



The Last Great Race

Researching this dog sled race takes kids across Alaska – and the curriculum

BY ELIZABETH SWARTZ

The cry of “Mush” rings out, and the Iditarod race begins once again on March 4. This race has been run in Alaska each year since 1973 to commemorate the 1925 Serum Run to Nome. At that time, countless children in Nome had become sick with the dreaded disease, diphtheria. The only serum was in Anchorage, and the only delivery system available was dog sleds. During that mercy run, 20 different drivers took part in delivering the medicine to Nome.

Today the race is organized by volunteers and covers over 1,150 miles of the roughest and most beautiful terrain in the world. Each team of 12 to 16 dogs and one sled driver, or “musher,” must cover the distance in 10 to 17 days, regardless of the weather.

The Iditarod in your classroom. The race can add excitement to your math, research, and geography classes. Try the reproducible on the opposite page to get the kids working independently.

Adding to the excitement of the race is the website for the Iditarod at www.iditarod.com which is updated throughout every day and night of the race. Students can log on, check out the biography of their favorite musher and his or her team of dogs, and

track them as they enter and leave each checkpoint. There are also teacher helps at the website, and one of the entries during the race is from the “teacher on the trail.”

My students make maps of the travel routes, calculate the mileage from one checkpoint to another, and write about the particularities of the terrain. We calculate the various speeds that certain teams of dogs are able to average between checkpoints.

Gold in Pennsylvania. I located a local musher who brings his lead dog and sled to our school for a presentation the week before the Iditarod is run. For those of you who don't have that option, there are great videos available that contain interviews with past winners and also-rans, as well as footage taken during training and past races.

This activity can be used as a springboard to further reading, writing and research about dogs, Alaska, the gold rush or life on any early frontiers. It can also be used to start a discussion on how and why we commemorate certain events – like the Nome mercy run – throughout history. It's an exciting way to begin the month of March! ↓

Elizabeth Swartz teaches third grade at Watsontown Elementary School, Watsontown, PA. She lives on a dairy farm with her husband and her two teenaged children.

Student name: _____

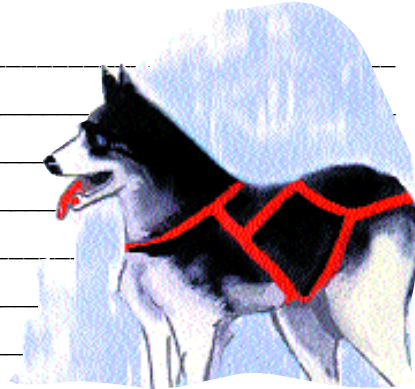
Mush, You Huskies!

Use your research skills to find the following information.

1. What does the word "Iditarod" mean? _____

In what state is the Iditarod run each year? _____

What does it commemorate? _____



2. Draw a map of the area covered by teams in the race. Label all areas of importance. Include the distances between checkpoints. Make a map key.

3. Find a list of people entered in the Iditarod race this year. Research the qualifications of each and pick the person for whom you will cheer. _____

4. In your journal, list information you've already gathered and then be prepared to add entries during each day of the event as they relate to your chosen musher. What is the name of his or her lead dog? _____ Has this musher been at the Iditarod before? _____ Be prepared to explain why you chose this team.

5. Read the book Stone Fox (John Gardiner, 1995 Houghton Mifflin). Write a paragraph comparing it to the Iditarod and another paragraph contrasting it with the Iditarod.

6. Choose three other people for your team and prepare a bulletin board for a public area in your school where you can keep other students informed about the running of the Iditarod. What information will you include to catch other students' attention?

7. List the winning team of the 2000 Iditarod: _____

Time to complete course: _____

Important events of the race: _____

Completion time of my team: _____

Finishing position of my chosen team. _____