

# The Race Against Death

A deadly disease. A dangerous journey. A team of heroic sled dogs.

## About the Story

**Lexile:** 1000L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

### Learning Objective:

to write a news article, create a video, or record a podcast about the events in a work of historical nonfiction

### Key Skills:

literary devices, author's craft, key ideas and supporting details, inference, figurative language, mood

### Essential Questions:

- Why do people risk their lives to help others?
- Why do certain events capture national attention?
- How can people work together to overcome challenges?

### Standards:

This article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards:

**R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, W.2, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6**

*For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.*



## Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of materials at  
**[scope.scholastic.com](http://scope.scholastic.com)**.

### Audio:

- The article
- Vocabulary Slideshow

### Differentiated article:

- Lower-Lexile version (printable)

**Literature Connections:** ideas for connecting to curricular texts

### Activities to print or project:

- Vocabulary
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Key Ideas and Details: The Story of Nome
- **Core Skills Workout:** Central Ideas & Details\*, Summarizing\*, Text Features
- Quiz\*
- Nonfiction Elements\*
- Contest Entry Form

*\*Available on two levels*

# Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

## Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

### 1 Preparing to Read

#### Do-Now: Consider an essential question.

(5 minutes)

Write this question on the board: *What motivates a person to risk his or her life to help someone else?* Give students three minutes to jot down their answers to this question on their own paper. Then spend two minutes discussing their ideas. Finally, explain that they are about to read a story in which many people risked their lives to save an entire town threatened by an outbreak of a deadly disease.

#### Preview vocabulary.

(8 minutes, activity sheet online)

Project or distribute the **Vocabulary Slideshow**. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. Highlighted words: *hypothermia, membrane, mishap, plight, rendering, serum, vaccinated*

### 2 Reading and Discussing

#### Read and discuss the article.

(45 minutes, activity sheet online)

- Have a volunteer read aloud the As You Read box on page 6.
- Create stations in your classroom with one of the close-reading questions listed below at each station. Break students into groups and have each group rotate through each station to discuss the question.

#### Close-Reading Questions

▶ **Consider the last line of the introduction:** “Unfortunately, the people of Nome would not be that lucky.” What literary device is the author using? What purpose does it serve? (literary devices, author’s craft) *The author is using foreshadowing. This line suggests that there would be a diphtheria outbreak in Nome. The*

*author likely uses foreshadowing to draw the reader into the story and make the reader want to keep reading to find out what happens.*

▶ **A place that is remote is far away and hard to get to. In the section “A Deadly Outbreak,” how does the author support the idea that Nome, Alaska, was a remote place?** (key ideas and supporting details) *In the section “A Deadly Outbreak,” the author explains that Nome is located on a peninsula surrounded by the Bering Sea, which can partially freeze in the winter. In 1925, the author explains, no ships were able to travel through the frozen sea to Nome. The author also writes that the closest major railroad to Nome was 674 miles away. These details support the idea that Nome was a remote place by showing that there were few ways to travel to and from the town.*

▶ **Why was the trip to Nome so dangerous for the mushers?** (key ideas and details, inference) *The trip to Nome was dangerous for the mushers because they had to take many risks to complete the journey quickly. For example, the author explains, Seppala took a shortcut across thin, unstable ice that could break and send him and his dogs into the sea, and which was “littered with ice rubble” that could injure the dogs. Since the mushers had to make the trip so quickly, they were forced to push their own bodies—and their dogs—to unsafe extremes. For example, the author writes that normally mushers do not travel in temperatures lower than 40 degrees below zero, but Shannon traveled at night when it was 50 below.*

▶ **On page 9, the author writes, “In spite of the risks, Shannon pushed on, pausing for only a few hours near the end to rest his dogs and warm his frozen body.” What does this detail tell you about Shannon?** (inference)

*From this detail, you can infer that Shannon was dedicated, strong, and brave. He did whatever it took to get the medicine to Nome in time, even when that meant putting his health at risk.*

► **Personification is the assignment of human qualities or emotions to nonhuman animals, objects, or ideas. What is the author personifying in the following line on page 10: “The minutes crawled by as Balto sniffed through several feet of snow . . .” What effect does this personification create?** (figurative language, mood) *The author is personifying time. By describing time as “crawling,” the author highlights the idea that because the situation was so tense, it felt like time was moving very slowly as Balto tried to find the trail. This creates a feeling of anxiety within the reader and adds to the drama of the moment as readers wait to find out if Balto got his team back on track.*

- Reconvene as a class to discuss each group’s responses to the questions. Then discuss the following critical-thinking questions as a class.

### **Critical-Thinking Questions**

► **Why is it unlikely that the people of Nome would face the same crisis today that they faced in 1925?** *Today most Americans are*

*vaccinated against diphtheria, so a diphtheria outbreak in Alaska is highly unlikely. Plus, modern forms of transportation such as jet airplanes, helicopters, and ice-cutting ships would likely be able to reach Nome even in the winter.*

► **Why do you think the story of Nome captured national attention?** *Answers will vary. Students may say that it captured national attention because it was dramatic and suspenseful—many lives were at stake. The plan to save Nome was also daring and involved many people working together toward a common goal.*

## **3 Skill Building**

### **Featured Skill: Key Ideas and Details**

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

Have students work in groups to complete the activity sheet **Key Ideas and Details: The Story of Nome**. They will identify the most important ideas and details to include in the article, podcast, or video that the prompt on page 10 instructs them to create. *For alternate culminating tasks, see the box below.*

## **Differentiate and Customize**

### **For Struggling Readers**

In one paragraph, summarize how Nome was saved from a deadly diphtheria outbreak.

### **For Advanced Readers**

Research another crisis that brought many people together (for example, the cave rescue of the soccer team in Thailand last summer). Create a news program in which “characters” from that crisis as well as from “The Race Against Death” are interviewed about what happened and how they helped.

### **For Social Media Gurus**

Tweet about the events of 1925 as though they were happening today. Create a series of live tweets with accounts from various people—the mushers, Dr. Welch, families in Nome, journalists, and anyone else you’d like to include.

### **For Poets**

Retell the story of “The Race Against Death” as a poem written from the point of view of any person or dog in the article—Dr. Welch, Balto, Seppala, Kaasen, etc.