

LEVELED BOOK • N

Sled Dogs to the Rescue



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Written by M. Aboff • Illustrated by Jani Orban

Sled Dogs to the Rescue



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Focus Question

What lessons do the sled dog teams teach us?

Words to Know

blizzard
medicine
mushers

relay
Siberian husky
teams

Page 3: The press photographs one of the sled dog teams, including Balto in the front, for a reenactment of their arrival in Nome.

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BALTO OF NOME.

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A Terrible Disease

In January 1925, sled dog **teams** raced in a **blizzard** through the wilderness of Alaska. They battled through heavy snow and icy winds to save children's lives.

It all started when a terrible disease spread through the town of Nome, Alaska. The children became very sick and needed **medicine** right away.

The medicine that could save the children was in Anchorage, almost 1,000 miles (1,600 km) away.



When the disease struck Nome, the town's only doctor worked to save lives in this hospital.



The package containing the medicine for Nome's children (inset)

The medicine could be delivered part of the way, to Nenana, by train. Even so, it was 674 miles (1,085 km) from the last train stop to Nome.

Back then, sled dogs were used to deliver goods in the snow. It was clear that sled dogs were the best way to deliver the medicine. However, the distance was too far for one sled dog team. A **relay** was the only hope.

The Great Sled Dog Relay

More than 20 top **mushers** and 150 dogs were set to take part in the relay. Mushers would hand off the medicine to the next team at different posts along the way.

On January 27, the medicine arrived by train where the first sled dog team waited. The package, wrapped in heavy fur to keep the medicine from freezing, was handed off.



A journey from Nenana to Nome would normally take twenty-five days by sled. The teams raced against time to deliver the medicine.



The race to Nome was on. The dogs battled through rough wilderness in the bitter cold. The medicine was passed from team to team. Many times, the mushers had to stop to warm the medicine by a fire. Some of the dogs did not survive the journey.

One of the teams, driven by the famous musher Leonhard Seppala, covered the most dangerous part of the race. The temperature had fallen to –85 degrees Fahrenheit (-65°C). Seppala's lead dog was a twelve-year-old **Siberian husky** named Togo.



Seppala had won many dog sled races with the help of his dog Togo.



To save time, Togo and his teammates raced over an area of frozen sea in the darkness. The next day, they struggled up snow-packed mountains. They traveled an amazing 91 miles (146 km)—more than any other team.

The Dogs Deliver

The sled dog teams continued their difficult journey. Gunnar Kaasen and his lead Siberian husky, Balto, left on the second to last leg. They raced through a terrible blizzard.





Balto led the team through whiteout conditions. At one point, a powerful gust of wind flipped the sled over. The medicine fell in the snow. With frostbitten hands, Kaasen found the medicine.

When Kaasen arrived at the hand-off point, the next team was not ready to leave. Kaasen decided to continue on to Nome himself.

Just before dawn on February 2, Balto and his teammates arrived in Nome. The journey took only five and a half days. The medicine saved the sick children and stopped the spread of the disease.





Seppala loved his dogs. Later in life, he started a husky kennel in Maine.

After the Race

A year after the race, Seppala took his dogs, including Togo, on a tour across the United States. They drew large crowds. He was one of the first to bring the Siberian husky breed to other parts of the country.

That same year, a statue of Balto was built in New York City. Balto and some of his teammates were in a dog show that toured the United States. However, they were not treated well and were kept in small cages. People gave money to bring the dogs to Cleveland, Ohio, where they were welcomed in a parade. They stayed in the Cleveland Zoo for the rest of their lives.

To this day, Balto remains famous for his bravery. However, every sled dog on that journey helped save the sick children when there was little hope left.



Kaasen and Balto visit the new statue that was built in honor of the sled dogs.

Glossary

blizzard (n.)	a severe snowstorm with cold temperatures, heavy snows, and strong, steady winds (p. 4)
medicine (n.)	a drug or remedy used for treating an illness or condition (p. 5)
mushers (n.)	people who drive sleds pulled by dogs (p. 7)
relay (n.)	the process of moving or delivering something in stages by passing it from one person to another (p. 6)
Siberian husky (n.)	any of a breed of dog from Siberia that has thick fur and is used to pull sleds (p. 9)
teams (n.)	groups of animals harnessed together to pull vehicles (p. 4)

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A Reading A-Z Level N Leveled Book

Word Count: 580

Connections

Writing

Do you think the sled dogs and their drivers are heroes? Write a paragraph that explains why or why not. Use details from the book in your answer.

Social Studies

Draw the state of Alaska. Label at least five important landmarks.

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