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How did dogs save Nome, Alaska?

1 In January 1925, the town of Nome, Alaska, faced a deadly threat. A dangerous sickness called diphtheria was spreading through the town. Some people had already died. Many more would die without medicine. The only thing that could stop the spread of the disease was a medicine that was nearly 900 miles away in Anchorage.



2 Unfortunately, getting the medicine to Nome would not be easy. The weather was so bad that airplanes and trains could not get all the way there. The only way to get the medicine to Nome was by dogsled. A train took the medicine the first 220 miles. From there, teams of sled dogs would have to take the medicine the 674 miles to Nome.

3 More than 20 people—called “mushers”—and sled dog teams took part in the relay. They traveled through temperatures that were almost 40° below zero. Many times, the wind was strong enough to knock over sleds and dogs. The snowy conditions often made it difficult to stay on course.

4 On February 2, 1925, six days after the journey began, Gunnar Kaassen and his team of sled dogs arrived in Nome with the medicine. They were cold and exhausted. Kaassen said it was the most difficult trip he had ever made. Today, a famous dogsled race called the Iditarod helps us remember the life-saving efforts of these brave men and dogs.

Circle the correct answer for questions 1–5.

Write your answer to question 6 on a separate piece of paper.



1. The deadly threat facing Nome, Alaska, was _____.
A freezing temperatures
B snowy conditions
C strong winds
D a sickness
2. Which word in paragraph 4 means “very tired”?
A exhausted
B difficult
C brave
D cold
3. Which paragraph describes the mushers’ journey?
A 1
B 2
C 3
D 4
4. You can decide from the article that if the dog teams had not been successful _____.
A many people would have died
B a train or airplane would have had to take over
C the town of Nome would have been covered in snow
D the people in the town would have gotten better on their own
5. *Course* can have the following meanings. Mark the meaning used in paragraph 3.
A a class
B a path
C a plan of action
D an area where a competition is held

6. Imagine that you lived in Nome, Alaska, in 1925. Write a paragraph about how you felt when you heard that the medicine had arrived.