

# Meeting John Beargrease By Analyzing Sources

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## ***Lesson Overview:***

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In this lesson, students will analyze artifacts associated with John Beargrease in order to determine what the artifacts tell us about him, the trail and the race.

## ***Subject Area:***

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Social Studies

## ***Grade Level:***

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3-5, others with modifications

## ***Resources Needed:***

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- Beargrease Mail Bag (one per class): available for purchase at [http://store-beargrease-com.3dcartstores.com/Beargrease-Station-Mailbag\\_p\\_57.html](http://store-beargrease-com.3dcartstores.com/Beargrease-Station-Mailbag_p_57.html) or photograph of bag
- Photo of John Beargrease (one per student, printed): <http://postalmuseumblog.si.edu/2010/02/by-sled-or-by-sail-native-american-mail-carrier-john-beargrease.html>
- Think, See, Wonder Foldable: included
- Text Quotations: included
- Copy of Fearless John, the Legend of John Beargrease by Kelly Rauzi and Mila Horak
- Beargrease Sled Dog Race Official Rules: <http://www.beargrease.com/registration.htm>
- Trail Mail Envelopes (one per student): available at [http://store-beargrease-com.3dcartstores.com/Trail-Mail-2017\\_p\\_123.html](http://store-beargrease-com.3dcartstores.com/Trail-Mail-2017_p_123.html)
- John Beargrease: Legend of Minnesota's North Shore by Daniel Lancaster (quotations included)
- Biography of John Beargrease (optional): [http://store-beargrease-com.3dcartstores.com/Trail-Mail-2017\\_p\\_123.html](http://store-beargrease-com.3dcartstores.com/Trail-Mail-2017_p_123.html)

## ***Standards Addressed:***

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

## ***Objectives:***

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- The learner will analyze sources using the Think, See, Wonder strategy in order to synthesize the information and determine the connection between John Beargrease, the mail trail, and the race.
- The learner will explain the reasoning for mail cachets being a required item in the mushers' sleds during the John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon. The learner will identify the connection between the Iditarod Trail as a mail route and a race route.

## ***Procedure:***

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1. Display for the students the mailbag or the photo of the object. Give them a few minutes to study the bag. Ask the students to make some observations about the bag and record their observations on a the board in a column labeled "See." Under a column labeled "Think," record some thoughts the students have about what they think the object used for. You can also ask them to think about when it was created, where it was used, etc. In a final column labeled "Wonder," have the students brainstorm some questions they have about this object. From this list, try to pull "One Big Wonder." I usually like the "One Big Wonder" to be something along the lines of, "What is this mailbag used for?" Or, "Why might this mailbag be relevant to us today?"

2. Tell the students that today, they will discover the answer to their "One Big Wonder" by analyzing some sources and then putting their discoveries together to come up with a hypothesis that answers their "One Big Wonder."

3. You will first provide them with another primary source. Distribute the photos of John Beargrease and the foldable sheet. The students will fold the foldable into a trifold and then open one flap on which to record information about the photograph on. Just like with

the mailbag, they will record observations they make by “See,” ideas they have about the object by “Think,” and questions they have by “Wonder.”

4. After giving the students some time with the first source, you may want to let them share with their table groups what they are wondering about. Tell them that as good historians or researchers they may need another source to help them with their research. Sometimes in research you can't find a lot of primary sources on a given topic, so sometimes you need to move to secondary sources to help us piece the story together.

5. This time you will provide them with a secondary source. Distribute “Quotation 1” to half of the class and “Quotation 2” to the other half. Now have the students unfold the second flap of the foldable and repeat their analysis using this new resource.

6. After giving time to analyze the second source, have the students find a partner. Each pair should have one student who used “Quotation 1” and one partner who had “Quotation 2.” The partners should share their quotation and their analysis of it with their partner. They should then work together to create a hypothesis that answers the class’ “One Big Wonder” question from the beginning of the task. This “One Big Wonder” should be recorded in the middle of their foldable sheet.

7. When everyone is ready, gather the students together and let them know that you have an additional source that may help them determine if their hypothesis is accurate or not. Share the picture book, Fearless John, the Legend of John Beargrease by by Kelly Rauzi and Mila Horak with the students. If you don't have access to the book, you could use the Beargrease Biography shown in the resources list. As an alternative, you could use both sources to compare and contrast them.

8. After sharing the novel, lead the students in a discussion about the validity of their hypothesis. Essentially at this point, you want them to know that the mushers are sworn in as mail carriers and carry the mail to a point where it is added to the main mail stream and sent out all around the world. The mushers do this as a way to honor John Beargrease and commemorate his work.

9. To tie the mailbag directly to the race, tell the students you have one more primary source to share with them. Show them Rule G from the official rules which lists the mailbag as one of the mandatory items! This should be the final clue needed to explain the purpose of the original object!

10. This is a great place to transition in to your Trail Mail project. For more information on this project check the Beargrease site at: <http://www.beargrease.com/trailmail.htm> I like to let my kids know that the Beargrease Sled Dog Race encourages kids get involved in the race by having them send Trail Mail down the trail. I have my kids put all their names in a hat and draw out the name of a classmate. This classmate is their secret pal for our

Trail Mail project. They write their friend a letter and then we mail them off.... They don't know who had who until the mail starts arriving!

***Assessment:***

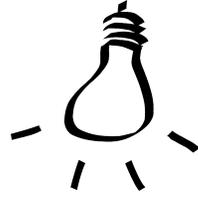
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- The foldables could be collected and used as an assessment.
- The letters to a friend could be collected and assessed prior to mailing.

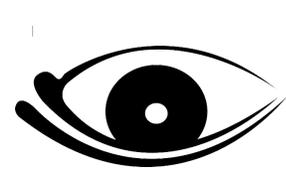
Wonder



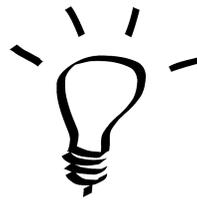
Think



See



Wonder



Think



See



Hypothesis about the  
“One Big Wonder”

### Quotation #1:

“With his dogs straining at their gang line, eager to launch across the snow, their breath hot and steaming in the dim morning chill, Beargrease made his final preparations for the journey ahead. Their first task was to reach Two Harbors, twenty-five miles from Beaver Bay to retrieve the week’s mail.” from John Beargrease: Legend of Minnesota’s North Shore by Daniel Lancaster, page 62.

### Quotation #2:

“Whenever Beargrease pulled into a community, everyone within earshot of the sled bells gathered around the post office to greet him, check their mail, get newspapers, and more importantly, hear the latest news. The mail carrier also served as the source of information about weather, snow depth, ice thickness and trail conditions.” from John Beargrease: Legend of Minnesota’s North Shore by Daniel Lancaster, page 69.

Beargrease Official Rules:

“G. MUSHER’S MANDATORY GEAR

1. Two complete working headlamps capable of reaching the lead dog.
2. Knife.
3. Sleeping bag
4. Promotional materials (not to exceed ten (10) pounds.
5. A cable cutter you know will cut your gang line.
6. Mail bag (this must be returned to the Race Official at the designated checkpoint or at the nearest checkpoint upon withdrawal from the race.
7. Vet book must be carried with the musher and available at each checkpoint 8. First Aid Kit (including an Ace bandage, pressure dressing and tape)
9. Matches, lighter or other fire starter.” from John Beargrease Marathon Rules accessed via <http://www.beargrease.com/registration.htm>