

# Feature Writing

Invitational A Meet • 2025



You are a reporter for the **Leaguetown Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 886 students in grades 9-12. Last week, sophomore Helen Santos was babysitting her neighbor's two young children, 4-year-old Bryson Vinick and 10-month-old Kaylee Vinick. The three were playing in the upstairs playroom when they heard the smoke alarm go off. Helen smelled smoke. She looked down the stairway and saw the downstairs filled with smoke and the light of flames coming from the kitchen. She quickly picked up Kaylee and took Bryson by the arm and lead them down the stairs. She had Bryson crawl toward the front door to avoid the smoke while she followed behind with Kaylee in her right arm. As she passed the Vinicks' living room on her way out the door, Helen grabbed a small glass box that displayed an old and expensive-looking medal off their mantle — a Congressional Medal of Honor that belonged to the children's great-grandfather from World War II.

She then ran with the children across the street to the front porch of her house, where she asked her mother to call 911 while she comforted the children and called their parents to tell them what was happening. Firefighters arrived and contained the fire to the west side of the Vinick home. The fire destroyed one section of their house and more than half their belongings. EMS evaluated the children, who were unharmed.

Thanks to Helen's quick thinking and actions, Leaguetown Mayor Annabeth Schott will present her with the Hometown Hero Award at a ceremony before the city council meeting Jan. 10. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Jan. 9.

## ■ HELEN SANTOS, sophomore

"I babysit for neighbors across the street about once a week. Bryson and Kaylee are such sweet kids, and we have fun playing board games or doing crafts. We were making plates of Play-Doh spaghetti when the alarm went off. The kids immediately started crying and covering their ears. When I smelled smoke, I knew this was a real fire and we needed to get out. I hurried both kids down the stairs, and by the time we got down there, the smoke was thick enough to burn my eyes.

"On our way out the front door, I ran right past the mantle and grabbed this little glass display box. I wasn't sure what it was, but it looked important. It's always been at the front of their house, right in the center of their mantle. I wasn't really thinking about what it was, but I thought, 'If they lose their whole house, at least I can save this one thing for them to remember what they had.' When they told me what it was, I still didn't fully understand what it meant. I spent some time reading about the Congressional Medal of Honor and what it means. I'm really glad I picked it up on my way out the door.

"Babysitting is a great way to make some extra cash and get some

### ■ HELEN SANTOS, continued

experience working, but it's also taught me to get off my phone and stay alert when I'm on the job. I know I'm getting an award from the mayor, but I don't feel like any kind of hero. When someone hires me to babysit, they are putting the most precious part of their lives in my hands. I would do anything for those kids. That night, I was just doing my job."

### ■ SARAH VINICK, Helen's neighbor

"Ever since the fire, I've been grateful every day that we chose this town and this neighborhood and this house because we met Helen and asked her to be our babysitter. Now she's saved our babies' lives. If Helen hadn't been there or if she was distracted on her phone like some of our other babysitters from the past, I'm not sure what would have happened. I'm so glad the mayor is going to honor her. This girl has a piece of my heart forever.

"She even managed to save my grandfather's Congressional Medal of Honor, which he won for saving some fellow soldiers in Guadalcanal in 1942. His was an act of valor but not too dissimilar from what Helen did. Not to be too dramatic, but they both put others' lives before their own. The fact that she grabbed his medal is no coincidence for us. Helen is pretty special.

"We'll stay with relatives while our house goes through some serious repairs. It will probably take months before we can move back in. Helen has already agreed to meet us for play dates at the park. My kids are going to miss her while we're gone."

### ■ BOB RUSSELL, firefighter

"We love to arrive on a scene and see that everyone has already gotten out safely. Luckily, this house had all the smoke detectors in working order, and everything worked out the way it was supposed to. It looks like the fire was started by a candle left lit in the kitchen, close to some curtains. We're just grateful that the babysitter did what she was supposed to do and that everyone is OK."

### ■ WILL BAILEY, sophomore

"I'm not surprised at all that Helen saved some kids from a fire. That sounds exactly like something she would do. Straight A's. NHS. Saved kids from a fire. It all tracks. I know we're the same age, but I still want to be like her when I grow up. She makes the rest of us look good."

### ■ ERIN SANTOS, Helen's mother

"Even before the fire, we've felt very lucky to have Helen in our family. In many ways, she's even more responsible than I am. I think if you were to ask her, she wouldn't say she's a hero at all. We've just always talked to her about making the right choices and doing the right thing. That's what human beings are supposed to do, and so that's what she did. We are very proud of her actions with our neighbor's children and will continue to celebrate her."

**DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!**

## Invitational A Meet • 2025 Feature Writing Contest Tips and Sample Story

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critiquing/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about a sophomore who saved two kids from a fire and grabbed a family's priceless heirloom on her way out the door.

2. The lead of a feature story must grab the reader's attention. It does not have to be a certain length or include the 5Ws and H. It should set a scene and get the reader into the story. Although you have freedom to describe the scene as you think it might have existed, try to stay close to the prompt. Judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

Two medals. Two heroes.

Sophomore Helen Santos was babysitting her neighbor's two children, like she did every week. The three were upstairs making plates of Play-Doh spaghetti when the piercing shriek of the smoke alarm stopped them.

Santos looked downstairs to see the house filling with smoke and flames coming out of the kitchen. She quickly led 4-year-old Bryson and 10-month-old Kaylee down the stairs and toward the door, but not before grabbing a small, glass box off the mantle.

The three ran across the street to Santos' house to call 911 and the kids' parents. The children were safe, but the Vinick family lost a section of their house and more than half their belongings — but not that small, glass box.

It was a Congressional Medal of Honor, awarded to Sarah Vinick's grandfather for an act of valor in World War II, and one of Vinick's most prized possessions.

3. Once you get past the lead, make sure you include a nut graph. It tells the reader what the story will be about. Follow the nut graph with a direct quote and then go into the transition/quote formula.

### **nut graph**

After her act of bravery, Santos will receive her own medal — the Hometown Hero Award — at a ceremony before Friday's city council meeting.

### **direct quote**

“I know I'm getting an award from the mayor, but I really don't feel like any kind of hero,” Santos said. “When someone hires me to babysit, they are putting the most precious part of their lives in my hands. I would do anything for those kids. That night, I was just doing my job.”

4. After the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote or at least after the first sentence. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution (“Santos said” not “said Santos”). Avoid putting two or more quotes together without placing some kind of transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story and that the quote does not repeat information in the transition.

**transition/story-telling**

Santos’ friend sophomore Will Bailey said he wasn’t surprised to hear his friend saved some children from a fire.

**direct quote**

“That sounds exactly like something she would do,” he said “Straight A’s. NHS. Saved kids from a fire. It all tracks. I know we’re the same age, but I still want to be like her when I grow up.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our students.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Go Helen!” These statements are personal opinions and should not be used in a feature story.

6. Always use the verb “said” as the verb of attribution. Don’t say “says,” “stated,” “feels” or any other synonym for “said.”

7. Finally, look for a strong quote to use as a closing statement or a statement that will bring the reader back to the beginning of the story. It should give the reader a sense of satisfaction or resolution.

“His was an act of valor, but not too dissimilar from what Helen did,” she said. Not to be too dramatic, but they both put others’ lives before their own. The fact that she grabbed his medal is no coincidence for us. Helen is pretty special.”

## SAMPLE STORY

Two medals. Two heroes.

Sophomore Helen Santos was babysitting her neighbor's two children, like she did every week. The three were upstairs making plates of Play-Doh spaghetti when the piercing shriek of the smoke alarm stopped them.

Santos looked downstairs to see the house filling with smoke and flames coming out of the kitchen. She quickly led 4-year-old Bryson and 10-month-old Kaylee down the stairs and toward the door, but not before grabbing a small, glass box off the mantle.

The three ran across the street to Santos' house to call 911 and the kids' parents. The children were safe, but the Vinick family lost a section of their house and more than half their belongings — but not that small, glass box.

It was a Congressional Medal of Honor, awarded to Sarah Vinick's grandfather for an act of valor in World War II and one of Vinick's most prized possessions.

After her act of bravery, Santos will receive her own medal — the Hometown Hero Award — at a ceremony before Friday's city council meeting.

"I know I'm getting an award from the mayor, but I really don't feel like any kind of hero," Santos said. "When someone hires me to babysit, they are putting the most precious part of their lives in my hands. I would do anything for those kids. That night, I was just doing my job."

But Vinick said Santos' quick thinking and attentiveness saved her kids' lives.

"If Helen hadn't been there or if she was distracted on her phone like some of our other babysitters from the past, I'm not sure what would have happened," Vinick said. "I'm so glad the mayor is going to honor her. This girl has a piece of my heart forever."

Santos' friend sophomore Will Bailey said he wasn't surprised to hear his friend saved some children from a fire.

"That sounds exactly like something she would do," he said "Straight A's. NHS. Saved kids from a fire. It all tracks. I know we're the same age, but I still want to be like her when I grow up."

Still, Santos insists she was acting on instinct when she saved the kids and when she saved the medal.

"I wasn't really thinking about what it was, but I thought, 'If they lose their whole house, at least I can save this one thing for them to remember what they had,'" she said. "I spent some time reading about the Congressional Medal of Honor and what it means. I'm really glad I picked it up on my way out the door."

Vinick's grandfather won his medal for saving a group of soldiers during the Guadalcanal campaign of World War II, but Vinick said Santos' actions aren't all that different.

"His was an act of valor, but not too dissimilar from what Helen did," she said. Not to be too dramatic, but they both put others' lives before their own. The fact that she grabbed his medal is no coincidence for us. Helen is pretty special."