Unit 2/Week 3

Title: Iditarod Dream

Suggested Time: 3 days (30 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RI.5.1, RI.5.2, RI.5.3, RI.5.8, SL.5.1, SL.5.3, RF.5.4, L.5.4, L.5.5, L.5.6, W.5.9

Teacher Instructions

*Refer to the Introduction for further details.*

**Before Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers, about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Even hard tasks can be successfully accomplished with determination, training, and team work.

Synopsis

Dusty Whittemore faces several challenges and below-freezing weather during the Junior Iditarod race in Alaska. He is an experienced racer and knows his dogs well. He uses what he knows about their personalities to his advantage during the arduous race. At the halfway point, after seven hours of racing, he has a significant lead and is able to care for his dogs before the next leg of the race. Two tangles, a snowmobile collision, and a run-in with a moose are no match for the skill of Dusty and his dog sled team. They cross the finish line first, a sweet victory that will replace the disappointment of coming in fourth the year before.

1. Read entire main selection text, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the main selection text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire main selection text independently.
2. Teacher reads the main selection text aloud with students following along.

(Depending on how complex the text is and the amount of support needed by students, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.)

1. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions and returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e.: whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text Dependent Questions** | **Answers** |
| What has Dusty changed from last year to ensure that he will do better in this year’s race? | He has gotten rid of his glasses and replaced them with contact lenses (the glasses were coated with ice and he couldn’t see the trail last year). He also has the best dog team he has ever had which will hopefully help him stay on course and not get lost like he did last year. |
| The author calls one of Dusty’s **competitors**, or someone else trying to win the race, “the favorite to win this year.” What does that mean? | This competitor, Andy Willis, is generally expected to win the race. |
| Why is number 6 a good position for Dusty to begin the race in? | This position places Dusty only eight minutes behind the lead racer and lets Dusty start in front of nine other racers. (Racers start two minutes apart. There isn’t a number one position, so two minutes times four racers in front of Dusty equals eight minutes. There are 15 racers, so he will be ahead of nine of them.) |
| About how long is the Jr. Iditarod race? How do you know? | It is about 158 miles. The text says the race runs 79 miles to Yentna Station, the halfway point. Two times 79 is 158. |
| The author uses many words and phrases to show how *tremendously powerful* the small dogs are. What are some of these words and phrases? | Dusty has to walk each dog from the truck with its front paws off the ground because with all four legs on the ground, they could pull Dusty off his feet. From the picture – it looks like this teenager is good-sized, larger than the dogs. Even when the dogs are “hooked up” to the sled, their excitement makes it difficult to keep them in place – all hands need to be holding them. Dusty’s mother rides on the sled with him to the starting line and keeps her foot on the breaks to help control the sled. Dusty “flies from the start” when the handlers step away after the announcers said, “Go!” |
| **On edge** is a phrase that means nervous or tense. What are some of the obstacles on the trail, and why is Dusty *on edge* about them? | Snowmobiles use the same trail. Dusty has to cross four roads within 10 miles and the roads are slick. If the team gets hung up or must quickly stop because of one of these obstacles, he or the dogs could get injured, and he could fall behind and lose the race. |
| The dog sled was going too fast and crashed into a tree. What does the author mean when he said, “Dusty **stops dead** and can’t believe he didn’t break the sled?” | It means that he was going very fast and after hitting the tree, came to a complete stop. |
| How does crashing into a tree become a positive experience for Dusty? | It reminds him to slow down and get control. He then establishes a strong, steady pace and is able to take the lead. |
| How does Dusty help out the dog team? | He runs alongside the sled when they go up hills. He jumps from the left runner to the right one to steer the sled around tight corners. |
| The dogs run into two snowmobiles and almost a third one on the narrow path. How does this **collision**, or crash, upset Dusty’s progress? | The dogs are stopped on the path and unable to pass so they spin and run in circles, tangling their lines. It takes Dusty five minutes for him to straighten them out and get underway. They almost run into a third snowmobile which causes the lead dogs to “stop dead” and the other dogs pile into them, tangling up their lines again. Dusty is worried that another racer will catch up with him. |
| After the collision with the snowmobile, Dusty sees moose tracks in the snow and his fears “mushroom.” What does this mean? | It means he got really worried and his fears multiplied because running into a moose is the musher’s worst nightmare. The moose can attack the dogs (thinking they are wolves) and kill several of them before the musher can frighten the moose away. |
| To get **tangled** means to get twisted around something. Why is a **tangle** a musher’s second worst nightmare, according to the author? | Getting tangled is the second worst nightmare because the dogs could be injured or strangled when the lines, or ropes, wrap around them. |
| Dusty was *on edge* on the narrow forest trail but feels “relaxed and at home” in the open meadow. Why has Dusty’s mood changed? What from the text tells you that?  Teacher may want to talk about the phrase “at home.” | On the narrow forest trail, there were many obstacles (and potential obstacles), such as snowmobiles and moose. He had also gotten tangled up twice and thought that others were going to catch up to him. In the open meadow, he can relax and take a break. It is a flat part of the route. He chooses the correct path (where he had gotten lost the year before) and notices that he has a large lead in front of the other competitors – he can see five miles behind him and there isn’t even one racer in sight. |
| Dusty reaches a checkpoint and checks on the dogs. Why does he decide to take Annie off the lead? Was the replacement dog a good decision? Why or why not? | Annie kept looking back while running and seemed nervous. He thought that she was still upset from the encounter with the snowmobile. He puts a young dog, Jazz, in her place. He is inexperienced and in a short while, he has to replace him with another dog, Bettie. It isn’t until he replaces Jazz that they are running well as a team again. |
| What in the text tells you that Dusty is sensitive to his dogs and their needs? | During the break at the lake, he greets all the dogs and checks their feet for injuries. He gives them snacks to maintain their energy. He puts booties on their feet to protect them as they run. He changes Annie at the checkpoint because she seems nervous – and then changes Jazz because he is inexperienced. |
| At the halfway point, Dusty has little time to relax because he has several “dog chores.” What are the chores? | He ties the sled to a small tree and makes a straw bed for the dogs. Then he fires up his stove to melt snow for water and pours the warm water over the frozen meat to prepare the dogs’ food. After dinner, he checks the dogs’ feet and treats their injuries. |
| How does the Jr. Iditarod protect the racers and the dog teams? | There are rules about carrying emergency food and giving the dogs a certain amount of food during the rest break. Racers must rest their teams and remain at the halfway point for ten hours. |
| What is the **rule of the wilderness** and why is it important? | The rule of the wilderness is that everyone helps each other – even though they are competitors. At the halfway point, Dusty doesn’t rest and helps the other competitors build a fire because of the harsh conditions. |
| Why does Dusty leave the halfway point in the dark to finish the last leg of the race? How does he feel about it? | Because Dusty has reached the halfway point first, he gets to leave first. He will have to remain there for 10 hours (Jr. Iditarod rule) before finishing the race. He isn’t happy about leaving at 3:30 a.m. because he doesn’t like racing at night – he can’t see the trail markers or nearby moose. He places his trust in his dogs and they become his “only eyes.” |
| When Dusty comes in first place, far ahead of all other competitors, rumors fly that he has mistreated his dogs. How do you know that he has not mistreated them?  Teacher might want to talk about the phrase “rumors fly.” | When everyone at the finish line looked at the dogs, they saw that the dogs were still strong – barking, jumping, and eager to run further. |

Vocabulary

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|  | **KEY WORDS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTANDING**  Words addressed with a question or task | **WORDS WORTH KNOWING**  General teaching suggestions are provided in the Introduction |
| **TEACHER PROVIDES DEFINITION**  not enough contextual clues provided in the text | competitors  on edge, stops dead, tangle, collision | windswept, swamps, handlers  runner, spectators, blind corner  musher, barren, frantically  tributary  bale of straw  straggle |
| **STUDENTS FIGURE OUT THE MEANING**  sufficient context clues are provided in the text | tremendously powerful  fears mushroom  rule of the wilderness | headquarters, headed for victory, position, slot  required  straining  route, pace, overtakes  meadow, delay, strangle  encounter, inexperienced, eager  ointment  mistreated |

Culminating Task

* It took teamwork, determination, and training to win the Jr. Iditarod. Find three examples in the text of how Dusty’s training has helped him to win the race.

Answer: He knows how to take care of his dogs – he knows how to care for their injuries, prepare their food/water and bedding, and he knows which dogs are best suited for specific tasks (running the trail at night). He looks for signs that they are tired or nervous so that he can rest them or switch their positions in the pack. He knows the trails better and which parts might give him a problem. He also makes sure he has all of the equipment handy. He knows when to help the team (running beside the sled uphill and placing his weight on the right/left runners around curves).

* It took teamwork, determination, and training to win the Jr. Iditarod. How did Dusty show determination throughout the race? Find three examples from the text.

Answer: Dusty overcomes two tangled lines after crashing with the tree and the snowmobile. He changes out the lead dogs (twice) when he notices that they are upset or not leading well. When they stop for the break, he checks the dogs’ feet for injuries. He determines they can continue because they look fresh and are still eager to run. He chooses the right path where he got lost the year before. He puts his trust in the dog sled team when they have to mush at night, even though he is very uncomfortable racing in the dark.

Additional Tasks

* Have you ever accomplished something that was hard to do? What steps did you take to prepare? What training helped you accomplish your task? How was this accomplishment similar or different from Dusty’s?

Answer: Answers may vary.

* Dusty and the dog sled come around a *blind corner* and hit two stopped snowmobiles on the narrow path. What does *blind corner* mean? Why was this a good phrase to describe this situation?

Answer: Blind corner is a corner that cannot be seen around. This is a good phrase to describe this situation because Dusty is already on edge about the many obstacles on the narrow trail – so he is ready for anything although he doesn’t know what might await him around that corner.

Note to Teacher

* The questions are designed to not only guide students through the story sequentially, but also to build up to the culminating activity.
* The teacher may want to talk about the phrase “at home,” “rumors fly,” “blind corner,” and other idiomatic phrases.