

Lesson Title:	“Trail Mail:” Celebrating and Sharing the Iditarod with Persuasive Writing
Background Information	
Created By:	Kate Newmyer, Seabrook, TX, 2024 Teacher on the Trail™
Grade Level/ Subject:	K-12 Writing
Background Information:	<p>Many people want to share about what makes the Iditarod so amazing! In this lesson, you will help students recognize good persuasive writing, and how to cogently state their claims with supporting details. Students will then compose a letter to a recipient of their choice.</p> <p>In this all-Iditarod persuasive writing lesson, I will share ways to generate ideas for topics about the Iditarod, how to help students research their topic and develop a strong claim and the audience for their ideas. Students will then utilize a balance of persuasive writing techniques in their writing. Students will mail their letter to a chosen recipient. If the person writes back, what an amazing feeling for students to know their voice has been heard!</p> <p>My district curriculum spends lots of time on argumentative text and persuasive writing. In past years it has been one unit. Now, argumentative writing is woven in throughout the year. This emphasizes to students the importance of writing clearly and effectively about their own ideas, no matter what they are writing about.</p> <p>I find this type of writing instruction to be one of the most rewarding and satisfying to teach. Students choose a topic that they care about. We discuss the reasons why they chose that topic and what makes it important to them. You will get to know your students through what they care about and choose for their writing topic.</p>
Learning Objectives/ Essential Questions:	<p>Content Learning Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students recognize elements of effective persuasive writing.</li> <li>• Students analyze the effectiveness of author’s choices in writing persuasive text.</li> <li>• Students develop a claim and supporting details to share to a specific audience.</li> <li>• Students write using a variety and a balance of persuasive techniques.</li> <li>• Students use the writing process to develop, draft, revise, and edit a piece of persuasive text.</li> </ul> <p>Language Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students use listening, speaking, reading and writing to develop their ideas.</li> <li>• Students write effectively for an audience of their choice.</li> </ul>

	<p>SEL Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students listen and respond appropriately to their peers’ ideas and questions.</li> <li>• Students develop ideas that they are passionate about.</li> </ul>
<p>Standards Addressed</p>	<p>Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)</p> <p>English Language Arts, Strand 10: Composition</p> <p>The student uses the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and uses appropriate conventions.</p> <p>(A) plan a first draft by selecting a genre appropriate for a particular topic, purpose, and audience using a range of strategies  (B) develop drafts into a focused, structured, and coherent piece of writing by: (i) organizing with purposeful structure, including an introduction, transitions, coherence within and across paragraphs, and a conclusion; and (ii) developing an engaging idea reflecting depth of thought with specific facts and details;  (C) revise drafts for clarity, development, organization, style, word choice, and sentence variety;  (D) edit drafts using standard English conventions,  (E) publish written work for appropriate audiences.</p>
<p>Materials Needed:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Iditarod web site: <a href="http://www.iditarod.com">www.iditarod.com</a></li> <li>2. Sources for student research, such as school library databases, encyclopedias, books and memoirs, K9 journalists, podcasts like <a href="#">Husky Talk</a>, <a href="#">Mushing Magazine</a>, etc. (discourage the use of general internet searches)</li> <li>3. Student notebooks, pencils, etc.</li> <li>4. Musher graphic organizer, included.</li> <li>5. Chart paper and markers.</li> <li>6. Sticky notes and 8 ½ x 11 paper.</li> <li>7. Talking chips—tokens, old game pieces, puzzle pieces, etc. (I use cut up card stock about 2x2 inches).</li> <li>8. Envelopes and postage.</li> <li>9. Examples: rubric, my letter, sample list of topics, elaboration ideas chart</li> </ol>
<p>Procedure</p>	
<p>Engagement:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Remind students of all they know about the Iditarod from learning in your class and how they have experienced learning through the Iditarod. Share that they will be writing persuasively to a specific audience about the Iditarod or using the Iditarod as an exemplar for community action.</li> <li>2. Ask students what their favorite part of the Iditarod is. Maybe it’s the dogs, the snow or cold, the competition--any aspect they like. For lower elementary you can ask, what would they tell people to convince them to like the Iditarod? Ask for reasons and examples they could share with others. Have students Turn &amp; Talk, then share what they heard their partner say in the large group.</li> </ol>

	<p>In middle grades, students can make a list together with you on chart paper, to refer back to. They can create a list of favorite things, or most important things, or any question that gets them thinking about how to persuade others about the Iditarod. If they have questions, you can guide them to the Iditarod website.</p> <p>For secondary students, you can have students create charts at their table, or do a gallery walk with charts around the room to generate specific topics to share with an audience within headings such as Dogs, Weather, Travel, Safety, Volunteering, or any others you wish. You can also encourage students to use aspects of the Iditarod as examples to persuade people to take action locally. (For example, persuade other teachers in their school to use the Iditarod as a teaching lens!)</p> <p>I encourage you to look at the Iditarod web site ahead of time yourself or generate a list of your own topics, so you can anticipate and/or steer students in a positive direction. These two steps can be interchanged depending on how you want to approach the lesson.</p>
Lesson Procedure:	<p>This lesson can be done over one unit during your writing time, or over several days as part of your Iditarod lessons. You can also modify it so that it focuses more on the sharing part, or more on the writing/revision part. You can shorten or lengthen it. Do what works for your students.</p> <p>1. Give each student 2 talking chips. I love talking chips because it helps students who are quiet allow their voice to be heard, and those who dominate conversation to practice listening. While one person is using their talking chip, others are listening.</p> <p>While students are in their table groups, ask students: If they want to convince someone to do or think something, what would they do? Allow students to share one idea until all the talking chips are used. I have students place the chips in a pile in the middle.</p> <p>2. After your discussion, teach students about the two different kinds of persuasive writing: 1. Writing that appeals to their audience’s emotions, such as stories and use of emotionally laden vocabulary. 2. Writing that presents evidence and ideas quantitatively—that is, statistics and numbers. Model different sentences that show respect and professionalism.</p> <p>Writers will also need to share with their audience about why they care about the issue, establish their credibility, and give an action plan. An example might be, persuading the reader to appreciate sled dogs or understand the Iditarod rules about why certain types of dogs are allowed. Students can appeal to their audience’s emotions by describing how adorable, sociable, and smart sled dogs are. And students should also explain logically the physical and mental characteristics that make a good sled dog. I tell students they need a balance of the types of writing. Too much emotion and you will lose credibility, and too many facts one after another will cause the reader to lose their connection with the writer, and thus lose interest. Students want their letter to have an impact!</p> <p>3. Students can use their ideas about how to persuade someone to help them determine their claim. A claim is a strong central idea statement that can be backed up with facts, evidence, stories, emotional language, and other techniques discussed</p>

above. Give students time to write a claim that explicitly states what they want others to think or do. For example: “The Iditarod is a special competition that more people should know about and enjoy.” Or, “The mushing spirit is accepting and helpful. We should emulate these values in our own communities.”

3. Along with their claim, students should determine their audience. What I tell my students is that they should think about whether they want one single person to hear their message—someone with the power to change policy or enact a new law? Or, are they trying to convince the general population to think or do something different? Students should imagine themselves talking to their audience. Do they picture one person, such as a political leader, CEO, or school leader? Or do they picture lots of people in their community or country?

4. Share the suggested rubric with students, modify it, or use another that works for you. Ask them to note what they already know how to do (such as use topic sentences, include transition words, state evidence, or write a hook). Then share the charts or have minilessons showing students how to create the various parts of their letter. Include a minilesson on the mechanics of writing a formal business letter. I’ve included my example.

5. Use the Musher Claim, Evidence & Action graphic organizer to help students plan their writing. Students will be creating two or three main reasons why they want to persuade their audience about an Iditarod topic. To support those reasons, students must determine the type of evidence that would best fit each reason. Students could include an anecdote (a 1-2 sentence story), a set of facts, an emotional appeal, or a combination. Then have students brainstorm things that they specifically want their audience to do or think. This can be difficult for some students, and if you find that your class struggles with this, pull them together for a group conversation to get their creativity flowing.

6. Students draft, revise, and edit their letters in Word or another way that works for your class. Younger grades can use the graphic organizer and use sentence stems to guide the students’ writing. Model how you want them to draft their letters. Include a minilesson on how to write a hook for their first sentence.

7. In my class and possibly yours too, students struggle with the necessity of coming back to a piece of writing to revise and edit, and how to do it well. Ask students if they would allow their work to be discussed by the class. Project or copy the work. Guide a whole group discussion or use talking chips at their tables to talk about how they might revise the writing to be more effective. As students look at the writing, give them a specific purpose, for example, does this idea naturally follow that one? How could I change my sentences to be more clear? Make sure you are creating a safe space for students to get and give feedback using sentence frames.

8. After students have finished their final copy, guide them in how they are going to share their writing, and who they are specifically going to mail them to. I have compiled a long list of addresses over the years that includes political leaders, CEOs, newspaper editors, heads of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or other figures. Guide students to choose the right recipient. When it comes time to mail the letter, consider giving explicit instruction in how to address an envelope and fold

	<p>the paper properly. Explain that doing so gives students credibility with their audience on the first impression. Let the students place the stamp on their envelope, and don't forget to mail them!</p>
<p>Conclusion &amp; Reflection:</p>	<p>Students can reflect on any of the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What did you write about and why? Make a personal, text, and/or world connection to your topic.</li> <li>2. How has writing persuasively about the Iditarod helped you learn more about it?</li> <li>3. What did you learn from talking, reading, and analyzing others' work?</li> <li>4. How has writing this letter helped you analyze other persuasive messages, such as ads, op/eds, opinion writing, or messages from companies or community leaders?</li> <li>5. How has working with peers helped you with get better at the writing process?</li> </ol>
<p>Assessment:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have students check their writing against the suggested rubric, one from your curriculum, or AP guide. They can work with partners or tables to look at and examine their work according to the rubric.</li> <li>2. Display student work and have a gallery walk or writing celebration.</li> </ol>
<p>Notes</p>	
<p>Enrichment/ Reinforcement Suggestions:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students can record a video of themselves reading their letter or talking about their claim and reasons. <a href="#">Flip</a> (formerly Flipgrid) allows you to make QR codes. Display the QR codes at a family night, PTA meeting, or other event, or send to individual families directly. Students can use their own devices to explore the work of their peers.</li> <li>2. Students can use their Iditarod persuasive writing to branch out to a local topic. For example, using Iditarod dog care to write argumentatively about caring for your own or shelter dogs. Or, write about the safety of the Iditarod Air Force to persuade someone to get a pilot's license or support a pilot. Students can generate a lot of great ideas to use the Iditarod as an example to extrapolate to other beliefs and actions.</li> <li>3. Create an infographic. Include photos (being mindful of copyright), drawings, and diagrams. Display the posters in your school.</li> <li>4. Show examples of Trail Mail envelopes over the years and have students create one that connects to the message of their letter.</li> </ol>

Sled: Claim



Dog: Reason  
Supporting evidence:

Dog: Reason  
Supporting evidence:

Dog: Reason  
Supporting evidence:

Musher: Action Plan

## Iditarod Persuasive Letter Writing

<b>Teaching Points</b>	
Writers state a clear, well-written claim.	/10
Writers craft an introduction using an effective hook sentence.	/10
Writers cite several reasons why their position has merit.	/10
Writers include relevant facts and examples to help support their position.	/10
Writers elaborate on their arguments by creating vivid mental images for the reader.	/10
Writers include comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs in their persuasive writing to influence the reader.	/10
Writers use transitional phrases to separate each of the points they are trying to make.	/10
Writers suggest a solution or ask the reader to take action or change their position.	/10
Writers know the letter writing format including how to write and punctuate the heading, greeting, and closing.	/10
Writers publish their letter effectively.	/10
<b>Comments:</b>	

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Kate Newmyer  
Bay Elementary  
Street name and number  
City, State zip

January 28, 2004

Esteemed Recipient (or, "To the Editor:")  
Organization  
Street name and number  
City, State zip

Dear Ms. Recipient:

Iditarod sled dogs are canine athletes, and that's their purpose in life. Working with animals is truly a partnership and an honor that goes back millennia. In rural Colorado, every animal has a job. You can see the happiness and purpose emanating from their bodies when they know they've done good work. I'd like to share with you some examples of animal partnerships you might be familiar with, so you can appreciate how humans in working partnership with sled dogs is similar.

An animal's job is related to its natural instincts: llamas guard sheep, dogs hunt, herd, and guard homes and flocks, horses carry people and assist in ranch chores, cats keep the mouse population under control. In Colorado, sandhill cranes which stop in the spring on their migration path pick the fields clean of last year's crop detritus. My cuddly apartment cat became a champion mouser! I saw many examples of animals that had a keen interest in performing their job and heard countless stories of many more.

Sled dogs are cared for and trained from the moment they are born. Mushers who race competitively know that their best partners are dogs who want to participate and run, and who have the physical capabilities to do it. Evaluating teams is an ongoing process. Businesses and educational institutions do the same thing by placing people where they can do their best work.

Mushers put their dogs first and celebrate their bond with their dogs. I urge you to spread this message about Iditarod dogs wherever you go: that they are cherished and hard-working, with a drive to run built into their very genes. Maybe you could even consider giving your own pet a job?

Sincerely,

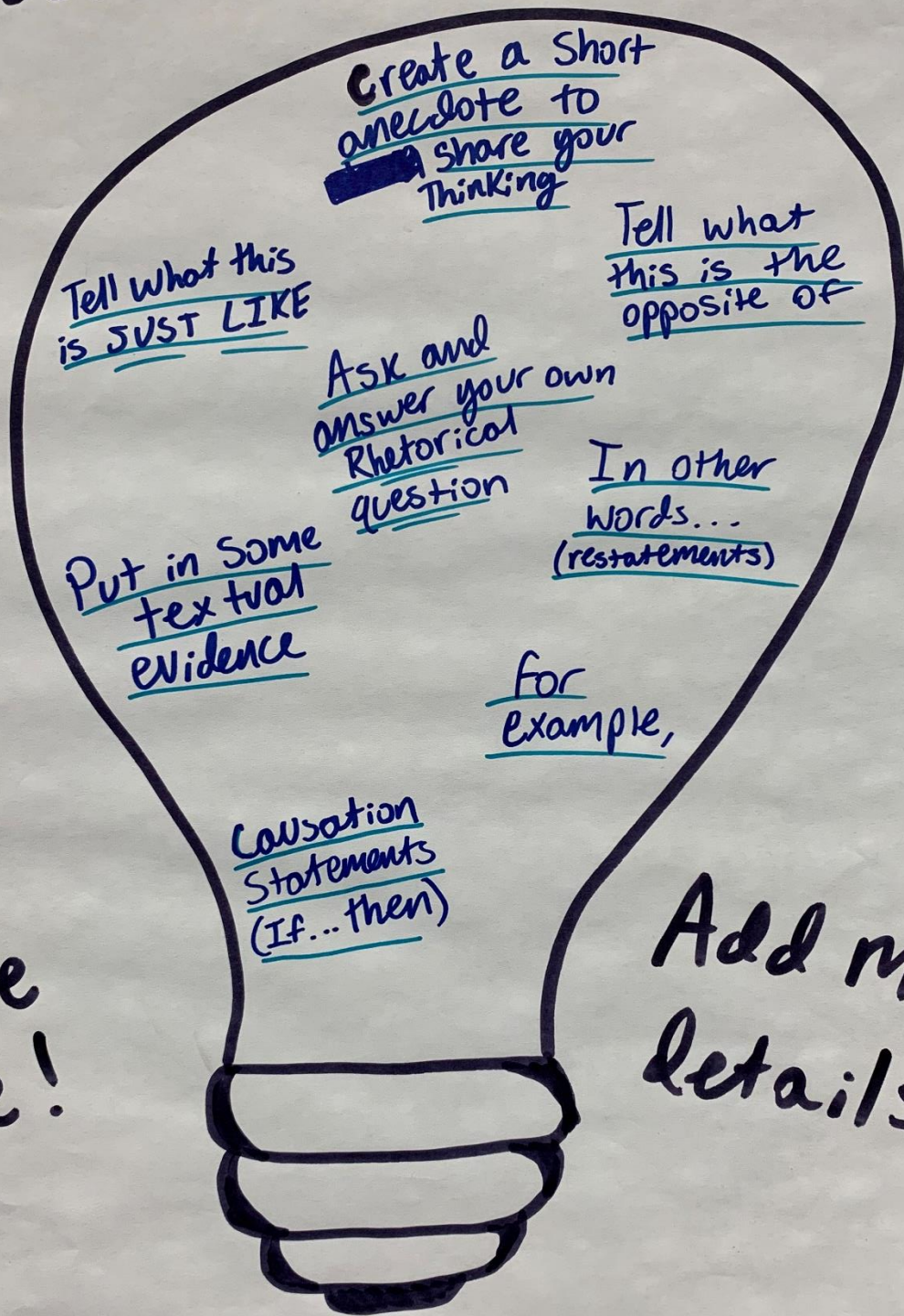
Mrs. Newmyer



## Sample List of Topics

1. the importance of the dogs' health
2. the importance of dog booties
3. the importance of following the rules
4. the importance of the Iditarod Air Force
5. the importance of teamwork
6. the importance of the Leonard Seppala Humanitarian Award
7. the importance of mandatory gear
8. fairness
9. the importance of the qualifying races for rookies
10. connection to climate change
11. the importance of volunteers
12. the importance of the web site
13. Iditarod Education and Teacher on the Trail™
14. how the Iditarod inspires students
15. why Trail Mail is special to the race
16. the values of Alaska Native culture
17. how the Iditarod represents your school's core values
18. why sled dogs excel in the cold
19. the importance of the 2-minute timed start with differential
20. when is best to take the 24-hour layover
21. the importance of safety
22. life lessons we can learn from the Iditarod or Iditarod/sled dog books
23. the importance of alternating Northern & Southern routes
24. the importance of a good run/race plan
25. the importance of correct food and nutrition for dogs/mushers
26. the importance of training
27. the importance of mentoring new mushers
28. how the Iditarod can inspire us to take action in our community, for example: work with shelter dogs; teamwork in accomplishing community goals, volunteering, learning about our community's history, maintaining local trails & nature centers, etc.
29. the importance of writing letters
30. the importance of respecting and working with one's physical environment
31. the importance of Iditarod traditions such as the Burred Arch, the Ceremonial Start, or Red Lantern Award

# Elaboration Ideas



Write more!

Add more details!

Stretch your writing!