Murphy, Gold Rush Dog

Written by Alison Hart | Illustrated by Michael G. Montgomery

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Ages 7–10
AR • Lexile • F&P • GRL V; Gr 5

ABOUT THE BOOK
Murphy is a sled dog owned by Ruston Carlick, a brutal man who starves and mistreats his sled team at every turn. One evening Murphy escapes and finds a new, loving family in Sally and her mother, who are trying to build a new life in Nome. But life in the mining town is not easy, and when it seems they may have to return to San Francisco, Sally and Murphy strike out on their own, hoping to find gold to make a permanent home for themselves. Danger awaits them on the wild Alaskan tundra in the form of blizzards, bears, and Murphy’s former owner, who will stop at nothing to get Murphy back. Will the intrepid pair survive their journey and outwit Carlick to find their fortune?

THEMES
Survival | Working dogs | The Nome Gold Rush
Gold mining in the 1900s | American History

ACTIVITY WORKSHEETS
The following activity worksheets are included in this guide:
• Vocabulary Word Match
• Research and Writing Assignment

AFTER YOU READ
Use the following excerpts from the book as post reading discussion questions.
• When I was young I had known a gentle touch, a heaping bowl, and a loving home. Then I’d been sold to Carlick who needed a new dog for his sled team. He’d driven us hard. We’d traveled for days and days with no kind words, no warm straw bed, and not enough food to fill our stomachs. So far, this place called Nome was no better than the camps where we’d stayed on the way. And it was not home. (p. 5)
  o Why are Murphy and the other dogs on his team treated so terribly by Carlick?
  o Compared to Murphy’s previous “loving home,” why does he not consider Nome “home”?• Under the wood pilings of a dock, an Inupiaq family camped. [...] the largest one held out a sliver of meat. Food! I stepped toward him, but glanced up at his face. There was no smile, and I spotted a leather strap in his hand. I leaped away. (p. 10)
  o Why does Murphy run away from the food the Inupiaq family offers?
  o Consider some reasons why the family, or anyone else in Nome, would want to catch Murphy.
• I crawled from behind the barrel, wagging my tail. Once it had been full and silky. Now it was dirty and thin. As I crept toward her, I lifted my lip in a grin, hoping she would see the dog I used to be. Sally’s mouth dropped open and her eyes filled with wonder. She dropped to her knees and wrapped her arms around me. “Oh! You are the most handsome animal I have ever seen!” (p. 23)
  o Explain why Murphy chooses to approach Sally and her mother instead of the other passengers.
“We must be practical, Mama, if we are to thrive in Nome—and escape Grandmama’s grip.” She shuddered and I pressed my nose into her palm. She stroked my head. “Perhaps we will make our fortune with your typewriter. Perhaps we will find gold. I don’t care how we survive, but we will. Because I will never go back to Grandmama’s house. Never.” (p. 34)

Since that day Mama had given Sally a shake, Sally often talked to me of “our claim” and “finding gold.” I wasn’t quite sure what she meant, but I did know one thing—she never talked again to Mama about this trip. (p. 69)

See-ya-yuk was a patient and quiet fisherman like me, but Sally was as noisy as the native dogs who crashed about on the shore yelping at hares. “See-ya-yuk!” She called. “I see gold in the water. Wouldn’t it be better to fish for gold instead of trout? Then you could buy a two-bedroom cabin for your mother. Isn’t that a nugget by that rock?” See-ya-yuk nodded but kept his eyes on the bobbing chunk of wood tied to his line. As the sun sank lower, he pulled in fish after fish. (p. 75–76)

Discuss why See-ya-yuk reacts differently to seeing gold. Consider how their different backgrounds influence their views about what is truly valuable.

What do you think is more important for Sally’s trip: learning how to catch fish or panning for gold? Why?

When we returned to the tent, Mama stood outside with a creased piece of paper in her hand. “I have written to your grandparents, Sally,” she said. “I have told them that we are booking passage on the Lucky Lady for home.” (p. 85)

Why does Mama want to return to San Francisco while Sally does not?

What situations and concerns could have influenced their decisions? What does this say about them?

As Sally gathered the wood strewn on the shore, she began to sing, the words filling the air with her happiness.

But as the sun dropped, my ears began to pick up the sounds of the night. Sally could not hear the distant howls, snorts and yips, but I did. My journey from Dawson City had taught me that the land was filled with wolves, bear, and fox.

I wasn’t a mighty hunter. But I hoped that I could keep Sally safe in the wilds of the tundra. (p. 98)

Why is Sally not worrying like Murphy about this “grand adventure”?

What tundra dangers has she not considered before leaving Nome?

“It doesn’t matter. Only you must never leave me again. Nothing is more important than you—and Mama—I realize that now.” Sally choked on her words and I could hear the sob in her voice. “It doesn’t matter if we don’t find that nugget. Tomorrow we’ll head back to Nome.” (p. 115–116)

What keeps Sally from returning to her mother?

Consider everything that has happened to her since she started panning on her own. Why does she decide to go back to Nome?

“Nobody can take away our claims,” Carlick scoffed. “McKenzie has many powerful friends in Washington, D.C.”

Judge Morrow cut his eyes to Mr. Beamer. “Fortunately we had a man inside your camp who has witnessed you beating and threatening miners reluctant to abandon their claims. His testimony...
will land you in jail long enough for Washington to learn the truth.” (p. 143)

- Why would Mr. Beamer contact Judge Morrow about Carlick’s treatment of miners?
- What are some of the positive results of Mr. Beamer reporting Carlick to the authorities?

REVIEWS

“Equal parts heart-wrenching and -warming…its message of the value of love over greed is as subtle as it is powerful. An adventure-filled tale set within a fascinating period of history.” —Kirkus Reviews

“Give this one to sensitive readers who love dog stories but aren’t ready for the heartache of books like Fred Gibson’s Old Yeller (HarperCollins, 1995) and Wilson Rawls’s Where the Red Fern Grows (Yearling, 1996).” —School Library Journal

“Readers will be quickly hooked by how Murphy tells his own story, sharing his fears, excitement, and joys. Montgomery’s childlike pencil-and-ink drawings add a nice touch.” —Booklist

AWARDS

- Kansas State Reading Circle Recommended Reading List (Intermediate) —Kansas National Education Association, 2015

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison Hart is the author of more than sixty books for young readers, including Emma’s River, Anna’s Blizzard, the Racing to Freedom trilogy, and the Dog Chronicles series. Hart is a former teacher and lives in Virginia.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Michael G. Montgomery has illustrated numerous children’s books. He attended Georgia Southern University and the University of Georgia. Montgomery lives in Georgia.

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VOCABULARY WORD MATCH

_____ Gee
A. A person who illegally takes over others’ mining areas

_____ Tundra
B. The term for gold dust

_____ Sluice box
C. The Inupiaq word for “fishing”

_____ Claim
D. A vehicle on runners that travels over snow or ice, often pulled by dogs

_____ Mukluks
E. The judge who helps Carlick and McKenzie “jump” claims along the Snake River

_____ Claim jumper
F. Fabric treated on one side with oil to make it waterproof

_____ Sledge
G. White gamebirds common to Arctic regions and which Sally looks forward to seeing

_____ Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals
H. A vast, flat, treeless region in which the subsoil is permanently frozen

_____ Inupiaq
I. A group of Eskimo people that inhabit northwestern Alaska

_____ Oilcloth
J. When a miner chooses a specific piece of land, often with a deed of ownership granted by a court

_____ Flour
K. A branch of the U.S. Federal court that hears appeals of cases decided by federal trial courts in nine western states

_____ Nome
L. A Californian judge who exposes corruption in the Alaskan Gold Mining company

_____ Judge William Morrow
M. The mining town on the coast of the Bering Sea in Alaska

_____ Tacoma
N. A sledding command for right turn

_____ Judge Noyes
O. A high, soft boot that is worn in the American Arctic and is traditionally made from sealskin

_____ Aqalugniaqtaq
P. The name of the barge on which Sally and Mama arrive

_____ Ptarmigan
Q. A long wooden channel with grooves on the bottom, used to separate gold from gravel or sand in the water
### VOCABULARY WORD MATCH ANSWERS

| _N_ Gee | A. A person who illegally takes over others’ mining areas |
| _H_ Tundra | B. The term for gold dust |
| _Q_ Sluice box | C. The Inupiaq word for “fishing” |
| _J_ Claim | D. A vehicle on runners that travels over snow or ice, often pulled by dogs |
| _O_ Mukluks | E. The judge who helps Carlick and McKenzie “jump” claims along the Snake River |
| _A_ Claim jumper | F. Fabric treated on one side with oil to make it waterproof |
| _D_ Sledge | G. White gamebirds common to Arctic regions and which Sally looks forward to seeing |
| _K_ Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals | H. A vast, flat, treeless region in which the subsoil is permanently frozen |
| _I_ Inupiaq | I. A group of Eskimo people that inhabit northwestern Alaska |
| _F_ Oilcloth | J. When a miner chooses a specific piece of land, often with a deed of ownership granted by a court |
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| _M_ Nome | L. A Californian judge who exposes corruption in the Alaskan Gold Mining company |
| _L_ Judge William Morrow | M. The mining town on the coast of the Bering Sea in Alaska |
| _P_ Tacoma | N. A sledding command for right turn |
| _E_ Judge Noyes | O. A high, soft boot that is worn in the American Arctic and is traditionally made from sealskin |
| _C_ Aqalugniaqtuq | P. The name of the barge on which Sally and Mama arrive |
| _G_ Ptarmigan | Q. A long wooden channel with grooves on the bottom, used to separate gold from gravel or sand in the water |
RESEARCH and WRITING ASSIGNMENT

RESEARCH one or more of the topics below and write an informative essay examining the chosen subject. Use citations, developed facts, and details in the piece. Report on the topic by presenting original ideas, opinions, and how the topic enhanced the plot.

TOPIC LIST:
- Nome, Alaska
- Alaskan climate and weather
- Wildlife in Alaska
- Women in the Gold Rush
- Panning for gold
- Alaskan Gold Mining Company
- Inupiaq Eskimos
- Alaskan Gold Rush
- Sled Dogs
- Life in the 1900s
- Life in Nome
- Tundra

DISCUSS the point of view in Murphy, Gold Rush Dog. Notice how the setting, physical details, emotional responses, and overall theme are presented from a dog’s perspective—more specifically—a sled dog turned beloved pet. Consider the research required to create a believable tale, such as Murphy, Gold Rush Dog, as seen and experienced from a dog’s point of view.

WRITE a narrative piece from Mama, Sally, or Carlick’s point of view. Choose a scene from the book in which the person is featured. Include other characters in the scene. Use dialogue and description revealing the person’s character and role in the scene, making certain to keep the perspective close to the person’s experience. Illustrate the scene. Share the piece with the class.

COMPOSE a list of supplies you would take on a tundra trek. But, because you and your dog can only carry so much, you can only choose ten supplies to pack. Review what kind of provisions Sally brought on her expedition for some inspiration. Provide reasons for your choices and share your list with the class.