

First Place Prose – Elementary School

A Sled Dog's Place

By: Eva Sharapova

Grade: 5

School: St. Francis Xavier

I lifted my eyes from the forest, I was Shilah. Glancing upon my owner, Katie, I had been playing with my littermates, but, this was different. If I could make this work, I could finally earn my place in the pack. I am an Alaskan Malamute. These dogs are not often considered sled dogs, but Katie, wanted to prove them wrong, she could win the race without a single husky on her sled.

I turned back to the thick pine wood. My fur was neatly combed and groomed and around my neck, was a worn down collar that read "Swing Dog." Gently padding towards my pack, I lowered my head and wagged my tail, "sorry Shilah, we can't risk you being a leader or wheel dog. It might be too much for a pup like you." Katie said. I sat back on my haunches and watched Katie questioningly, when Katie didn't respond, I barked several times and leapt up on my hind paws trying to get her attention. My mother snapped at, revealing her teeth. Quickly, I backed down.

My sister, Leah was a swing dog as well. My other litter-sister, Eva, was a team dog as well as my littermates Ringo, Jinx and Lox. My mother and father were the lead dogs, Frost-pelt and Willows-breeze were the wheelers. Trotting over to the ice glazed lake, she sniffed the edge hoping to hear the sound of rushing water. Edging by the lake, I sniffed the air for the sweet scent of food and rushing water, my mother, Small-leap, was nosing her way towards me.

Like my mother, once I earned it, I would have a full name of my own. Father was leaping-grass and mother was small-leap. I felt my fur prick with excitement as Katie began to tie up the Wheelers, then the Team dogs. When it came my turn, I leapt up and stood still while Katie tied Leah's and my harness on. More behaved than the rest of us, mother and father took their place in the front. Katie bundled into the thick jacket she wore and took her place on the sled. "Come gee come haw, straight away!" manded for mother and father to lead the team straight. All of the sudden, they were running, it felt as though she was flying as their paws hammered against the snow. Then Katie uttered a command she hadn't heard before, "Whoa!" and they abruptly came to a stop. Other dogs lined up as well. Beneath them was a big black line that some humans must have painted on the ground.

My littermates paced excitedly, but, following my mother, I stood still and erect. "Ready & alright!" Katie's voice was followed by several others and all of the dogs stood still, ears pricked, I edged forward. The trail ahead turned into a sharp left turn. That was where Katie would give another command. There was a strange sound that a human made from a black object that smelled of fire, then, suddenly we were off. "HAW!" Katie's signal to move left was followed by each dog in my small pack... except

mother. She slid and fell. Father immediately skidded to a stop and the few of us who couldn't stop, slid and fell on top of each other.

Katie raced out to kneel beside mother and check her over. Mother's leg had been bent the wrong way when she hit a tree, moving forward I sniffed the leg, mother snapped at me. Her eyes were glazed over with pain, Katie carefully lifted mother onto the sled, Father, following behind her, then as if Katie had planned this she took mothers collar off. I noticed a few of us.

Exchanging unsure looks, so I let out a sharp dominant bark. As Katie stroked mother's soft leather harness, she replaced it with mine, Katie took father out and put him in the Swing dog's place where I had been. Taking me, Katie placed me in the Lead dog's place and descended to the sled where, she muttered "Shilah, earn your place, if this won't work our sled packs gone, Ready & Alright!" I heaved forward and was suddenly aware of the weight behind me. The dogs ran with me though, she heard mother's loud barks from the sled, telling us in her own language to run harder than ever before.

"Mush." Katie commanded, I could see the black outlines of the other sledders, frost was beginning to work its way through my fur, they disappeared around the ridge and as soon as Katie yelled "Gee!" the pack was right by another team, our team launched across the tundra beating the opponent by a whisker. Night was soon there, but Katie wouldn't think about pausing, if they stopped for too long, well... Small-Leap's life was depending on this.

Quicker than before, she didn't hesitate to go through the night, small leap was her first sled dog and if she was gone. There was no hope. The dawn's light filtered through the tundra. They weren't far ahead of the rest of the competitors. And soon enough, a man not much older than Katie with his own pack of huskies was flanking us, not to be outdone, I sped up. Sure, they had two lead dogs, but they didn't have our pack! There was no way they would win. But sure enough, Katie had an idea, in a flash she had turned and yelling "gee!" we went through the woods, this was a shortcut, I could see the fury glittering on the man's face, there was the end. There was the gunshot. We had won! "Shilah! Shilah!" the words were happy when Katie said them and running to me, she unhooked the sledding harness, taking out a pocket knife, she crossed Shilah out and wrote: Swift~breeze. "Swift breeze." the words echoed out of her lips.

"Swift breeze." I thought, "I earned my name. I am finally a true pack dog!"