

Meet Maggie!

Maggie Williams lives with her family in a small Alaskan town. Mushing is a big part of their lives. Maggie's dad used to race in the Iditarod every year. Now the family runs a business that takes people on sled dog tours and gives mushing lessons. This year, they are getting back into the big race. Maggie's older sister, Laura, has been training for several years. Now Laura is going to compete in the Iditarod for the first time . . .



Meet Alex!

Alex is Maggie's cousin. He lives in Florida and is visiting Alaska to see the race. His cousins visit him in Florida almost every year. But this is his first time in Alaska. He has never seen snow before! Alex is a little worried that the weather will be too cold for him. Still, hanging out with Maggie will be fun. So will cheering on Laura in the race . . .



Alex set his bags down in the guest room. He was excited to be in Alaska. But he couldn't stop shivering.

"Come on," Maggie said. "I'll give you a tour. You can even meet the dogs!"

"I don't know if I'm ready to go back outside," Alex replied. "I'm freezing just from walking between the car and the house."

Maggie rolled her eyes and handed him a heavy coat. Then she grabbed his arm and led him to the door.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF MUSHING

People have used sled dogs to get around in snowy areas for thousands of years. This way of traveling has a rich history in Alaska. It was once the only way to get to many parts of the state. This was before airplanes or snowmobiles. In the 20th century, Alaskans began holding dog sled races. It was a way to honor their past. This tradition has continued. The Iditarod and other races are held around the state every year.

The first Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race was held in 1973.



Maggie took Alex to the dog **kennels**. She led him from one dog to the next. She stopped near a dog with black fur and blue eyes.

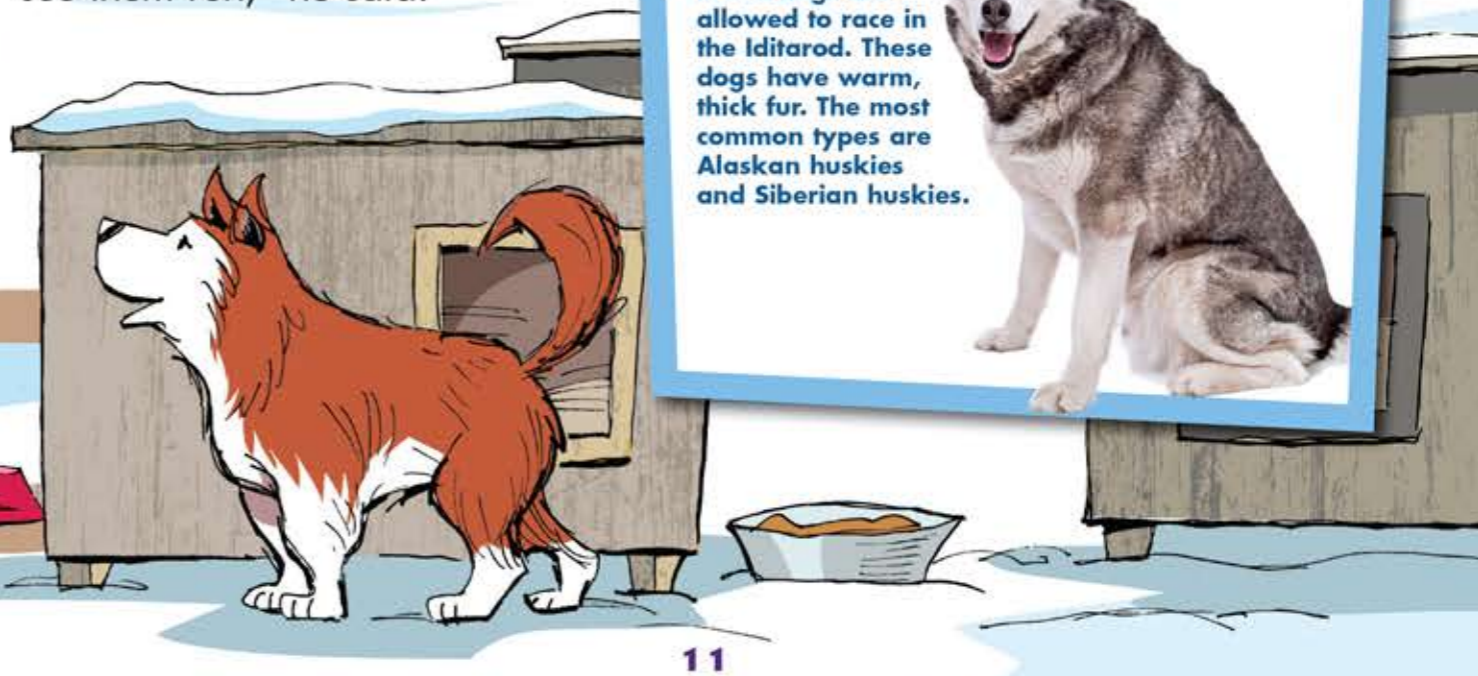
"This is Shadow," she said, petting the dog. "He's my favorite. I've helped raise him since he was a puppy. He's still young, but he's very fast."



She walked over to another dog with red and white fur.

"This is Max," she said. "He's the lead dog of Laura's team."

Alex laughed as Shadow licked his face. "I can't wait to see them run," he said.



MEET THE TEAM

An Iditarod team usually has 16 dogs. Some have special roles to play. One or two lead dogs run at the front of the group. They have to be able to react quickly to obstacles. Behind the lead dogs are swing dogs. They help the team turn left or right. The dogs right in front of the sled are called wheel dogs. They help steer the sled itself. All the other dogs are simply called team dogs. They add speed and power to the team.

Only northern breed dogs are allowed to race in the Iditarod. These dogs have warm, thick fur. The most common types are Alaskan huskies and Siberian huskies.

