

**The Heart of the Iditarod is the Heart of Our Classrooms  
Character Education – Teaching the Hearts of Our Students**

**Developed by: Cathy Walters**

**Discipline / Subject:**

**Appropriate for all subjects**

**Topic:**

**Character Education – The Iditarod is the Last Great Race. Teaching excellence, personal excellence, using the acronym RACE.**

**R - Respect and Responsibility**

**A – Attitude**

**C – Compassion**

**E – Excellence**

**Grade Level:**

**PK-5**

**Resources / References / Materials Teacher Needs:**

- *Personal Excellence* Song by Genevieve Fortuna
- *The True Story of Balto* by Natalie Standiford
- *Balto and the Great Race* by Elizabeth Cody Kimmel
- *Togo* by Robert J. Blake
- *The Great Serum Run* by Debbie S. Miller
- *Big-Enough Anna* by Pam Flowers
- *Granite* by Susan Butcher and David Monson
- Other books in your Iditarod library
- 2008 Iditarod Insider
  1. March 3 – Karen Ramstead Waves to the Eye in the Sky
  2. March 5 – Ion Earth Tracking
  3. March 6 – Tipped Sled on Rainy Pass
  4. March 10 – Cruising Down the Trail
  5. March 10 – The Athletes in Slow Motion
  6. March 10 – Sven and His Favorite Dog
- Descriptions of the awards given for outstanding character during the Iditarod: the Red Lantern Award, the Golden Stethoscope Award, the Humanitarian Award, Sportsmanship Award, and Most Inspirational Musher Award

**Lesson Summary:**

**This lesson(s) will focus on the fourth tenet of the acronym RACE, excellence. Through song, reading, video, and discussion students will learn what personal excellence looks like.**

**Standards Addressed: (Local, State, or National)**

**Although there are no character education standards, the Character Education Partnership, which sponsors the Schools of Character Awards program, states Principle 1: schools of character are those that promote core ethical values as the basis of good character and Principle 2: students grow to understand core values by studying and discussing them,**

observing behavioral models, and resolving problems involving the values.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will be able to tell if characters in literature and on the Iditarod Trail are showing personal excellence.
- Students will show personal excellence in the classroom.
- Students will memorize and perform the personal excellence song.
- Students will act out examples of personal excellence –ideas can be generated by the class or choose one of the books they have read to perform for another class, in an assembly setting, or for their parents (optional).

**Method of Assessment for Learning:**

- Students will be recognized by having their name placed on a poster of a giant sled. The acronym RACE is written across the top. When a student is “caught” showing respect their name goes under the “R” if they are “caught” showing compassion their name goes under the “C” and so on.

**Procedural Activities:**

Each quarter of the year focus on a different tenet of the acronym RACE. Tell your students that there is an Iditarod thread woven through the entire school year and that in matters of character we can learn a lot from all those associated with the Last Great Race. Select a day of the week and set a time aside that you call, “Matters of the Heart.” Make it a priority to spend time at least once a week focusing on character. On your first meeting introduce the personal excellence song. Sing it daily until they have it memorized and then at least once a week through the quarter. During the “Matters of the Heart” time read a book, tell a story from the Trail, or show an Insider clip. Discuss what personal excellence looks like. Ask the children if they have seen anyone in class showing personal excellence. Make this a weekly question so they will begin to look for those good behaviors and be able to report back to the class. Decide at the beginning of the quarter when and where the children will perform the personal excellence song and also what type of drama they will perform.

**Materials Students Need:**

To encourage family conversation about the character education tenets you can incorporate a “Baggy Book” Program. Ask your librarian to select twenty or so books showing personal excellence for your grade that you can keep in your classroom for the quarter. Send the books home in a bag at the end of each week with a sheet of paper for parents to record that they read the book to their child. It takes a bit of organization to keep it going, but it’s worth it.

Write the words to the song, Personal Excellence, on song chart paper. This song is piggybacked to the tune Zippity-Do-Dah. This is one of my personal favorites!

**Technology Utilized to Enhance Learning:**

[www.iditarod.com](http://www.iditarod.com) website for musher profiles, biographies, and the Iditarod Insider

**Other Information:** The 2008 awards can be found under Press and Media at

[www.iditarod.com](http://www.iditarod.com)

**Modifications for Special Learners/ Enrichment Opportunities**

**The “Baggy Book” Program is appropriate for all learners because parents will be reading to their children and then, hopefully, discussing the character education tenet, personal excellence, and how that was shown in the book.**

**This character education program can be used just during your Iditarod Unit, whether it is one week or four. In a one week program focus on one character tenet a day, Monday through Thursday, and review by making the RACE necklace (July 23) on Friday. Or stretch it out over four weeks focusing on one tenet a week. Please adapt it to your curriculum!**

