the Snow

Sled dogs will run over, through and under the snow. A dog trains many miles to prepare for a race. If there is new-fallen deep snow, it will be challenging to run, but training prepares the dogs to change their stride. In deep snow, they may slow the pace, nearly dragging their feet through the snow, but they will continue to run. A packed trail allows dogs to run quicker with smooth, dance-like steps. Think of yourself running out to play or to run a cross country race. Your speed and steps will change if you are on packed hiking trail or unshoveled trail running at the beach or in deep snow. Sled dogs will dash over, through, and under new fallen snow. They love to run.

Mandatory Gear

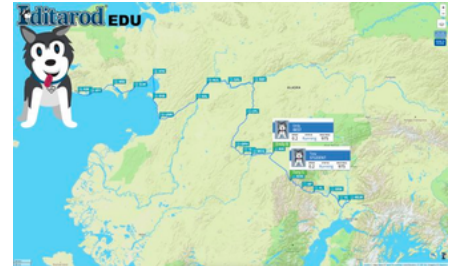
by Jane Holmes

Here are the "must have" resources you need:



Click on this image for a **free Insider video clip** of Run Dogs Run Willow Restart 2022 and have your students write a news brief about the event.

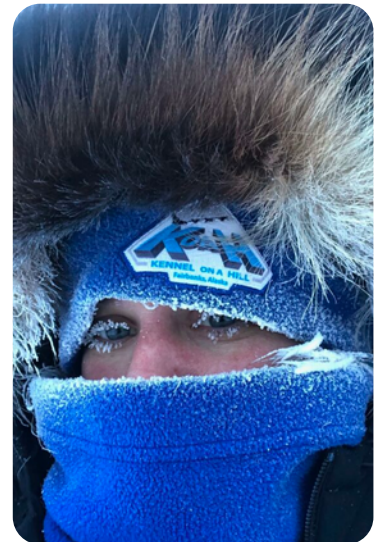
Always a favorite, **Idita-read** projects motivate students to read more, read more often, and keep reading! As students reach each goal, their avatars move down the trail from checkpoint to checkpoint on the race map just like the GPS Tracker that shows mushers during the race. Click on this image to sign up for your **free** account.



Click each image to catch up on the 2 newest episodes of Husky Talk.

Episode 4: Wes Erb, Chief Pilot for the Iditarod Air Force, has been flying for the Iditarod for 15 years.

Episode 5; Bridgett Watkins
She was a rookie in last year's Iditarod and was forced to scratch near White Mountain due to a violent storm. Back to run Iditarod 2023!



The **race rules** are a wealth of information and very useful for instruction. Mushers have so much to consider before, during, and after the race. Click on this image to view the 2023 race rules.



Have you seen the **Dog Care** page of Iditarod.com? This resource is mandatory gear for any educator to be familiar with. Click on the image to visit the page.

Sneak Peek

The shortest day of the year may have been back in December, but for me January is just the worst. All the brightness of the holidays that kept the dark at bay has disappeared and January is when the world seems the coldest, gloomiest, and the gray days drag. So this month I am going to focus on the light, trying to bring bright spots of hope and joy to the long winter days.

Click on the images to enlarge.



by Juli Westrich

2023 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™

This month's SEL "snack" will shift to Relationship Skills with real-life Iditarod examples of mushers showing concern for others and working together towards a common goal. The mushing community is a tight knit group, connected by a common bond forged from the love of dog sledding. We hope for that type of cohesion and sense of purpose in our classrooms. To help support this I'll share Iditarod examples of positive relationship skills to help foster a collaborative classroom community.

The lesson plan this month will explore the change in daylight hours throughout the year in Alaska. I am often asked if it was dark all the time for the start of the 2022 Iditarod, or if the mushers only race the Iditarod in the daylight. Neither of these are true. Students can explore the answers to these questions in a lesson that uses math, telling time, and science!



Students run to help scoop poop in Takotna. Their helpfulness brightens a mushers day!
Photo Credit: Heidi Sloan



Aily Zirkle mushing through the night.



Northern Lights Seen at 2015 Jr. Iditarod From Denali Highway.

Photo Credit: Terrie Hanke

When it gets dark early, and stays dark late, there is an endless search for light in the darkness. January is the time to find that light in the world and within our students. What makes them shine? Rounding out the month will be ideas to connect the Northern Lights, which are endlessly fascinating for kids, with their own power to brighten even the most challenging of times.

The countdown is on to the start of the 2023 Iditarod! Next month I'll be heading to Alaska and the start of my Iditarod journey! Please come along with me as I share all the details of the trip in the Teacher on the Trail journal at www.iditarod.com/edu

Zuma's Scavenger Hunt –Cabins, Tents, Lodges & Villages

Hello Friends!

It's Zuma here! The checkpoints along the trail where all the mushers have to "check in" come in all shapes and sizes. They are all unique to the people who live at the checkpoints and the volunteers that operate the temporary checkpoints. No two checkpoints are alike! All mushers seem to have their favorites, maybe it's because of the hospitality (Skwentna), the scenery (Rohn) or perhaps it's food (Takotna) related. Click each image to enlarge.



With Iditarod 51 being just around the corner, it's time to dig in and get familiar with the checkpoints and the trail. Answer the answers to these questions and you'll be more informed about the trail and what the mushers experience over their 1,000 mile journey to Nome.

Consider the Southern Route:

How many checkpoints are on the southern route with Yentna Station being the first?

Make a list of checkpoints located at private homes, cabins or near lodges.

Make a list of checkpoints which are temporary tent camps.

Make a list of checkpoints located in once thriving towns but are now ghost towns.

Make a list of communities that host checkpoints.

Consider geography:

What checkpoints are on the east side of the Alaska Range?

What checkpoints are in the interior of Alaska?

What checkpoints are on the Bering Sea coast of Alaska?

What challenges will the mushers experience in each of these distinct regions?

Here's the big question - Which checkpoint would you most like to be at when the race comes through? Why did you choose that particular checkpoint? What is it about the checkpoint that interests you?

Find information about the checkpoints in the Race Center on Iditarod.com and under Education in K9 reporter [Sanka's Virtual Trail Journey](#). Another interesting resource, the Don Bower's Jr. Trail Information can be accessed through the [Race Center - Race Maps](#) by clicking on the checkpoints listed under the Southern Route Race Map.

This sizable endeavor is an ideal group project. Working in groups of 4 or 5, kids can research and become experts on a handful of checkpoints, thus the sum of the parts will combine to create the whole trail for each group. Knowing more about the trail will enrich the experience of students as they track mushers during the race.



photos L to R:
Mikey modelsthe new coat Yuka made for him.
Yuka and Mikey in the dog yard.
Yuka Honda

Sled Dog of the Month

by Kelly Villar

Happy New Year! This January we travel to Ginga Express Kennels, the home of musher Yuka Honda. Yuka was born and raised in Japan. In 1998 she moved to the Northwest Territory in Canada to become a dog handler. After watching the Iditarod on TV the following year, she began the journey to her own Iditarod. In 2015 Yuka completed her first Iditarod in 55th place with a time of 12 days, 8 hours, and 32 minutes.



Click each photo to enlarge.

When asked to choose a dog in her kennel that has touched her heart, she said, "Ya, It's hard to pick... I don't have a human family here. Just only me and the dogs in the bush. So they all are my babies.

My special dog is named Mikey. He ran the Iditarod and the Yukon Quest as lead dog. Iditarod 2015 was especially important to me. My mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in December 2014. I was thinking about withdrawing from the Iditarod and traveling back to Japan to be with my mother. I remember my sister, who was in Japan, said, "No. You can't do anything here. Mom wants to see you run Iditarod."

It was hard for me, but my team and I started training hard. I was distracted and thinking a lot about my mom. I would even sometimes cry on the runs. I'm sure Mikey realized something was wrong with me. He took charge and helped with all the training.

During the 2015 Iditarod, he pulled the team like a real leader. It was not an easy race, but I knew my team, and I had to finish the race for mom. We traveled through strong winds and places where the snow drifted so high we couldn't see the trail markers, all under the lead of Mikey. That was my first Iditarod. Mikey passed away last fall of old age. I will never forget the way he helped me through a tough time in my life."

Yuka finished her second Iditarod, Iditarod 2022, in 36th place with a time of 13 days, 8 hours, and 28 minutes. Yuka is an amazing musher with a strong connection to all of her dogs.

K9 Journalist Corner

by Sanka W. Dog



Welcome to the “23” part of the 22-23 school year. It’s Sanka W. Dog here to make sure you are ready for Iditarod LI! When the calendar flips to a new year, it’s only a few weeks until the start of the Yukon Quest and only a few more weeks to the start of the Jr. Iditarod and then only ONE more week until the start of Iditarod! Are you ready to maximize the experience of your students as they learn through the real life applications provided by Iditarod? Here are a few ideas and suggestions.

1) Is your classroom Insider subscription up to date? The incredible Insider crew puts together an unbelievable quantity of top notch videos that introduce students to mushers and transports students down the trail during the race. Interviews are filmed at checkpoints and posted for Insider subscribers to view. Live views of checkpoints are also available and the expert, Greg Heister and Bruce Lee, provide viewers with top notch commentary. Go to [Insider Educational Subscriptions](#) to purchase.

2) Are your students on the right path to maximize Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)? Many teachers start the school year with Iditarod themed SEL activities. The Eight Traits of Iditarod written by none other than me (Sanka W. Dog) uses Iditarod as an acronym for desirable personal traits. Mushers demonstrate innovation, determination, integrity, team work, attitude, respect, optimism and diligence every day on the trail. Students can find examples throughout the race and demonstrate the traits daily at school. The 24th Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™, Juli Westrich, posts SEL activities monthly for teacher use.

3) Speaking of my friend Juli, have you been following her lessons posted in her teaching journal in the EDU section of the Iditarod website? Every month there is an SEL activity, a lesson plan and a culture based activity. Her recent posts include a lesson - Iditarod Now and Venn, an SEL Snack - Barriers to Entry and a Cultural Awareness story - Legacy of the Land. Make sure to follow [Juli's posts](#) that come out three times each month.

4) Getting acquainted with the trail is a big task, but again, I can help you out there! The Iditarod Trail is prime real estate for learning about maps, landforms and all sorts of geography concepts. [Virtual Trail Journey](#) is a resource that’s available on Sanka’s K9 journalist page. There’s information about each checkpoint as well as the trail between the checkpoints. BTW, in this very newsletter, ZUMA has a get to know the trail challenge designed as a team project.

Continued on next page

5) Get to know the veteran mushers. Start early by studying the biographies and then having your students write their own biography. Using the race archives, it's possible to compare the current field with the 50th field. Who was in the top 10 last year? How many of those mushers are returning for this year? What former champions are in the current field? Speculate and create a list of top ten finishers for the 2023 race.

6) Get to know the rookie mushers. Who are the mushers that are returning as rookies from the 2022 race? Are those rookies eligible to win the honor of rookie of the year? Speculate on who might become rookie of the year. Back your choice up with solid reasoning and share those reasons.

7) Get to know the Jr. Iditarod mushers at jridtarod.org and follow the Jr. Iditarod which runs on the last weekend of February. Archives and stories about the previous Jr. Iditarod races are available at jridtarod.com and in the Eye on the Trail blog at Iditarod.com.

8) Finally, discuss the meaning of the following phrases and how the concepts apply not only to Iditarod mushers but to students as well.

- One champion but all are winners.

- The thrill is not in victory, but in the courage to join the race.

Psst! There is going to be a **great big surprise** in the February newsletter. I'll give you a little hint. The surprise has to do with Pam Flowers, adventurer and award winning children's author. Might she have a new book coming out? Come back in February to find out.

Well, there you have it, a few suggestions for getting ready for using Iditarod as a theme in your classroom prior to the 2023 race. Enjoy the fun and excitement as your classroom goes to the dogs!

Born to Run,
Sanka

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Next Race	59 Days	21 Hrs	52 Mins	56 Secs
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2023

January 31 - Trail Mail Projects due in Alaska

February 15 - Conference Registration closes

February 17 - Banquet Centerpieces due in Alaska

February 28 - March 3, 2023 - Iditarod Education Department Educators Conference, Lakefront Hotel, Anchorage, Alaska

March 2 - Musher Meet and Greet and Banquet, Anchorage, AK

March 4 - Ceremonial Start of Iditarod 2023, Anchorage, AK

March 5- Restart of Iditarod 2023, Willow, AK

This month our **Kennel Connection** is to
Matt and Liz Failor's
17th Dog Kennel in Willow, AK

It is always a great time visiting Alaskan Husky Adventures, and it is always educational. Not only is Matt a 12 time (2023 being his 12th) Iditarod racer, his wife, Liz, has been a trail reporter for the Iditarod for the past couple of years as well. It's a family affair! And their dogs are just as much a part of their family as any human beings.

The dogs at this kennel are some of the friendliest and happiest around. After talking to and petting almost every single dog, I watched a couple of teams get hooked to the gangline to take visitors out on a run. All of the dogs, whether getting ready to run or waiting for a turn at another time, expressed their excitement with the barks, howls, and yips that only sled dogs can make. Since I was there as an observer, I stayed behind and talked to and petted the rest of the dogs, some twice. When the teams left the yard, their resting teammates sang a "goodbye" song. I could tell when the running teams got closer to the dog yard. How? Their resting teammates called out to them.

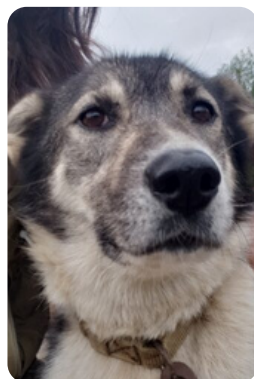
Lesson prompts: (click on each photo to enlarge)

- categorize the photos below into before, during, and after the visitors' run
- write speech bubbles expressing very clearly what each dog is "saying" or thinking
- write a dialogue between dogs using correct punctuation
- This is an audio recording from the dog yard of the teams getting hooked up and leaving. [17th Dog Kennel "Let's Go!"](#) (Dogs not running continued to make sound once the teams ran off.)

This is an audio recording of the dogs in the yard waiting for their teammates to return. [17th Dog Kennel "Come Back!"](#) Have students write a narrative from a running dog's point of view or a waiting dog's point of view.



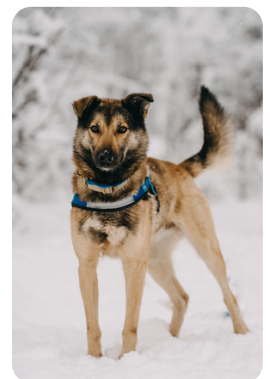
Iron Maiden



Banshee



Dio



Stanley



Banshee



Premier



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