

THE IDITAROD TRAIL DOG SLED RACE



The “Iditarod” is a **dog sled race** that is held every year in Alaska in March. Dog sled racing is a sport, and the Iditarod is one of the most difficult races.

In a dog sled race, a group of dogs pull a sled across the snow, guided by a person who stands on the sled behind the dogs. The race may be short (called a *sprint race*) or long. In the Iditarod, the racers take about ten days to cover a distance over 1150 miles (1,852 km).

Dog sled racing is a type of *mushing*. *Mushing* refers to any type of dog pulling any kind of transport across the snow. Mushing is used to move materials (including the mail) over snow-covered ground that cars, trains, and other transportation cannot get over. People who drive dog sleds are called *mushers*.



In mushing, dogs are *harnessed*, or hooked up, to the sled. There may be only one dog or many dogs. The number depends on how much is being pulled and how far, the type of ground, and the reason that the dog is pulling. The type of dog also depends on the load and the purpose. If the load is heavy, more dogs are used. If it is important to go far, then strong dogs are used. If it is important to go fast, dogs that can run very quickly are used. If the team is big, it’s important that the dogs be calm and able to work in groups. In the Iditarod, a team of twelve to sixteen dogs pulls a single person for a long distance as quickly as possible. People have different ideas about the best combination of number, strength, speed, and temperament.



Although the Iditarod is watched by veterinarians to make sure that the dogs are healthy, there are no specific rules about the types of dogs used. A group of poodles have even run in the Iditarod!

The Iditarod is not an easy race for the mushers or the dogs. There are wild animals and bad weather. The race is very expensive: the cost of taking care of the dogs and all the race materials is more than the first place prize. However, people who love dogs and dog racing enjoy the chance to work with dogs and to race against other people with the same interests.



Answer the questions about *THE IDITAROD TRAIL DOG SLED RACE*

1. When and where is the Iditarod held?
 - a. It is held every year in March in Iditarod.
 - b. It is held in alternate years in Iditarod.
 - c. It is held every year in March in Alaska.
 - d. It is a special event this year in Nome, Alaska.

2. What is *mushing*?
 - a. It is the kind of snow the dogs race across.
 - b. It is pulling a sled.
 - c. It is using dogs to carry things across the snow.
 - d. It is a synonym for dog sled racing.

3. According to the article, which of these are factors in choosing dogs for a dog sled race?
 - a. strength, speed, and mood
 - b. weight, warmth, and high tempers
 - c. warmth, friendliness, and teamwork
 - d. strength, tirelessness, and warmth

4. Using clues in the article, what does *temperament* mean?
 - a. saying what you mean
 - b. bad temper
 - c. mood
 - d. none of the above

5. Would you like to participate in or watch a race like the Iditarod? Why or why not?

Name _____ Date _____

Answers to *THE IDITAROD TRAIL DOG SLED RACE*

- 1. c**
- 2. b**
- 3. a**
- 4. c**
- 5. answers will vary; accept reasonable answers.**