

Educator Discussion Guide

SLED DOG SCHOOL
by Terry Lynn Johnson

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2019-2020
Grade 3-5

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Sled Dog School is a fun and inspiring novel filled with themes of problem-solving, finding strengths, building friendships, and unleashing passions. The story is centered around the main character, Matthew Misco. Matt is an eleven-year-old boy growing up in Copper Creek, Michigan. Matt is struggling to make friends at school, fly below the radar for his unusual lifestyle, and pass math class. To making a passing grade in math, he must successfully complete an extra-credit project offered by his teacher, Mr. Moffat. For the project, students must create a business plan, run the business for six weeks, present weekly reports, and have at least three clients to show a thriving business all with accurate math figures.

Matt decides to start a business doing the only thing he genuinely loves, dog sledding. Working with dogs is his passion and comes naturally to him. During his six-week business adventure, he is joined by a few characters, Tubbs, Alex, and his sister Lily. Matt soon finds that teaching others is a more difficult task than mushing as he discovers that not all people have the same natural abilities that he possesses. Stressed with getting clients and teaching them how to safely mush for his business, Matt worries he may not finish his project and make the passing grade. Will Matt learn how to teach his students how to mush and run a successful dog sled business to pass math? Along the way, will Matt learn a few lessons of his own?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry Lynn Johnson writes middle grade adventures based on her experiences living in northern Ontario, Canada. For twelve years she worked as a backcountry canoe ranger in Quetico Wilderness Park. In the winter months, she ran her kennel of eighteen Alaskan Huskies. She might have fallen through ice a time or two, been dragged by a dog team, blown up a wood stove, been attacked by a sloth (slowly), nearly drowned on a portage, and chased a bear with a chainsaw. She owned eighteen sled dogs, but now owns one border collie who is almost smart enough to type out her own adventures. Since she began her career as an author, her sled dogs have all passed, but their spirits remain in her stories.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at
<http://terrylynnjohnson.com/terry.php>
Accessed 25 September 2018.

BOOK AWARDS

Scholastic Book Fairs Selection

A Junior Library Guild Selection

Maine Student Book Award Nominee

Bank Street College of Education's Best Children's Books of the Year, 2018 edition

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

How-To Guides

Ask your students if they have ever had to teach someone how to do something. Ask them about their experience. What steps did they provide when teaching? What was the level of difficulty of the task? Were there any adjustments in your instructions after working with your “student?” Explain to students that they will be creating a “How-To” guide to teach others how to do something. Have students follow these steps:

1. Go slowly and think about each step of the task. Carefully write down each step. Encourage students to make notes or illustrations that will help teach the step.
2. Work with a partner to review the steps of the task by having them follow the steps. If there are any errors or missing steps, have students correct the mistakes.
3. Once the steps are complete, have the student complete a final draft with neat handwriting or a computer program. Students should add illustrations to make their How-To guide appealing.

See, Think, Wonder Routine

The purpose of the See, Think, Wonder routine is to encourage students to make careful observations and thoughtful interpretations. It helps stimulate curiosity and sets the stage for inquiry. Have students participate in the routine using the photo below. This can be done in groups, pairs, or independently by having students record their thoughts in a journal/recording sheet. If using a journal/recording sheet, give students time between each step to record using the sentence stem I see... I think... I wonder...and discuss before moving to the next step in the routine. First, pose the question: What do you see? Discuss what they see. Next, pose the question: What do you think about this picture? Discuss their thoughts. Lastly, pose the question: What does it make you wonder? Discuss their wonders.



Johnson, T.L. (2013, October). “Wyoming Stage Stop Race Follow the Lead Teacher[Photograph].” Terry Lynn Johnson Blog. Retrieved from <http://terrylynnjohnson.blogspot.com/search/label/Yukon%20Quest>. Accessed 14 October 2018

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The story begins with Matt rushing to the mailbox to prevent his parents from getting a letter from school. Along the way, he is slowed down. What obstacles slow him down? How could these obstacles have been avoided?
2. Once Matt's mom gets the mail, what is her reaction? Was the reaction he received different from what you expected? If different, how did you expect Matt's mom to react?
3. How does Mr. Moffat try to help Matt succeed in math class? Why do you think Matt is reluctant to take the help?
4. Matt chooses to create a sled dog school for his extra credit assignment. If you had to create a business, what type of business would you create and why would you choose that business?
5. What is Matt's first impression of his student, Tubbs? What evidence supports his thoughts?
6. How does Tubbs react to the lifestyle of the Misco family? How is your lifestyle similar/different than the Misco family lifestyle? How would you feel if you lived a lifestyle like the Misco family?
7. Why does Tubbs sign up for sled dog school? On the first lesson, Tubbs does not come alone. Who is the character that accompanies Tubbs to the lesson? Describe the first interaction between that character and Matt's sled dogs. How do the interactions change over the six-week timeframe?
8. On the first lesson with Tubbs, Matt is eager to begin and rushes through giving directions to Tubbs. What happens as a result, and how could this have been avoided?
9. Matt gets a second student for sled dog school, Alex. What is Matt's first impression of Alex? What evidence supports his thoughts?
10. How are Matt's students, Tubbs and Alex, similar/different?
11. When giving sledding instructions to Tubbs and Alex, what are some things that Matt does differently than his first lesson with Tubbs? What are the results of his adjustments?
12. Matt's sister Lily tags along for most of their adventures. During a run, Matt has Lily stay back. Alex runs a large team of dogs while he and Tubbs ride the sled. What happens to Lily during this run? How do the characters react? How would you react in this situation?
13. After arriving back to Matt's house late from the run, Alex takes the blame, saying she wanted to show off her new skills instead of telling the parents the truth. How does Alex's stepping up to protect her friends affect the dynamics of the group?
14. Matt gets a new student for his sled dog school after the TV broadcasting. What happens when the student, Jacob, arrives for their first lesson? Describe the interaction. Was this different from what you expected? If different, how did you expect the interaction to go?
15. Matt gives presentations every week about his business. Does Matt's project seem successful compared to his peers? What evidence supports your thoughts?
16. Matt needs three customers to complete his assignment. On the day the assignment was due, Matt was able to get this third customer. How was Matt able to get his third student to complete his assignment? Describe your reaction.
17. What lessons do you think Matt learns from completing his extra credit assignment of creating and running a sled dog school?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts:

- Matt faces many obstacles throughout the story but is able to overcome them in the end. Have students write a narrative about a difficult time they may have faced. In the narrative, have them address the obstacles they faced, how they overcame the obstacles and who (if anyone) helped them along the way.
- Matt decides to continue his sled dog school business with the help of his friends. They will need more clients. Put students in groups and have them write a short commercial about Matt's sled dog school. The commercial should include an appealing message with a description of the sled dog school, the cost and length of lessons, and selling points such as positive reviews from Matt's students. Once the group has their commercial written, have them practice conveying their message fluently and with expression. Using digital technology, record the group commercials and air them in class.
- Complete an extension activity from prereading How-To Guide activity. Have students teach someone their chosen activity using their guide. After students have taught their chosen activity using their guide, have them write a report on the successes and/or struggles of the teaching experience.

Math:

- Matt struggles in math class but uses math often when he is completing daily tasks such as dividing the food for the dogs or measuring out rope for gang line. Have students make a list of their daily activities and then discuss math concepts that are addressed within those activities (example: fixing lunch and dividing a sandwich in half or getting dressed in the morning and figuring out how much time they have before the bus arrives). After discussing several activities, teach the *Division Models to Solve Problems* lesson found at https://betterlesson.com/lesson/549747/division-models-to-solve-problems?from=cc_lesson. Teachers can access the lesson without signing up for an account. There is the option to sign up. Signing up is free and allows the user to print and save plans they have found.
- Create a business plan. Have students create a business and complete the extra credit assignment Matt was given by his math teacher, Mr. Moffat. Once students have created their business plan, have them design flyers by hand or using digital technology to market their business.

Art:

Become the illustrator! After reading, discuss story elements with the class. Have students choose parts of the story they feel need illustrations. Then, have them draw illustrations or create illustrations using digital technology to go along with those parts of the story. Students should use descriptions of the characters and setting from the text in addition to the visuals provided in the related websites of this guide.

Science:

In the story, Matt hooks up a different number of dogs to the sled depending on the run. The dogs use force to move the sled. Explore the concept of force and motion by having students pull a sled. Divide students in groups and have them design a sled team of various

configurations (2-person, 4-person, 6-person teams and single line or double line). Before attempting to move the sled, students should predict how much the sled will move and discuss possible effects of varying amounts of force on the motion of the sled. After groups have experimented with pulling the sled, students should discuss and compare their predictions to how the amount and direction of force exerted on the sled was affected by the various configurations.

Vocabulary:

Musher	Mischievous	Income
Toboggan	Dubiously	Expense
Steer	Berserk	Salary
Careen	Intuitive	
Dominant	Client	
Whittle	Viable	
Kiln	Parameters	

Additional terms relating to sledding can be found on pages 190-193 in the book, *Sled Dog School*.

RELATED WEB SITES

Terry Lynn Johnson

<http://terrylynnjohnson.com/>

This is the author's website. It provides biographic information about the author, Terry Lynn Johnson, as well as information about author visits and other titles she has written. The blog is full of adventures that inspired her writing. Virtual and physical visits can be scheduled using the visits tab on the website. The fun tab on the site links information about races and sled dogs along with mushing terminology used by the author.

Sled Dog School Curriculum Guide

<http://terrylynnjohnson.com/pdfs/sled-dog-school-curriculum-guide.pdf>

This guide is linked to the author's website. It contains author information, a brief description of the book, additional discussion questions, and classroom connection activities.

Siberian Husky

<https://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/siberian-husky/>

This website provides an information about the Siberian Husky breed along by providing an overview of their physical and behavioral features, quick facts, and the history of the breed. This website would be helpful to provide additional information and detailed visuals of the breeds of dogs used for sledding for the art illustration activity.

Alaskan Malamute

<https://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/alaskan-malamute/>

This website provides an information about the Alaskan Malamute breed along by providing an overview of their physical and behavioral features, quick facts, and the history of the breed. This website would be helpful to provide additional information and detailed visuals of the breeds of dogs used for sledding for the art activity illustration activity.

What is a Dog Sled?

<https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-dog-sled>

This is an inquiry-based website in which questions about various topics are posed and then answered. This link will take the user to the wonder “What is a Dog Sled.” A brief explanation that can be read to students is given to answer the questions: (1) What is a dog sled? (2) What types of dogs make up a sled team? And (3) What is the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race? Additional photos are supplied on the site along with a short video from a musher’s perspective.