

## ADAPTING A READING FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS TO FOCUS ON VOCABULARY

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When adapting materials, some teachers might think only about how to make them more accessible for beginners or lower level students; however, materials can also be adapted to be more challenging to meet the needs of more advanced learners. In this Teacher's Corner activity, teachers learn how an article can be adapted to raise the level of its vocabulary. The reading, "[Iditarod: Annual Sled Dog Race](#)," from the journal *English Teaching Forum*, focuses on Alaska and the annual 1,000-mile dog race across the state. There are a number of readings in this resource, but the article used for this activity is found on pages 52-53.

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### LEVEL

Advanced

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### LANGUAGE FOCUS

Reading  
Vocabulary

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### GOALS

During this activity, students will be able to:

- Use an article about Alaska to practice using and manipulating new vocabulary
- Recognize and define new vocabulary words from the [Academic Word List \(AWL\)](#), highlighted in the reading
- Change highlighted words to appropriate synonyms
- Rewrite sentences so that highlighted words must change their form to a different part of speech

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### MATERIALS

- Copy of the original reading "[Iditarod: Annual Sled Dog Race](#)" (for teacher)
- Copies of the adapted reading with highlighted AWL vocabulary (see Appendix A)
- Access to dictionaries and thesauri (print or online)

## PREPARATION

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- Read the article (Appendix A) and practice completing this exercise prior to asking students to complete it
- For each student, make a copy of the article with the AWL vocabulary highlighted (Appendix A)

## PROCEDURE

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1. Begin class by putting students into small groups and asking them to share what they know about Alaska. As they discuss, offer some other topics related to the state of Alaska. They can then discuss what they know or guess as to what these topics might mean.
  - a. For example, ask them to discuss the climate, geography, people, etc.
  - b. As the students discuss the topics, write the name of the article on the board: “Iditarod: Annual Sled Dog Race.”
  - c. Draw students’ attention to the title of the article and have them discuss in their groups what they know about this specific Alaskan event.
  - d. Bring the class together and have them share what they know and what questions they might have.
2. Explain to the class that today they are going to use an article about Alaska to work on some new vocabulary words from the Academic Word List (AWL).
  - a. If students have not worked with vocabulary from the AWL before, explain that it is a list of the 570 words most commonly used in academia.
3. First, students are going to read the article with the new AWL vocabulary words highlighted.
  - a. Hand out copies of the article (see Appendix A) to each student.
  - b. Give students sufficient time to read the article on their own, paying close attention to the vocabulary words that are in bold print.

- i. Encourage students to write a definition and a translation next to the highlighted words if they know what a particular word means.
  - c. Once students have had a chance to read the article, have them return to their groups to discuss the highlighted vocabulary. Have students work together to write down definitions and translations of the new words.
  - d. After students work for several minutes, hand out dictionaries to learners or tell them they can use computers or their mobile devices to look up the new words.
  - e. As they work together to find and define the words, tell students to correct any incorrect definitions they had written down.
4. Tell students to return to working individually. Have students go through the article again, but this time they replace each AWL word with an appropriate synonym.
- a. If teachers find it necessary to model, elicit synonyms for the first word in the article *teams*. Write students' suggestions on the board and then have them choose the word they think is the best fit.
  - b. If a highlighted word is repeated in the text, students should try to find different synonyms for each instance of the word.
5. After students have worked through the article and changed the words to appropriate synonyms, tell students to return to their groups and share the changes they made.
- a. Also encourage them to speak up in their groups if someone's synonym does not have quite the same meaning or does not work as a substitution.
6. Bring students back together as a large group and explain that the next changes they are going to make relate to parts of speech of the highlighted words.
- a. Clarify that when a word changes to a different part of speech, the meaning of the word is slightly changed. By understanding these changes in meaning, learners will have a better understanding of the word and all of the words in its family.

- b. Remind students that not all words can change to another part of speech.
  - c. Explain that if a word changes its part of speech, it will not work in the same position in the sentence. For example, change the word *economics* to *economical*, and the word changes from a noun to an adjective. In English, nouns and adjectives do not sit in the same place in a sentence.
7. Begin by modeling and working with the students on a single word from the article.
- a. First, write the word *transportation* on the board and ask students which part of speech it is.
  - b. Then, ask students to suggest other parts of speech for the word, e.g., *transport*, *transportable*, *transportability*, *transporter*.
  - c. Have students look at the first sentence in the article using *transportation*.
  - d. Ask students to rewrite the sentence using the word *transport* instead.
  - e. Have volunteers write their new sentences on the board or share them with the class.
8. Explain that now students will do this for each of the highlighted vocabulary words in the text. Students will alter the text to retain the meaning but use different parts of speech for the new vocabulary words.
- a. Try to have students start this activity in class, but if time is short, return to the activity in the next class or assign it as homework.
  - b. Save a few minutes at the end for students to return to groups and share one or two sentences that they have rewritten.

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### VARIATIONS

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This activity can be adapted to fit additional needs of advanced learners in terms of other language skills. Instead of focusing on vocabulary, teachers could adapt the text to focus on a grammar point that has been studied in class. For example, if students are working on writing complex sentences, the teacher

could rewrite sentences combining and adding information as a way to model sentence complexity. Then, the activity could be adjusted to practice this particular skill or grammar point.

Another variation is to focus not on language skills when adapting the text but on another element such as content or rhetorical structure. Teachers could focus on a particular genre of writing that would require changing the language used to present information and ideas. For example, teachers working on comparative writing strategies might bring in another topic to incorporate into the article to create a comparison, such as between two traditional dog races.

## APPENDIX A

The following article's highlighted vocabulary words are all listed on the [Academic Word List](#) (AWL). In order to identify AWL words, a [AWL highlighter](#) was used. The [original article](#) was copied and pasted into the tool's text box, and a version was created where the words from the AWL were highlighted.

**Iditarod: Annual Sled Dog Race**

By William P. Ancker

Mushing is the sport of racing **teams** of dogs that pull sleds over snow. It grew from an ancient and practical means of **transportation** of native people of Alaska: using muscular dogs to carry cargo through harsh winter weather. The largest and most famous sporting event in Alaska is Iditarod, an **annual** race of **teams** of sled dogs and their drivers (or "mushers") that takes almost two weeks and covers **approximately** 1,800 kilometers (1,120 miles) from Anchorage to Nome. "Mushing" is the act of racing **teams** of dogs that pull sleds over snow. It grew from an ancient and practical means of **transportation** of native people of Alaska: using muscular dogs to carry cargo through harsh winter weather. The largest and most famous sporting event in Alaska is Iditarod, an **annual** race of **teams** of sled dogs and their drivers (or "mushers") that takes almost two weeks and covers **approximately** 1,800 kilometers (1,120 miles) from Anchorage to Nome.

The Iditarod commemorates a historic event from the winter of 1925, when a relay of 20 **teams** of dogs and mushers was used to deliver urgently needed medicine to Nome. Severe weather conditions made delivery by boat or airplane impossible. That heroic effort of men and their beloved dogs prevented an outbreak of diphtheria in Nome and saved hundreds of lives.

The first Iditarod was held in 1973. The race has grown steadily since then, both in the number of entrants who compete and the number of **volunteers** who help behind the scenes. Over the years, mushers and their dogs have come from Alaska, 20 other U.S. states, and 14 foreign countries to compete in "the last great race."

The race begins every year on the first Saturday of March in the city of Anchorage, which is on the Gulf of Alaska in the northern Pacific Ocean. It ends in the town of Nome on the coast of the Bering Sea. The middle **section** of the racecourse, between the villages of Ophir and Kaltag, alternates each year. A northern **route** is taken on even numbered years and a southern **route** on **odd** numbered years. This **enables** more villages to **participate** as checkpoints during this test of endurance across very sparsely populated wilderness.

The checkpoints are essential for a race of this length, difficulty, and **isolation**. Because there are no roads **linking** every **section** of the race, airplanes are used to ferry supplies and people before, during, and after the event. In fact, the race has its own "air force" of 23 **volunteer** pilots who **transport** dozens of race personnel, such as judges, dog handlers, and veterinarians, and tons of cargo, including dogs taken out of the race due to sickness or **injury**.

There are important rules in Iditarod to protect the health and safety of the **teams** of musher and dogs. During the race, the mushers must take several mandatory rest stops. One eight-hour stop **occurs** in the middle of the race, and another **occurs** before the last 124-kilometer (77-mile) **section** of the race into Nome. In addition, at one point during the race whenever each musher decides is best the **team** must rest for 24 hours. The mushers have to carry certain safety **equipment** for themselves, such as a warm sleeping bag, a pair of snowshoes, and a small cooker for boiling water.

This safety **equipment** also includes **items** for the **teams** of dogs, which can **range** between 12 and 16 animals per sled. Two pairs of "booties" for each dog are **required** to protect the animals' paws from sharp ice and other obstacles on the trail. Most of the sled cargo is dog food. Each musher must also carry a special veterinarian notebook, which is presented to the veterinarian who examines all the dogs on a **team** at each checkpoint. The rules of Iditarod **specifically** state, "There will be no cruel or inhumane treatment of dogs." A **unique feature** of Iditarod, in addition to the extreme climatic conditions and unusual **mode** of racing **vehicle**, is that women and men mushers compete together. In fact, in the 30 years of this grueling race, a woman has won five times. In 1985, Libby Riddles was the first woman to win. Clearly, winning Iditarod takes months of planning and training. Perhaps an **indication** of the tremendous dedication is that 20 **editions** have been won by only five mushers.

Iditarod has an education **component**, too. Every year, a Teacher on the Trail is **selected** among numerous applicants to observe the race firsthand and prepare lessons based on the race for elementary students. The **selected** teacher follows the trail where the **teams** race, sleeps in a sleeping bag at checkpoints, travels on Iditarod Air Force planes, and is present for the finish in Nome. Every day during the race, the teacher uses a laptop **computer** to post news reports, photos, and lesson plans to the official race Web **site** for classroom use around the world. There are other responsibilities, too. The Teacher on the Trail must also attend and report on the Junior Iditarod, a short sled dog race for teenage mushers held beforehand, and may be called upon to serve as an official spokesperson for Iditarod and make many public appearances at schools in Alaska and other states.