**The Incredible Life of Balto by Meghan McCarthy**

Louisiana Young Reader’s Choice Nominee 2014

Grades 3 - 5

*Submitted by Catherine Bascle and Angela Germany*

Title: The Incredible Life of Balto

Author: Meghan McCarthy

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Pages: 40

**SUMMARY**  
Balto is known as the lead dog in the sledding team that, in 1925, brought diphtheria serum to Nome, Alaska, inspiring the Iditarod Trail Dog Sled Race that is held every year to this day. Balto’s life continued for many years after that though. His celebrity helped to draw crowds to see him and his team, first as vaudeville act, then as part of a sideshow. When George Kimble saw how the sideshow was treating the dogs, he started a fundraiser in Cleveland to buy the dogs and donate them to the Brookside Zoo. IL: **LG** – BL: **4.7** – AR Pts. **0.5**

**AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY**  
  
Born and raised in Rhode Island, Meghan McCarthy was never much good at her math classes, but she loved to make art. After earning her degree in illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design, she worked delivering pizza while trying to get her first book published. She moved to New York to be closer to the publishing industry and has now published eleven books. Her fiction titles include *George Upside Down*, *Show Dog*, *Steal Back the Mona Lisa*, and *The Adventures of Patty and the Big Red Bus*. Her other non-fiction includes *Pop!: The Invention of Bubble Gum*, *Astronaut Handbook*, *Seabiscuit the Wonder Horse*, *Aliens Are Coming!: The True Account of the 1938 War of the Worlds Radio Broadcast*, *Strong Man*, and *City Hawk*.  
  
**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**  
  
**Writing:**

Balto was big news in his time! Students can become newspaper journalists and write an article about this hero dog or create a news video. Pretend it is 1925 and they are reporting on the lifesaving efforts of Balto. Be sure they include interviews with witnesses in their article or video.

**Art:**

A statue of Balto was made by a famous sculptor. Make your own dog sculpture with clay. It could be Balto, a dog you know, or one from your imagination.

For a short time, Balto toured in a vaudeville act. What is vaudeville? Have your class perform a

vaudeville style show for your school that tells the story of Balto.

**Science**:

* Many dogs have been used to pull dog sleds. Some of the most popular are the Alaskan Malamute and Siberian Husky. Individually or in groups have students look up the characteristics of these dog breeds. They can report out why these dog breeds make ideal sled pullers.
* Individually or in groups ask students to research and answer these questions about Diphtheria. I have included the answers in parentheses.

1. What is Diptheria? *(a contagious disease caused by bacillus cornyebacterium diptheriae)*
2. How does it affect humans / what are the symptoms? *(it produces fever, blurred vision, shock, extreme difficulty breathing and swallowing, slurred speech, swollen neck)*
3. What is the incubation for this disease? In other words, from the time you catch it, how long does it take to start making you sick? *(2-5 days but sometimes longer)*
4. How contagious is it? *(highly/very/fatality rates between 5% and 10%)*
5. What is a Vaccine and what does it do? *(Improves immunity to a particular disease, they boost your body’s immune system. Most vaccines contain a little bit of a disease germ that is weak or dead. )*
6. Why are vaccines important? *(they help protect people from getting sick, especially small children and the very old)*

**Geography**

Balto’s team carried the serum from Nenana to Nome. Locate both towns on a map. How far apart are the two towns? Individually or in groups ask students to research and give examples of where they could get to if they were to travel that far from where they live.

Follow this link to 10 Scavenger Hunt Questions about the state of Alaska:

<http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson095.shtml>.

**Math**

10 Iditarod Math Worksheets for grades 4-8

<http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson302.shtml>

**Lesson Plans Online**

Iditarod Activities Across the Grades

<http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson225.shtml>

**Vocabulary:**

serum fidelity

enthusiastic intelligence

relay grapple

pelt contribution

endurance citizen

diphtheria musher

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How did Dr. Curtis Welch get word out that diphtheria medicine was needed in Nome?
2. How cold was it when the first dogsled team left Nenana to get the medicine to Nome?
3. What was the name of the musher for Balto’s sled team?
4. Why was Balto a surprising choice to lead the sled team? What skill helped him do the job?
5. Where was Frederick Roth’s statue of Balto set up?
6. Balto starred in a movie! What was its title?
7. How much did people pay to see Balto and his team at the sideshow?
8. How much did the sideshow owner want when George Kimble wanted to buy Balto and his team?
9. How long did Kimble have to raise the money?

**Additional Resources**

**History Channel:** Online article about the history of the Iditarod. <http://www.thehistorychannelclub.com/articles/articletype/articleview/articleid/1500/the-history-of-the-iditarod>.

**Discovery Channel**

Documentary TV show from The Discovery Channel: Iditarod Toughest Race on Earth Season 1. Some of the videos are available online <http://dsc.discovery.com/tv-shows/other-shows/videos/other-shows-iditarod-videos.htm>.

**Official Iditarod Website**

<http://iditarod.com/>

Teacher’s Page <http://iditarod.com/teachers/> (has more activities, ideas and lesson plans)

**Kids Health**

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/lung/diphtheria.html>

**Animated Movie Balto, 1995**