

**Missouri Assessment Program  
Spring 2006**

**Communication Arts**

**Released Items**

**Grade 6**

**Directions**

This passage is about a dogsled championship race. Read the passage. Then answer Numbers 1 through 6.

# The Prize

by Meridee Jones Cecil



Blake guided his dogsled past us toward the starting chute. Thor, his black lead dog, lunged and snarled at Kenai. Thor was a little too wild for my liking, but he was good. Almost as good as Kenai.

I knelt down to pat Kenai. My hands shook from nerves and excitement. We'd trained two years for this—the Junior Sled Dog Championship. I was first going into this final day, and I wanted to win more than anything in the world.

Kenai whined and tipped up his orange-and-white face to lick my chin.

“I know, boy. You’re ready, aren’t you? That makes two of us.”

Just before Blake’s countdown started, he turned my way and shot me a tight grin.

“This is it,” he said. “Only one of us will be holding the trophy. And that one’s going to be me.”

Not likely, I thought. Blake and his team were in second place, but they were more than a minute behind us.

It was our turn next. I snapped the dogs into the towline, Kenai first. They howled and tugged, eager to

*Go On* ►

begin. My heart thudded so loudly that I almost didn't hear the beginning of my countdown. I rocked the sled to unfreeze the runners.

Then I heard, "Go!"

Before I could yell "Hike!" Kenai leaped forward. The rest of the dogs charged after. The sled whooshed behind. We were off.

I was glad we were starting last. I like having someone ahead of me. Kenai *loves* it. As soon as he catches scent of another team, his tail shoots up and he races to close the gap. He even seems to grin each time we pass a sled.

Could we catch Blake, with his two-minute lead? We didn't have to pass him to win; we just had to keep our time lead. But I really wanted to pass him if I could. And see his face.

We flew down the long hill. Then we rounded a corner. I leaned to keep the sled steady.

Kenai saw Blake's team before I did. His tail flew up, and he took off. I would have held him back a little, but his tongue still flopped forward, not sideways like it does when he's starting to get tired. So I let him go all out.

We closed the gap. Another hill and a bridge later, we drew close enough to feel the spray of snow

from Blake's sled in our faces. We inched closer.

On the next hill, Kenai drew even with Blake's sled. Blake glanced over, then shouted to his team. They surged forward. Kenai yipped and pulled faster.

We drew even again. I jumped off and raced alongside the sled, still holding on. I was glad for all my own training. Without the weight, my sled cruised past.

"See you at the finish," I shouted.

Maybe it was when I looked back to see Blake's face. Maybe it wasn't. But suddenly our sled hit a branch.

The runners caught. I lost my hold. The dogs jerked to the left, then lurched off the trail and down a steep bank. The sled careened behind. I watched from the trail as the whole mess skidded through stumps and deadfall. I heard a yelp. Finally, the dogs and sled came to a stop.

I struggled through the deep snow to Kenai. I reached him and grabbed his harness to turn him up the hill. Then I froze. The snow under him was bright red. His shoulder was ripped open and bleeding.

"Kenai! NO!" My voice came out a howl.



Kenai struggled to stand. He looked at me, his blue eyes pleading to keep on. He would do it, too. He would pull us back up the slope. He would run us all the way to the finish, no matter what it took.

For one frozen moment I saw myself on the winner's stand. I thought of the miles and miles of trail we'd run, summer and winter. I saw the space I'd made on my shelf for my trophy.

But then in my mind I saw the foot of my bed. Empty. For the first time in the five years since Dad gave me Kenai.

No. There *was* something I wanted more than winning.

Blake had stopped above us. I motioned for him to go on, then bent and unsnapped Kenai. I gently wrapped him in a blanket and zipped him into the sled bag. I snapped Shacimo into the lead, and we struggled up the hill and back onto the trail.

The race vet stitched up Kenai, then I stayed to watch Blake accept the trophy. I wanted to be happy for him, but I felt miserable.

I leaned over, not wanting anyone to see my tears. Kenai squirmed in my lap, and at that moment I realized that I hadn't lost after all. I had the prize that really counted. I smiled as I felt a warm tongue on my wet cheek.

**1** Which of these facts would best help a reader know whether the description of the sled dog race in the passage “The Prize” is accurate?

- The author lives in Alaska.
- The author competes in sled dog races.
- The writer read an article about training sled dogs.
- The writer owned a dog that was the same breed as Kenai.

**2** Which of these best describes the main conflict in the passage?

- a boy’s desire to win and his love for his dog
- the narrator’s struggle to survive in challenging weather
- a boy’s wish for success and his friendship with a competitor
- the narrator’s belief in his dog’s ability and his doubts about himself

**3** Based on what you have read in the passage, what are two things that can be concluded about the relationship between sled dogs and their owners? Use information from the passage to support your answer.

Conclusion 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Reasoning for the conclusion: \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Reasoning for the conclusion: \_\_\_\_\_

**4** How does the narrator's attitude toward the trophy change during the passage? Use two details or examples from the passage to support your answer.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Go On* ▶

5

Complete the graphic organizer to show two character traits of a lead sled dog in the passage “The Prize.”

### Character Traits of Lead Sled Dogs in “The Prize”

Important Character Trait of a Lead Sled Dog	How the Character Trait Is Shown by the Lead Sled Dog
1. _____ _____	_____
2. _____ _____	_____

DO NOT WRITE HERE ↑

