



# The Great Serum Race: Blazing the Iditarod Trail

*By Debbie S. Miller, Jon Van Zyle*

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**The Great Serum Race: Blazing the Iditarod Trail** By Debbie S. Miller, Jon Van Zyle

In the winter of 1925, Nome, Alaska, was hit by an unexpected and deadly outbreak of diphtheria. Officials immediately quarantined the town, but the only cure for the community of more than 1,400 people was antitoxin serum and the nearest supply was in Anchorage-hundreds of miles of snowbound wilderness away. The only way to get it to Nome was by dogsled.

Twenty teams braved subzero temperatures and blizzard conditions to run over 600 miles in six days in a desperate relay race that saved the people of Nome. Several of the dogs, including Togo and Balto, became national heroes. Today their efforts, and those of the courageous mushers, are commemorated every March by the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.

Jon Van Zyle's stunning oil paintings capture the brutal conditions, pristine wilderness, and sheer guts and determination demonstrated by the heroic mushers and dogs.

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### Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 3-6-Hot on the heels of Robert J. Blake's *Togo* (Philomel, 2002) comes another version of the story of the relay race across Alaska to save the people of Nome from an outbreak of diphtheria in 1925. While Blake focuses on one particular dog, Miller tells the more complete tale, beginning with the first dying children and including all of the details of carrying the serum from Anchorage, 1000 miles from its destination. The conditions were terrible as dog teams and mushers dealt with all sorts of problems caused by temperatures as low as 64 degrees below zero. Much of the story focuses on Leonhard Seppala, the musher who owned *Togo*, *Balto*, and many other sled dogs. Included are a list of the mushers who participated in the relay, additional information on the dogs that ran, brief information on the Iditarod, a trail map, and photographs of Seppala and *Togo*. Van Zyle, official artist of the Iditarod and a musher himself, has created vivid, full-spread paintings to bring the story to life. This book does not have the intensity of storytelling or art that is found in *Togo*, but for children whose interest is piqued by Blake's book, or for older readers, this is an excellent account told with lots of detail and drama.

*Susan Oliver, Tampa-Hillsborough Public Library System, FL*

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 2-4. This picture book for older children tells the full story of the legendary 1925 race to Nome, Alaska, to deliver diphtheria antitoxin serum. The run was actually a relay, completed by many mushers and teams (a chart showing the name of the musher and the distance covered is included in the back of the book), although a dog named *Balto* seems to have the best press agent; his participation in the race is memorialized with a statue in Central Park and a feature-length movie. There's a lot of text here, but Miller's telling is exciting, and her details are compelling. Particularly outstanding are Van Zyle's acrylic-on-Masonite illustrations that perfectly capture the icy chill and dim light of the Arctic. Simply put, each scene in the double-page spreads looks damn cold. Back matter describes what happened to some of the dogs that helped deliver the serum and explains how the serum run became the basis for the Iditarod. For more history about the race, suggest also Lew Freedman's *Father of the Iditarod* (1999). *Todd Morning*

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About the Author

**Debbie S. Miller** has written many acclaimed children's books, including *Arctic Lights*, *Arctic Nights*. She lives in Fairbanks, Alaska.

**Jon Van Zyle** is a noted children's book illustrator and the official artist of the *Iditarod Sled Dog Race*. He has twice participated in the run and was recently inducted into the Iditarod Hall of Fame. Jon lives with his wife, Jona, and their twenty Siberian huskies in Eagle River, Alaska.

Jon Van Zyle has also collaborated with Debbie S. Miller on seven books for children.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Scottie Kelly:**

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