



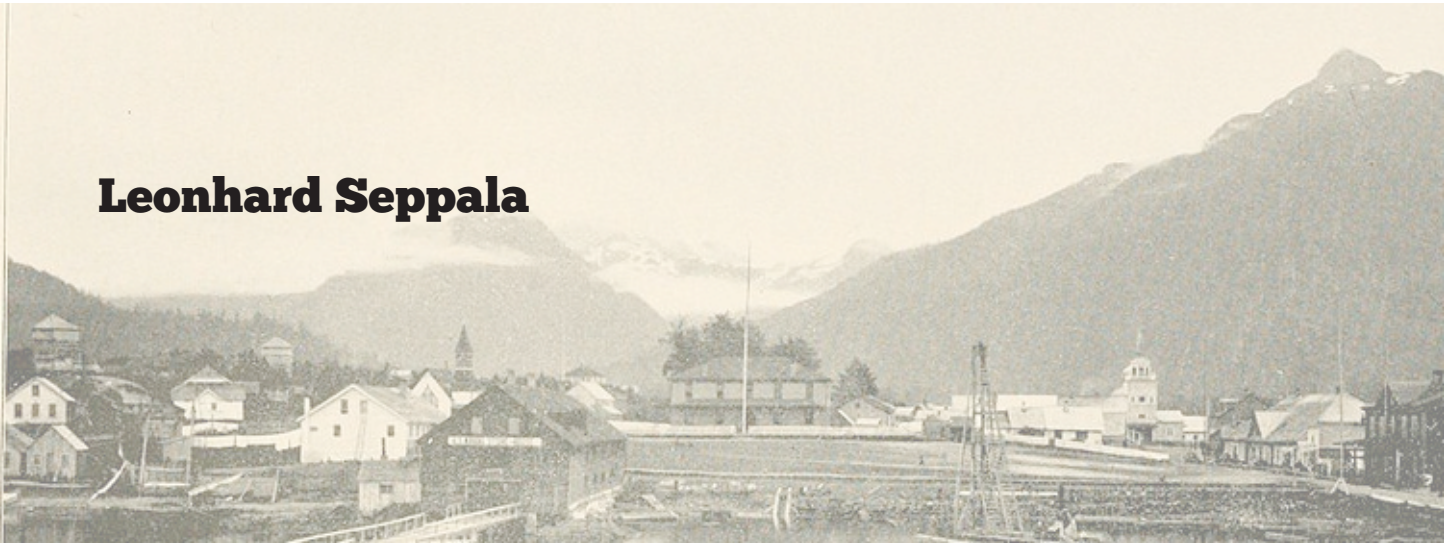
The **Great Race** of **Mercy**

Locate and label the following places and things on the map of Alaska above.

RUSSIA ARCTIC CIRCLE
 NORTON SOUND IDITAROD TRAIL
 NOME JUNEAU ANCHORAGE
 ARCTIC OCEAN PACIFIC OCEAN

THE GREAT RACE OF MERCY was a race to deliver serum that would save the lives of hundreds of people at risk of catching diphtheria in Nome, Alaska in 1925. The serum, relayed over 600 miles with 20 sled dog teams and their mushers, was delivered successfully.

Leonhard Seppala



LEONHARD SEPPALA played a crucial role in the serum run to Nome. Born in Norway, he immigrated to Alaska in the early 1900s when a friend convinced him to work for a mining company there.

Seppala's first team of sled dogs fell into his lap by chance. Seppala's friend had purchased the dogs, Siberian huskies, for someone else but ended up giving them to Seppala. "I literally fell in love with them from the start," he later said. "I could hardly wait for sledding snow to start their training." In 1915, Seppala won the All Alaska Sweepstakes, the first of three back-to-back victories in the 408-mile race. He built a name for himself as one of Alaska's best mushers.

At the time of the diphtheria outbreak, Seppala was delivering mail and freight by dogsled through the Alaskan wilderness. Seppala still favored Siberian husky dogs and had trained a strong team for competition. Leading the team was Togo, a husky with impressive grit and speed.

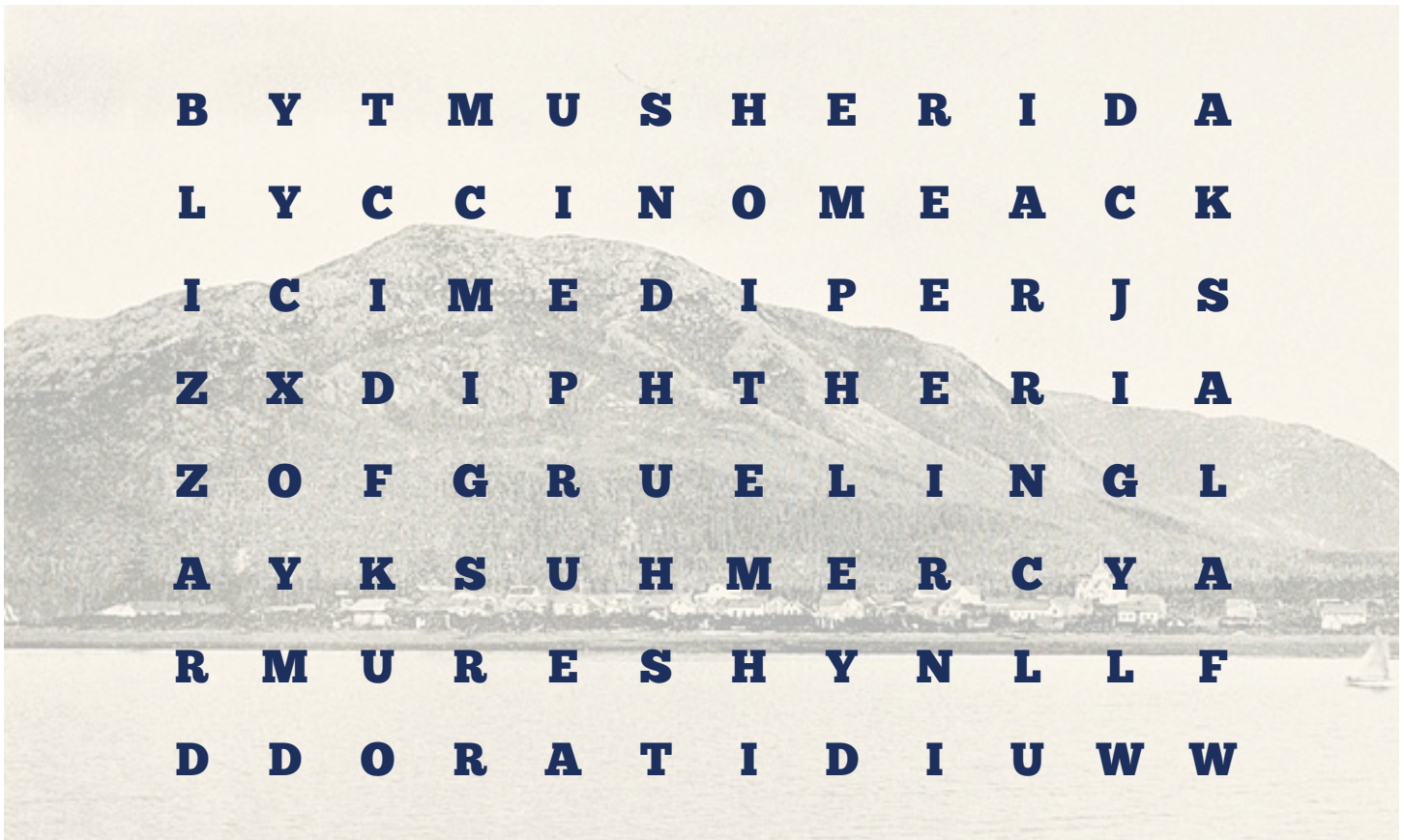
The star husky had a questionable beginning on the team. Togo was a thin, scrappy pup who did not look promising. In fact, Seppala tried multiple times to sell him, but each time, Togo found his way back home! Though he looked scrawny, Togo proved that he was a

fast, powerful racer and won himself a place as Seppala's lead dog.

In the Great Race of Mercy, Togo and Seppala transported the serum for almost twice the length of any other team. When the serum was passed to Seppala at night, he made the decision to brave the high winds and blistering cold in the dark in order to pass the Norton Sound. He did not want to waste time waiting for daybreak, even if it meant greater danger. The conditions on the Sound were risky because the ice was thin in certain parts. This meant risking his own and his dogs' lives, as well as the lives of the citizens of Nome: all would be lost if something should go wrong for him and his team.

Even after the team crossed the perilous Norton Sound in a blizzard, they still had to face the final challenge—ascending a ridge with steep, dangerous grades. Sleep deprived and practically freezing, the team reached Golovin in record time. From there, only 78 miles stood between the serum and Nome.

Thanks to this death-defying feat, the serum arrived to the citizens of Nome in record time. In total, Seppala and Togo traveled 91 miles, almost twice the distance of any other team on the relay.



Word Search

ALASKA – the largest but most sparsely populated U.S. state. Bordering Canada, the Arctic Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean, it is unconnected to the lower 48 states.

BLIZZARD – an extreme snowstorm with strong winds, intense cold, and low visibility.

DIPHTHERIA – a highly contagious bacterial disease that can be fatal.

EPIDEMIC – a widespread, rapid growth of a disease affecting a large number of people at the same time.

GRUELING – exhausting, very tiring, demanding.

HUSKY – a breed of strong, medium-sized dogs often used in arctic regions for hunting and pulling sleds.

IDITAROD – an Alaskan town that flourished in the early 1900s but is now

abandoned. It is also the namesake of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, which takes place every year with a route that goes from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska. It was inspired by the 1925 serum run.

MERCY – an act of compassion or kindness.

MUSHER – a person who races with a dog team and sled. Mushers used to be professional deliverers, but nowadays, they compete for sport.

NOME – a city in Alaska with a population of roughly 3,600. It is located on the southern Seward Peninsula coast on Norton Sound of the Bering Sea.

SERUM – a liquid usually used to create immunity against an infection or disease. Synonyms for serum: antigen, antitoxin, vaccine.

Interview Assignment

Pretend you are Seppala and a reporter wants to interview you about the serum run. Answer the interview questions based on the information that you just read.

1. I understand you are not a Native Alaskan. Where were you born and why did you immigrate to Alaska?

2. How did you initially feel about training your first team of sled dogs? What kinds of dogs were you training?

3. What was Togo like as a puppy?

4. You tackled the hardest and riskiest part of the 674-mile journey from Nenana to Nome. Describe what the conditions were like as you traveled 91 miles from Shaktoolik to Golovin to complete your part of the journey. Can you highlight one of the life-threatening events that you faced.