ALASKA

THE LAST FRONTIER *Became a state January 3, 1959 (49th)*

Alaska is by far the biggest state, more than twice the size of Texas. Few people live there and most of its land is still wild, which is why it is called the Last Frontier.



Two Cents an Acre

Russian fur traders came to Alaska in the 1700s. In 1804 they fought the Tlingit people at Sitka and later made it their capital. In 1867 Russia sold Alaska to the United States for 7.2 million dollars, about two cents an acre. Some Americans mocked the deal and called Alaska an icebox. Tlingit people live in Sitka today.



The High One

Denali is 20,310 feet tall, the highest mountain in North America. Its name comes from the Koyukon people and means the high one. It rises about 18,000 feet above the land around it, a bigger rise from base to top than Mount Everest. The United States government calls it Mount McKinley, after a president. The state of Alaska calls it Denali.



The Race to Save Nome

In January 1925, children in Nome were sick with diphtheria, a deadly disease. The medicine was far away, and ice had closed the harbor. Twenty mushers, or sled dog drivers, passed the medicine from team to team for 674 miles through bitter cold. It arrived in five and a half days. Sled dog racers still use part of that trail.



Oil at the Top of the World

In 1968, oil was found under the frozen ground at Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic coast. To move it, workers built a pipeline 800 miles long to the ice-free port of Valdez. It was finished in 1977. Alaska saves part of its oil money in a fund, and each year most Alaskans get a check.



A Feast Before Winter

Each summer, salmon swim up the Brooks River in Katmai National Park to lay their eggs. Brown bears wait at a waterfall and catch the fish as they leap. The bears eat as much as they can. They sleep through the winter without eating and can lose a third of their weight, so the fattest bears have the best chance.



Whalers of the Arctic

The Inupiat people have hunted whales on Alaska's Arctic coast for more than a thousand years. Each spring, crews wait at the edge of the sea ice for bowhead whales. Some still paddle an umiaq, a boat covered in sealskin. The meat from one whale is shared with the whole town. In June, Utqiagvik holds a festival to give thanks.

BY THE NUMBERS

Population	About 737,000 (3rd fewest)
Size	About 665,000 square miles (the largest)
Highest point	Denali, 20,310 feet
Boroughs	19, plus 11 census areas that have no borough government
Neighbors	No state touches Alaska. Canada lies to the east.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Alaska's flag was designed in 1927 by Benny Benson, a seventh grader who won a contest for schoolchildren.
- No road leads to Juneau. People reach the capital by boat or by plane.
- Alaska has more ocean coastline than all the other states put together.
- In Utqiagvik, the sun does not rise for about two months each winter.

FIND IT ON THE MAP

1. Which city on the map is farthest north?
2. Which city is closest to the Iditarod Trail?
3. In what year was gold discovered in Fairbanks?

Answers: 1. Utqiagvik 2. Anchorage 3. 1902