

EDITORS' NOTE: THIS SECTION SHOULD NOT BE READ BY GROWN-UPS



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SEEING YOURSELF

ON THE ICE

BY LOVIA GYARKYE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY FLO NGALA



Members of Figure Skating in Harlem, a group that encourages girls and young women of color to participate in the sport.

Twice a week, all winter long, little black and brown girls glide and twirl across the ice rink at Riverbank State Park in Harlem. "When I skate, it just feels free," says Jonni Carter, 10. Jonni is one of more than 170 girls and young women from Harlem, Upper Manhattan and parts of the Bronx who participate in Figure Skating in Harlem, an organization that supports figure skaters of color.

As in most Winter Olympic sports, people of color make up only a small fraction of professional figure skaters. In 2017, for example, the United States Olympic Committee reported that 25 percent of its skaters were black, Latino, Asian or of other non-European descent. In 1997, Sharon Cohen started Figure Skating in Harlem after people in the community invited her to teach their daughters how to skate. Cohen, who skated growing up, wanted to create a space where girls could express themselves.

It's "like a sisterhood," says Raven Williams, 13. "I go to a predominantly white school, so they can't really relate to who I am. When I come here, it is kind of like a breath of fresh air."

When Raven started competing on one of F.S.H.'s three synchronized-skating teams two years ago, she noticed that their team was usually the only one exclusively made up of black and brown girls. "I realized how important it was that an African-American girl was ice-skating," she says. She and

the rest of the girls in F.S.H., who range in age from 6 to 18, now commit 10 to 11 hours to the after-school program every week. That includes skating lessons and practicing routines, but also twice-weekly tutoring and leadership classes to help them think about their identities and deal with issues like bullying. They also learn about successful women who look like them, both on the ice and off. "It makes us feel more confident in ourselves," Jonni says, "that we can be more than what we thought we could be." ♦



A 1,000-MILE RACE FOR VERY GOOD SLED DOGS

BY CHELSEA LEU • ILLUSTRATION BY ANUJ SHRESTHA

ONE OF THE TOUGHEST

longest races in the world isn't run by people — it's run by dogs. On March 3, more than 600 dogs and 53 mushers, will embark on the Iditarod, an annual race that starts in Anchorage, Alaska, and zigzags across the state to another city, Nome. Each team, which consists of one musher and up to 14 dogs (usually Alaskan huskies, which were bred to pull sleds) will spend the next eight to 12 days on a grueling 998-mile journey through an icy wilderness, braving snowy hills, frozen

rivers and blizzards for a chance at a cash prize.

Running the Iditarod requires careful planning. In their sleds, mushers need to take a cooker and fuel, which they use to melt snow for water; a heavy-duty sleeping bag; and an ax. Oh, and dog food — crucial for canine athletes who need to eat 10,000 calories a day. Martin Apayauq Reitan, a 21-year-old and the youngest musher competing in this year's race, feeds his dogs kibble, chicken fat and whale blubber from Kaktovik, his hometown. "They love it," he says.

Martin, like many mushers, grew up with the sport: His dad has finished the Iditarod seven times, and

his older brother also mushes competitively. Martin started mushing when he was 4, with one dog and a tiny sled. To prepare for this year's race, he started training in August. Because there wasn't snow on the ground yet, his dogs pulled a four-wheel all-terrain vehicle on a nearby beach. In the winter, his family went into the mountains, so the dogs could get used to running through ice and snowstorms.

But the biggest challenge during the race isn't the freezing cold. It's sleep deprivation. Besides feeding and watering their dogs when they're not running, mushers need to put on or take off the protective cloth

bootees the dogs wear on each paw. The process can be time-consuming — "It's 56 bootees!" Martin says. Each paw needs to be checked for cuts and dabbed with an ointment, and the mushers need to make sure their dogs' wrists and shoulders aren't too sore, either. They also need to be conscious of their dogs' moods — sled dogs love to run, but if one isn't feeling well or doesn't want to race, the musher drops it off at a checkpoint to relax. Once the dogs are all taken care of, the musher often sleeps for only two hours at a time. But to Martin, it's all worth it. "They're amazing athletes," he says — ones that happen to love being petted. ♦