

Bringing the Iditarod into the Classroom

Aisling's story can be the springboard for lessons across the K–8 curriculum. Here are suggestions for motivating your students to learn more about sled dogs, mushing, and the Iditarod.

Reading & Writing:

- Have students research past and present mushers and write encouraging letters to their favorites.
- Create an Iditarod Web Quest by coming up with questions and having students research the answers and write them in grammatically correct sentences.
- Have students write poems about mushing that attempt to engage all the senses (e.g., feeling the cold, smelling the pine trees, hearing the dogs barking, etc.).
- Have students design a trading card of their favorite musher and make copies to trade with other students.
- Have students research the aurora borealis (northern lights) and write a children's book about them.
- Create an "I-Did-a-Read" contest where students are challenged to read for 1150 minutes (about the total mileage of the Iditarod).

Math & Science:

- Challenge students to spend as many minutes outside as the miles the mushers travel in the Iditarod.
- Have students choose a section of the Iditarod Trail and construct a scale model of it. They should include at least three checkpoints, a change in elevation, a natural resource of some type, and latitude and longitudinal lines. Students should write a description of the area to go along with their models.
- Have students research the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and tundra region of Alaska and then build a model biome in a box of either the tundra or the Refuge. They should include a written description of the biome including the type of terrain, the elevation, and levels of precipitation, plants, animals, and temperatures.
- Create story problems based on the Iditarod using, for example, the amount of food needed along the trail or the amount of money needed for supplies, etc.
- During the race, have students use the Internet to compare the weather in their hometowns to that of Anchorage and Nome. Students can graph their findings and later analyze the differences in weather.
- Have each student follow a musher during the Iditarod and each day calculate the average miles his or her chosen musher has covered per hour that he or she has been on the trail.

Art:

- Teach students about the igloo and its significance to Alaska Natives, and then make an igloo out of sugar cubes.
- Have students make posters to get the word out about the Iditarod and dog sledding.
- Make a quilt with pieces students have drawn that depict sled dogs and mushing.
- Have students design and create scale models of sleds and then explain the designs they chose and what makes them unique and serviceable.
- Ask students to study the different animals in Alaska and then draw a realistic picture of their favorite animal.
- Have students design and create a class mural of mushers and their dogs.

Where to Find MORE Classroom Information

The official Iditarod website (www.iditarod.com) provides a wealth of information for classroom teachers in grades K–8 to help students enjoy the race. Curriculum links take you to activities created by teachers in art, music, industrial arts, character education, games and activities, health and physical education, reading, integrated curriculum, language arts, writing, math, problem solving, science, and service learning projects. The “I Kid a Rod” link gives detailed instructions for a simulated Iditarod, in which students take on the roles of mushers, veterinarians, race volunteers, and dogs, as well as such challenges as storms and wild animals. It’s a great culmination activity to an Iditarod unit.

Here are two direct links to teaching units:

<http://iditarodblogs.com/tott/>

<http://iditarodblogs.com/teachers/>