

MUSH ON!

Monthly Newsletter of the Iditarod Education Department

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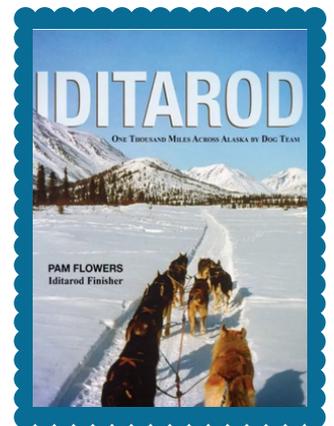
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Book of the Month

Iditarod: One Thousand Miles Across Alaska by Dog Team
by Pam Flowers



Once again we are featuring a book by Pam Flowers. *Iditarod: One Thousand Miles Across Alaska by Dog Team* is the true story of Pam's Iditarod journey. She takes us from her desire to move north to her interest in the dogs to actually running a team in the Iditarod.

This book would be a great read aloud as you prepare your students for the 2024 Iditarod. Pam Flowers is a true story teller and your students will be engaged as she describes the Iditarod Trail checkpoint by checkpoint.

"I hope this story inspires others to pursue their dreams whatever they may be, no matter size, gender, age, race, where you come from in society, or how many times someone tells you that you will never succeed . . . Always, always keep your eye on your dream, because wherever you are looking, that's where you're going."



February Teaching Ideas

by Heidi Sloan

Science

Adaptations help sled dogs do very well in arctic conditions on the Iditarod. Study the tails of these incredible athletes and do a comparison of canine and human skeletons with this lesson!

[Fluffy Tails](#)

Reading

Read about the mother of last year's Iditarod champion who helps many people, Barb Redington! Older students can read and discuss the article. A touching book suggestion is also highlighted.

[Barb Redington](#)

Geography

Printables showing latitude and longitude lines over Alaska's Iditarod Trail are included for your students to practice their skills in pinpointing location.

[The Way to Nome](#)

Technology

Create an Alaskan history timeline using links to a resource where students can insert video, images, and more! This lesson also includes a writing piece to wrap up the timeline research.

[Timeline](#)

Recognizing the history of both the Sweepstakes and the Serum Run is surely in keeping with celebrating Alaska's history. However, contrary to some thinking, it is not the Serum Run, but the All Alaska Sweepstakes race - the granddaddy of them all - that is regarded as Iditarod's inspiration.

Al Crane

["Iditarod: The First Ten Years."](#)



Leonhard Seppala, All Alaska Sweepstakes champion. Photo from [Iditarod: The First Ten Years.](#)

Meet A Sled Dog

by Kelly Villar

This February, just days before the start of Iditarod 2024, we meet up with Will Rhodes of Two Rivers, Alaska. Will Rhodes and his wife, Brenda Mackey, own and operate Mackey's Distance Dogs. Will began his racing career in 2013 and has been racing ever since. Last year, he completed the Kusko 300 and the Knik 100. This will be his first Iditarod. When asked to tell about a dog that holds a special place in his heart, this is what he had to say:

"You're right, all the dogs are special and they each have their own stories, it is hard to pick one dog!"

A leader named Lusa stands out in the team and holds a special place in my heart. She is about 42 lbs and the smallest athlete in our kennel of 40 dogs. She is 7 years old and has been racing competitively since she was a yearling on our team. We breed and raise the dogs in our kennel. She is the daughter of our longtime leader Salt, and main stud of many years, Outlaw. Lusa is named after the black bear in the Seekers book series that my daughter Isabel so adored.

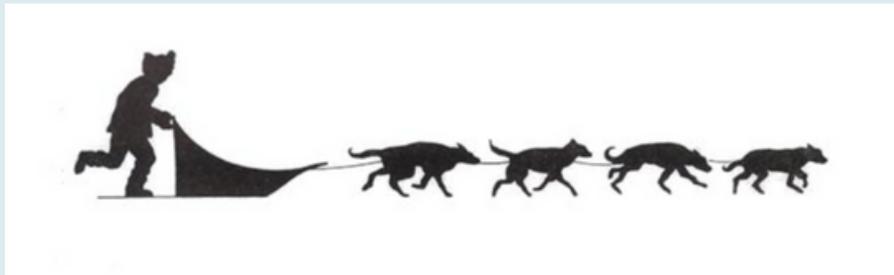
When Lusa was a two-year-old in her first big races, the Kuskokwim 300 and the Kobuk 440, she really shined. The 440 was a fast race that year, with a particularly hard-packed, icy trail that caused an unusual amount of wrist and shoulder soreness among teams as the race progressed. A bit like running on concrete, a hard surface without any give. My main leader at the time, Spark, who is Lusa's half-brother, had a swollen leg from the repetition and impact. This showed up 30 miles from the finish line of the race, and he had led beautifully the entire race. He needed a ride in the sled bag to rest and be treated. Lusa came through for the team and finished the race in lead, in Spark's absence. She had not been developed as a leader at that point in her young career; it was amazing to see her drive to the finish line with confident determination. Since that race, Lusa has more often than not finished races in lead. We rarely start in her races in lead, reserving her one or two positions back with the other backup leaders. Lusa has finished every race she has started.

Lusa is as sweet-natured as she is cute. She is one of our family's favorite dogs to take hiking or biking during the summer months. She loves to swim, and her favorite snack is salmon!"

To learn more about Lusa, check out the following link:

[Lusa](#)

We look forward to seeing Lusa and Will Rhodes in Iditarod 2024!



What's In Kate's Sled Bag?

by Kate Newmyer

Trail Mail

This month is all about mail! Carrying Trail Mail™ is a way of honoring the Iditarod's origins. For a long time, dog teams were the only way to transport mail in the winter in Alaska. Every year before the race mushers get together to stamp Trail Mail before they carry it down the Iditarod Trail. In fact, their packet of Trail Mail™ is one of the items of mandatory gear.

I think Trail Mail™ is one of the coolest aspects of the Iditarod—who doesn't love to get mail? My February lesson plan gets students writing persuasive letters about the Iditarod. Students will brainstorm the most important or favorite aspects of the Iditarod and then decide how to hook their reader and organize their ideas. Students can choose topics like being a volunteer, sponsor or other supporter, outstanding dog care, or simply encourage awareness of the Iditarod. I share my best strategies for writing to a specific audience. Students get to mail their letters to a recipient they choose.

"Classroom Culture" invites your students to write a letter to a teacher that has inspired them. You can do this activity at any time, although I usually do it the end of the year. It's a great opportunity for students to thank their former teachers and share a little bit about the Iditarod! In the time I have been doing this, my students have touched the lives of many of their teachers.

"Houston, We Have a Connection" will highlight the similarities between Trail Mail™ and items flown in space. Astronauts carry mementos, patches, and flags for others on their flights into space. Being "flown" gives these items a special significance, just like the letters and artwork students send with mushers on the Iditarod Trail.



Kate Newmyer
2024 Iditarod
Teacher on the Trail™



© Julia Redington
2023 Jr Iditarod
northernwondersphotography.com

Emily Robinson, defending Junior Champion. She is also the reigning Knik 200 Champ beating a number of seasoned veterans. Read more about the Junior Iditarod on pages 5 and 6.



It's Sanka W. Dog here to make sure you are ready for Iditarod LIII. Lots of action before the Iditarod starts the first Saturday of March - the Knik 200, Copper Basin 300, Kuskokwim 300 and the Yukon Quest Alaska 300. Here are some info quests for you and your students.

1) Get to know the veteran mushers of Iditarod 2024 by studying their biographies at Iditarod.com. Research which of the 2024 Iditarod mushers have participated in each of the other races during the current race season. Will looking at the race standings for the shorter races help you predict how the mushers will fare in the 1,000 mile Iditarod?

2) Get to know the rookie mushers through their biographies. What about Rookie of the Year for Iditarod? Will the standings of other races help you predict who the Iditarod Rookie of the Year might be? Are there any 2024 rookie mushers who have started Iditarod before? Are those rookies eligible to win Rookie of the Year Honors?

3) How many former Champions are competing in the 2024 Iditarod? How many years of Iditarod experience do these former and defending Champions bring to the race? How many of the top ten mushers from 2023 have entered the 2024 Iditarod? Can you predict a top ten?

4) Another race you'll want to keep an eye on is the Jr Iditarod. Young mushers age 14-17 make a 150 mile round trip from Knik Lake to Yentna Station and back to Knik starting on the last Saturday of February. This is the 47th Jr. Iditarod! (Check out more on next page.)

5) Get acquainted with the Iditarod trail. It's prime real estate for learning about maps, landforms and all sorts of geography concepts. Virtual Trail Journey is a resource written by non-other than me, Sanka W. Dog! It's available on Sanka's K9 Journalist page. There's information about each checkpoint as well as the trail between the checkpoints. ([Sanka Virtual Journey](#))

6) Become familiar with the Eight Traits of Iditarod written by yours truly, Sanka W. Dog. As the race unfolds, look for examples of mushers demonstrating innovation, determination, integrity, team work, attitude, respect, optimism and diligence. Can your students find an example of all eight traits? Can your students identify the same traits demonstrated by fellow classmates?

7) Last but not least, is your classroom Insider subscription up to date? The incredible Insider crew puts together an unbelievable quantity of quality 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 experts - Greg Heister and Bruce Lee provide viewers with top notch commentary. Tracker can be purchased along with Insider in classroom or school packages. Go to Iditarod.com to purchase subscriptions. You might also want to purchase a printed race guide.

Well, there you have it, a few suggestions for getting ready for using Iditarod as a theme in your classroom prior to and during the 2024 race. Enjoy the fun and excitement as your classroom goes to the dogs!

Check out the Junior Iditarod

by Terrie Hanke

The 47th Jr. Iditarod, a 150 mile race for teens 14 to 17 years of age is scheduled for the final weekend of February. Jr. Iditarod is a unique experience for students to follow kids racing sled dogs who are close to their own age. The race begins at 10:00 am on Saturday, February 24th at Knik Lake. Musher's will travel from the start, go through Eagle Quest, then continue to the halfway point at Yentna Station Roadhouse where they will camp, taking their 10 hour required layover. They will return the next day along the same route to the finish on Knik Lake.

Twenty-one mushers are signed up for the 2024 race! The field includes 12 veterans and 9 rookies. Emily Robinson is the defending and also 2022 Champion. Morgan Martens is the 2021 Champion. Joining these champs on the trail are mushers from Alaska, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Minnesota and Norway! Have your students read the biographies [here](#).

Follow the Jr. Iditarod through the Jr. Iditarod [Facebook page](#) and the Eye on the Trail blog at Iditarod.com.

In recent race action, Emily Robinson ran the Knik 200 held in early January. Sixteen year old Robinson bested Brent Sass and Ryan Redington, both Iditarod Champions, to win the Knik 200. It was the longest race of her career. Robinson says she is very grateful for the encouragement and mushing wisdom she's received from Sass and other Iditarod mushers.

Did you know that until last year there has never been a Jr. Iditarod Champion who has gone on to win the Iditarod? In 2023, Ryan Redington changed that! Ryan, who won Jr. Iditarod in 1999 and 2000, claimed Iditarod gold in 2023 to become the first musher ever to win both races.

You might wonder how the first musher to cross the finish line can be the winner when the mushers don't all start at the same time. Here's how that works. The teams all take a required 10 hour rest at the Yentna Station Roadhouse Checkpoint. Their start differential is added to the 10 hours of rest to equalize the 2 minute start intervals. If there were ten mushers, the 10th musher to depart the start wouldn't have any time added and would leave Yentna after 10 hours of rest. The 9th musher to leave the start would leave Yentna at 10 hours and 2 minutes after arriving. Following this pattern, the first musher to leave the starting line would have 18 minutes added to the 10 hour rest. This same concept applies to the Iditarod with 43 mushers.

With smaller numbers in the Jr. Iditarod, projects are more manageable. Here are a few you might consider –

- *Calculate percentages of rookies v. veterans; males v. females and Alaskans v. outsiders.
- *How many miles will each musher have to travel from home to arrive at the Knik Lake start?
- *List the veterans, number of times they've run and finish position – sort on all categories.
- *Figure out the Yentna layover time by adding the start differential to 10 hours
- *Add time to time using Yentna arrival plus the 10 hours plus start differential

Have fun following the Jr. Iditarod while building skills to understand the Iditarod.

Meet Our Finalists

Welcome to our Iditarod Education family Maggie Hamilton from Indiana and Kevin Paolini from New York. After filling out the rigorous application, they are the two finalists for the 2025 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™. Both will be in Alaska for the Iditarod Winter Educators Conference where they will be involved in all aspects of Iditarod Education. Read more about the 2 finalists [here](#). Congratulations Maggie & Kevin!



Photo by Maggie Hamilton



Photo by Kevin Paolini

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

February 24: Junior Iditarod

February 27 - March 1, 2024: Iditarod Education Department Educators Conference, Anchorage, Alaska

February 29, 2024: Musher Banquet Gala

March 2, 2024: Ceremonial Start Iditarod

March 3, 2024: Official Start of 2024 Iditarod: The Last Great Race

Iditarod® **EDU**

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