

## **Balto the Sled Dog (Main idea, themes, narrative)**

### **Objectives and outcomes:**

- To familiarize students with vocabulary words (tragedy, perilous, expedition, ominous, surveyed, insistence)
- To work on dramatic skills, especially use of voice and body to express emotions and convey character
- To bolster analysis of a narrative to figure out themes and main idea

**Grade level:** 3rd to 6th

**Duration:** 30 minutes

### **I. Introduction (five minutes)**

- A. Gather students in a circle sitting on the floor.
- B. Introduce concepts to students that they might not be familiar with. Ones that are especially notable to understanding this story are dog sleds (what they look like, how the dogs are arranged), diphtheria (a deadly disease of the nose and throat that killed many people before the vaccine became widespread), Alaska in 1925 (very isolated, no roads, no commercial planes)

### **II. “Woosh” of Balto story (twenty minutes)**

- A. Instructor has students sit in a circle, and narrates a story. Instructor will call individual students into the center of the circle to perform roles in the story. Instructor will feed lines and actions of the characters to the students, and the students will act out what has been narrated. When the instructor says “woosh”, the students in the center of the circle go back to their spots on the edge of the circle, and the instructor will continue narrating the story with new students playing the characters in the next part. An example of what the woosh narration may look like is at the bottom of this lesson plan.

### **III. Conclusion**

- A. Hold a discussion with the students
  1. Ask students to provide details and a summary of the story to gauge their retention of the events in the story
  2. Ask students to discuss lessons that they may have learned from the lesson. Ones to highlight include not being counted out for being younger, to not judge people based on their appearance or age, and to have confidence in doing the right thing. Especially try to relate these lessons back to the students.

## **Modification and Differentiation**

This lesson can open or close with a game, a writing component can be added in, and it can be used for a variety of purposes. I found this to be a very effective story to tell in many different classrooms for different purposes. As far as the woosh narration goes, I would recommend

improvising additional dialogue and actions in the parts that are narration heavy to keep students engaged.

### *Example woosh of Balto*

Back in 1925, in one of the most isolated parts of Alaska, there was a town called Nome. There were two children, and their parents, in the doctor's office, and the children were very sick. The doctor checked out the children and said "It seems your children have caught diphtheria, which is a very deadly disease". The parents, very worried, asked "what can we do??" The doctor said, "there has been an outbreak in our town, and I'm afraid I have run out of the cure. I will have to call for more."

Woosh

The news of the outbreak was broadcasted by radio to the capital of Alaska, Juneau, and the governor said to his assistant "we need to send more of the cure to Nome to prevent a **tragedy**." The assistant replied, "Mr. Governor, there are no roads or trains to Nome! The closest we can get the cure is 600 miles away." The Governor thought for a second, and then said, "I know! We can have the cure delivered by dogsled!" The assistant said, "this will be a very **perilous** journey. We need to find the best dog team to go on this **expedition**." The Governor replied, "you're right. We'll have a race to see who the most fit dogs are."

Woosh

The race was held later that day. A young, handsome dog named Balto entered the race, wanting to do his part to help. Two older dogs came up to Balto and made fun of him. The first dog said, "what can you do, you're just a little pup!" and the other dog told Balto, "I bet you've never even done a race before! How could you ever expect to win?" All Balto said back was "Let's just see what happens." The dogs went to the starting line, ran the race, and Balto won!

Woosh

The journey begins with three dogs in a dogsled line, with one dog in the front, Balto in the middle, and another dog in the back. They sled all day for 125 miles (have students walk around the circle to show the long journey). The lead dog stopped and said, "whew, I am tired!" The back dog said, "yeah, me too." Balto said, "Let's stop, **survey** the area, and find camp." So the three dogs split up and looked around. Balto said, "something feels very **ominous** about this bush over here," and he felt chills down his spine. Balto looked at the bush and heard a growl coming from it. Suddenly, a bear jumped out from behind the bush! The other two dogs ran away, and Balto was left in a stand-off with the bear.

Woosh

Balto, thinking quick on his feet "I can't fight the bear, but since I **surveyed** the area, I know there's a frozen lake right over there." Balto slowly backed away while the bear crept closer and

closer toward him, leads the bear into the lake, but falls in as well. Balto yelled out “help! Help!” but started to fall in the water. The other dogs hear Balto, go to the lake and pull Balto out. Balto says, “thanks guys! I thought I was gone for sure.” The first dog says, “oh no, thank you! That bear could’ve gotten all of us!” The second dog said, “yeah, just don’t let it happen again.” The three dogs went back to their campsite and went back to sleep.

Woosh

-The dogs got back into their formation, with a lead dog, Balto in the middle, and a dog in the back. A couple more days pass, and the dogs have been going hundreds of miles. The lead dog stops and says, “hold on, I don’t know which way is north. We need to be going north, but I feel like we’ve been going east.” Balto says, “We’re going the right way. We’ve been going the right way this whole time!” The lead dog says to Balto, “hush! You don’t know anything, you’re just a pup!” The dog in the back said, “I don’t know, we’ve been going for a long time and I think if Balto knows which way we’re going, maybe we should let him lead.” The lead dog says, “oh, so now you’re turning on me?!” So the dogs held a vote, and they decided Balto would be in the lead.

Woosh

After five days of sledding, Balto and the other dogs arrive in Nome with the cure. The doctor thanks the dog musher, and the musher tells him that it was thanks to Balto’s **insistence** that they were able to make it so quickly. Everyone cheers for Balto!

Woosh