

Lesson Plan

THE IDITAROD: THE LAST GREAT RACE

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Grade: Kindergarten

Subjects: Social Studies, Geography, Science

Time Required: 3 days, 30 minutes each day

PRIMARY SOURCES & MATERIALS USED

- [Alaska--Freighting with dog teams](#)
- [Dog sled arriving from Iditarod](#) (see image at right)
- [Local Legacies: Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race](#)
- [Today in History: "Mush! Mush! First Woman Wins Iditarod"](#)
- [America's Story from America's Library: Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race](#)
- Web sites:
 - [Official Site of the Iditarod](#)
 - [The Teacher's Corner: Iditarod Printable Worksheets](#)
- Books:
 - Gill, Shelley. *Kiana's Iditarod*. Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1984.
 - Blake, Robert. *Akiak: A Tale from the Iditarod*. New York: Philomel Books, 1997.

OVERVIEW

"The Iditarod: The Last Great Race" is an introduction to the Iditarod sled dog race that occurs annually in Alaska. Students will learn what the race is, and about the elements that make up the race including the mushers, dogs, and hardships.

UNDERSTANDING GOAL

Students will understand the Iditarod race and its components.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be introduced to and understand the following:

- Iditarod mushers
- Huskies: mushing dogs
- Race preparation and hardships

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION

What is the Iditarod?

TN Curriculum Standards:

Science (Embedded Inquiry)

GLE 0007.Inq.2 Ask questions, make logical predictions, plan investigations, and represent data.

Social Studies

K.1.02 Discuss cultures and human patterns of places and regions of the world.

K.3.01 Understand how to use maps, globes, and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process and report information from a spatial perspective.

K.5.01 Identify major events, people, and patterns in Tennessee, United States, and world history.



PROCEDURE

- Step 1 Connect** The teacher will introduce the words “musher” and “Iditarod” and explain/ask the following:
- *The Iditarod is a sled dog race that takes place in the state of Alaska. Alaska is a state in the United States, but is not close to Tennessee. It snows a lot in Alaska. Do you think it is hot or cold in Alaska? Why?*
 - *Dogs, called huskies, are used to pull sleds along a very long trail. A musher rides on the back of the sled. What supplies do you think the musher will need to carry on the sled during this journey? Why?* (The teacher will chart students' answers.)
- For background information, refer to the America’s Library: Alaska Web page at http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/es/ak/iditarod_1.
- Show the students a picture of a musher coming into Nome (the finish line) titled [“Dog sled arriving from Iditarod”](#) from the Library of Congress Web site.
- Allow the students to ask questions about the musher and the dogs. If the students are struggling, here are some prompting questions:
- *How many dogs do you think are needed to pull a sled?* (about 16)
 - *What happens if a dog is injured on the trail?* (the dog is picked up in a small airplane and taken out of the race)
 - *Do you think the dogs get tired?*
 - *Do you think that women can be mushers?* Refer to the Library of Congress link for [Today in History: First Woman Wins Iditarod](#).
- The teacher will then read *Kiana's Iditarod* by Shelley Gill. While reading, ask questions such as:
- *Do you think it is hard for the dogs to pull the sled? Why?*
 - *How do you think the musher stays warm?*
 - *How long do you think it takes a musher to finish the race? Why?*
- Step 2 Wonder** Based on the material introduced in the previous step/day, ask the following questions and chart student responses:
- *What have we learned about the Iditarod so far?*
 - *What would you like to learn next about the Iditarod?*
- Step 3 Investi-
gate** After charting student responses from Step 2, pull up the [Local Legacies: Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race](#) from the Library of Congress Web site. This Web page has a description of the race from former U.S. Senator of Alaska, Frank Murkowski. The website also has a picture of a real husky sled dog. After looking at the picture of the husky, ask the following questions:
- *How does this dog stay warm during the race?*
 - *What senses does the dog need to use while pulling the musher?*
- Allow students to ask questions and make inquiries about the race and the mushing dogs.
- Next, access [The Official Site of the Iditarod](#). Click on “2010 Iditarod” and scroll down to view the map of the Iditarod trail. Ask students if they think the mushers stop at all checkpoints (cities) and why they would need to stop during the race. Next click on the “Iditarod Insider™” tab. You can scroll down and show free, short video clips of the sled dog race.

Step 4 Construct

Step 4 starts day three of the lesson. Again, ask students what they have learned and what they would still like to learn about the Iditarod.

Show the sled dog picture, "[Alaska – Freighting with dog teams,](#)" from the Library of Congress Web site. This picture is very old, but shows how the sled dogs carried supplies for people in Alaska. Ask the students to look at this picture closely, and keep it in mind when looking at *Akiak*.

Read *Akiak: A Tale from the Iditarod* by Robert Blake. This is a story about a lead dog named Akiak and his journey through the Iditarod race. Ask the students questions as you read to check comprehension and understanding.

After reading *Akiak*, ask the students how the dogs and mushers in today's Iditarod are different than the dogs and mushers in the picture. Students should respond with the following points:

- *There are fewer dogs.*
- *Before, the dogs carried supplies to people.*
- *The current Iditarod is a race for fun.*
- *Mushers now are better prepared for the harsh conditions.*

Step 5 Reflect

Visit [The Teacher's Corner: Iditarod Printable Worksheets](#) and scroll down to the coloring pages. The students can complete sled dog and musher coloring pages. Have the students cut out their pictures and glue to paper plates. If you desire, you can add glitter and hang the plates from your ceiling to decorate your room.

EVALUATION

As a final review, have the students tell you what they know about the Iditarod and chart their answers. You can go around to every student and ask the following questions to check for understanding:

- *What is your favorite thing you learned about the Iditarod?*
- *Do you think it would be easy for a musher to complete the race?*
- *Can any type of dog become a sled dog?*
- *Add your own questions as you feel necessary.*

EXTENSIONS

To extend the lesson, provide the Iditarod books and Web sites listed in this lesson plan as take-home resources. The students can then explain their new knowledge about the Iditarod with friends and family members.

Every year, the Iditarod takes place in March. You can find a list of the mushers and follow their progress throughout the race. Completing this lesson before March will allow your students to follow the mushers during the race. Posting the race route and picking two to three mushers to follow will excite the students and extend their learning.