

Grade 11 - Narrative

Mushing Experience Needed

Caitlin sat at her desk in the classroom, staring at the snowflakes falling gently to the earth. The sight was familiar to the citizens of the community who seemed captivated by the occurrence and ventured outside. Unfortunately, Caitlin would not be able to go outside until the meeting with her journalism instructor, Ms. Gallagher, and a few other students was completed. Each student was there to discuss a topic for the next journalism project that had to somehow display community involvement.

Caitlin was seated in a desk adjacent to Ms. Gallagher. She explained to her instructor that she wanted to write an article about dogsledding since it is a prevalent sport in the community during the winter. I have not determined how to involve the community in my project.

“Caitlin, I think the topic of your project epitomizes a significant number of people in the community. My concern is your familiarity with the topic. Do you have any experience dogsledding?” asked Ms. Gallagher.

Caitlin’s excitement about the project now turned to nervousness. “I don’t have personal experience in the subject area, but I could interview people in the community who could enlighten me about the topic,” replied Caitlin.

“Interviews are a great way to retrieve information firsthand from an expert in a specific area. As far as the community involvement requirement, maybe you could speak to Marcia Simmons. Marcia is a member of the city council and is currently planning the Frost Fest, which is scheduled for next month,” replied Ms. Gallagher.

Caitlin trudged home, contemplating different possibilities of how to involve the community. Her first impulse was to complete research on the Internet about dogsledding before contacting Marcia Simmons about her ideas.

After completing her research, Caitlin became even more overwhelmed by the complexity of the sport, the massive amount of equipment needed, and the extensive training that dogsledding involved. Caitlin was beginning to think that the task was unattainable for someone her age, until an underlined word on her to-do list attracted her attention—delegate. She finally concluded that she could delegate various people to complete different tasks. Slowly, Caitlin’s worries started to subside so she decided to phone Ms. Simmons to set up a meeting.

Ms. Simmons met with Caitlin later that afternoon to discuss the purpose of Frost Fest and determine how Caitlin would be able to contribute to the events of the festival.

“Frost Fest has been an annual festival for many years now. It is held each winter

to display outdoor winter activities. What is the topic of your project and how do you see it correlating with the festival?" asked Ms. Simmons.

"My project is about dogsledding—a popular sport in this community. It would provide citizens who are unfamiliar with dogsledding knowledge about the sport from expert mushers in this community. People could also experience the sport by watching a dogsled race," replied Caitlin.

Ms. Simmons was impressed with Caitlin's enthusiasm. Together they created a list of tasks that needed to be accomplished in order for Caitlin's idea to be a success.

The next day at school, Caitlin was granted permission from the art instructor to talk with art students about Frost Fest. Caitlin explained that she was seeking art students who would be interested in designing fliers. The design on the flier would also be used for posters to advertise the festival throughout the community.

By the end of the first week, a few art students had completed the fliers, which displayed curly-tailed dogs navigating through the snow while pulling a sled. The fliers also informed the community about volunteer opportunities—creating a trail for a dogsled race and providing expert information about dogsledding. A contact number was given, and fliers were posted throughout the community.

By the following week, progress had been made on the events for Frost Fest. Caitlin had received a phone call from Salina Barnes, an expert musher. Caitlin scheduled a meeting with her and asked Ms. Simmons if she would be available. Ms. Simmons agreed.

Salina brought one of her sled dogs, Skyler, to the meeting and reminisced about her mushing days in Canada. She explained that she had competed in several races and had won several medals. She also described the training process and the commands used when training her dogs.

"Your expertise in the area of dogsledding is outstanding and would be very informative to the citizens of this community. Would you be interested sharing your knowledge with others?" asked Caitlin.

"I would be honored to speak to this community about my experiences and training processes," responded Salina.

The following week, another group of dogsledding experts agreed to design a trail for the dogsled race. The course would have different levels of difficulties—flat land, hills, and forested areas. Bright orange flags would be used to designate the trail.

Two weeks later, Caitlin stood before a multitude of inquisitive spectators at Frost Fest. They had gathered to hear Salina speak. Salina had brought her team of sled dogs to model different commands. The dogs started moving with the command "hike"

and then turned right when they heard “gee.” They turned left after hearing “haw” and stopped with the command “whoa.” The audience was captivated by how well the dogs listened and obeyed the commands.

Later, many of the spectators went to a hill where bleachers overlooked the racecourse. The spectators gasped and cheered as racers had mishaps and regained footing around the course. Ms. Simmons and Caitlin were at the finish line to pass out medals to the winners of the race. Afterward, Caitlin acknowledged everyone who had helped make the events of the day possible.

Caitlin reflected on the project on her way home. She had begun with several misgivings, and the project had been a part of her life for several weeks, but in the end she had gained a sense of fulfillment for the experience she had provided to the community.