



The Story of Balto

60-Minute History and Health Lesson

Interactive Video Conference

Grades: K-12 (*or Balto fans of any age!*)

TEACHER GUIDE

Balto: A History of Humans, Huskies, and Health in Alaska

Description

Why is this famous husky from Alaska found at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History? Join our historians for this heroic tale of dogs and mushers in Alaska, from the 1925 Serum Run to the Iditarod of today. Discover facts about the disease diphtheria, and why the outbreak in Nome, Alaska is so famous. Experience how humans and huskies survive in harsh Arctic conditions today with a collection of authentic Iditarod gear! Uncover the Cleveland connection to Balto and how he has become the “spokesdog” for this unique event in Cleveland history.

Objectives

- Use a map to locate Alaska and measure the distance between key stops in the Serum Run.
- Compare and contrast conditions in Alaska with those in Cleveland in the 1920's, and describe methods of transportation used in both areas
- Identify the pathogen that causes diphtheria, and the difference between a vaccine and antitoxin
- List ways that proper equipment can help dogs and humans exist in extreme cold
- Describe how cooperation and teamwork can complete an almost impossible job

Ohio's Learning Standards

Kindergarten: Geography – Spatial Thinking and Skills

Grade 1 & 2: History – Historical Thinking and Skills

Grade 3: Government – Civic Participation and Skills

Grade 4: Economics – Production and Consumption

Grade 5: Geography – Spatial Thinking and Skills

Grade 6: Government – Civic Participation and Skills

Grade 7: History – Historical Thinking and Skills

Grade 8: Geography – Spatial Thinking and Skills

National Health Education Standards

Kindergarten – Grade 12: Standards 1 & 2

- Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health
- Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology and other factors on human health

How You Can Help Us Make This Virtual Program A Success

- If your students are joining us from your classroom computer, please arrange your room and projection screen so everyone can see us clearly.
- If you and your students are joining us from your homes, we will have an educator monitoring the Chat feature for questions. We request that you or another staff person serve as a Co-Host to help monitor students for any inappropriate Chat or camera behavior.
- If you will have a hybrid class (some at school, some joining from home), our educator will monitor the Chat and camera behavior, and we reserve the right to temporarily move any disruptive students to our Waiting Room so we or school staff can correct the undesired behavior.
- If you prefer, we can turn off all cameras and interact solely via the Chat feature.

Vocabulary

antitoxin – a medicine containing antibodies produced by either an animal or human that has been exposed to a bacteria and the toxins (poisons) they produce. When used on a sick person, the antibodies bind to the toxins produced by these germs and stop them from harming the victim.

cockpit - the small space where the pilot sits to fly a plane.

dime museum – a small showplace specializing in the odd and unusual, charging a fee to view the items.

diphtheria - an extremely contagious bacterial disease affecting the throat and lungs. Toxin, or poison, caused by the bacteria can lead to a thick coating in the nose, throat, or airway. This coating is usually fuzzy gray or black and can cause breathing problems and difficulty in swallowing.

Iditarod – annual dogsled race from Anchorage, in south central Alaska, to Nome on the western Bering Sea coast. Each team of 12 to 16 dogs and their musher cover over 1150 miles in 10 to 17 days. There are certain pieces of equipment each team must have: an arctic parka, a heavy sleeping bag, an ax, snowshoes, musher food, dog food and boots for each dog's feet to protect against sharp ice.

prospector – someone who explores an area for valuable mineral deposits.

serum – fluid made from the blood of an animal inoculated for a specific disease.

telegraph – a long-distance communication system that relied on a signal of short and long pulses (dots and dashes) transmitted over an electrical wire from one place to another. In the standard Morse code used, each letter of the alphabet had its own code signal. For example, the standard call for help was SOS: ***_---***. Morse code was also used in signaling with flags, lights, etc.

vaccine – medicine containing either weakened or dead bacteria or viruses. When given to a well person, it allows their immune system to protect them from the specific disease.

Vaudeville – a variety show featuring short performances of singers, jugglers, comedians and, sometimes, trained animals.

Extension Activities

- Find stories of other amazing animal rescues and famous dog adventures.
- Investigate some of the other diseases that caused widespread problems in the past, such as smallpox, cholera, and malaria. Are they still problems today? Where? How are they prevented or treated? Are there any that have been eliminated worldwide?
- Look up alternative modes of transportation used before modern mechanical means, such as automobiles and planes. Were they restricted to certain environments or geographic locations?
- Find out about rescue dogs, seeing-eye dogs and service dogs. How they are trained and used to help people?
- View the Universal Pictures animated film about Balto and list the differences between what happens in the cartoon and the true story.

Online Resources for Teachers and Students

Click the link below to find additional online resources for teachers and students. These websites are recommended by our Museum Educators and provide additional content information and some fun, interactive activities to share with your class.

CMNH Educators regularly review these links for quality. Web addresses often change so please notify us if any links have issues.

Cleveland Museum of Natural History <https://cmnh.org/edlinks>

Some Common Questions We Are Asked About Balto and Alaska...

Who are the two most famous mushers from the Serum Run?

1.) Leonhard Seppala-- Born in Norway in 1877. Came to Nome in 1900 during the gold rush. During the Serum Run, drove 170 miles (274 kilometers) from Nome to Shaktoolik, from January 27th to the 31st, on his planned run to Nulato to meet the antitoxin. In addition to his return trip of 91 miles (146 km), from Shaktoolik to Golovin, that represents a grand total of 261 miles (420 km) covered by his team. That was nearly five times the total distance covered by any other team. Died in 1967 at age 90. His ashes were scattered along the Iditarod Trail by his wife, Constance.

2.) Gunnar Kaasen-- Born in Norway in 1882 and came to Nome in 1904. His team ran the last 53 miles in the Serum Run. At one point, the wind was so fierce that his sled was blown over and the box of serum was lost in the snow. Kaasen amazingly found the box and brought it into Nome on Feb. 2, 1925, with the well-known quote about Balto: "Damn fine dog". Kaasen retired from mushing in 1950, and died in November 1960 in Everett, WA.

How did Balto get the name "Balto"?

Balto was named after Samuel J. Balto who, along with Fridtjof Nansen first crossed the Greenland Ice Cap in 1888. He also held mining claims in Alaska.

When was Balto born, and when did he die?

Balto was born in either 1919 or 1922 (there are no conclusive historical records) in Leonhard Seppala's kennels in Nome. He died March 14, 1933, and was assisted in his last hours by Dr. R. R. Powell. His body was preserved by taxidermist Frank Tobin of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, where it is displayed today.

How old was Balto during the Serum Run to Nome?

Leonhard Seppala was once quoted as claiming that Balto was six years old at the time of the serum run, which would make Balto's birthdate in 1919.

Did Balto ever have any puppies?

No. He was neutered at 6 months because Seppala did not consider him worth breeding.

What other dogs were on Balto's team?

Seven dogs from Gunnar Kaasen's team came to Cleveland with him. Their names were Balto, Fox, Billy, Tillie, Sye, Old Moctoc and Alaska Slim.

How far did Balto and Gunnar Kaasen's team run?

53 miles. The entire Serum run from Nenana to Nome was 674 miles. With 20 mushers and their average of 13 dogs per team involved, there were over 200 dogs included in the rescue effort!

How long did it take for the teams to make the run from Nenana to Nome?

Less than 5 ½ days. That means they averaged a speed of 5 miles per hour.

Tell us more about Togo!

Togo was the lead Siberian Husky sled dog for Leonhard Seppala's team: courageous and strong, obedient and possessing an exceptional ability to find the trail and sense danger. Seppala's team had set out from Nome and traveled 150 miles to meet the relay and return with the serum. They then turned around and ran 91 more miles before handing off the serum to the next musher. Togo was 12 years old at that time! He was retired shortly after and died December 5th, 1929 at age 16. His body was mounted and is on display at Iditarod Trail Headquarters Museum in Wasilla, Alaska. His skeleton is stored at Yale University's Peabody Museum of Natural History, Connecticut.