

Feature Writing

Invitational B Meet • 2024



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 1,320 students in grades 9-12. During flash floods last Friday brought on by a week of heavy rain, bus driver Thurman Thornton was finishing his afternoon route with one student left to drop off.

As he started to cross the bridge over Grassy Creek, he spotted two children caught in flood waters against a tree on the side of the road. Several neighbors had already gathered to try and help 8-year-old Jacie Winters and 10-year-old Timothy Winters. Thornton pulled over to assist as well.

After calling 911, Thornton went through his bus detaching extra seat belts, then he jumped off the bus to help. He and neighbor Jolie Williams hooked the bus seat belts together and attached one end to an extra seat cushion and threw the it to one of the children. The two grabbed on to the cushion while Thornton and Williams pulled them safely out of harm's way.

The children were taken by ambulance to Leaguetown Medical Center for further evaluation. They had minor cuts from the tree branches but were otherwise unharmed.

On Sunday, Feb. 11, Mayor Juliana Curry will present Thornton with a Hometown Hero award for his part in rescuing the two children. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Dec. 11.

■ THURMAN THORNTON, bus driver

"I have never seen rain coming down like that, so I was relieved when dispatch asked us to avoid roads near Grassy Creek. I still had to take the bus over the bridge. And it's a good thing I did.

"At first I heard a child screaming. There was only one kiddo left on my bus, so I knew it wasn't him. I looked out and saw these two little faces screaming for help. One boy was hanging on to a tree and trying to help a little girl hang on with him. I could tell he was struggling to hang on to her and the tree. My bus is equipped with special seat belts for accessibility, so I grabbed as many of those as I could and hooked them to my seat cushion. I wasn't sure this would even work. It seemed like something out of "Gilligan's Island." But it did work. Timothy wrapped one arm around his sister and one arm around the cushion, and we were able to pull them across the creek to safety.

"The crazy thing is, I don't normally take that route around the neighborhood. If they hadn't changed my route that day, I never would have seen Jacie and Timothy down there.

"It's nice that the mayor wants to honor me with an award, but I think I did what anyone would do in that situation. My mom taught me to help whenever I can. I saw an opportunity to help someone, so I did. And now I have two new friends — Jacie and Timothy. They came to visit me a few days later and they are the sweetest little kids. Hopefully, I'll get to drive them on my route one day."

■ **KRISTEN WINTERS, parent of rescued children**

“Normally Jacie and Timothy walk home together from Leaguetown North Elementary, but I left work early that day to try and pick them up because the rain was so heavy. I ran into two closed roads, so I couldn’t get to the school in time. I’m so grateful my neighbors saw them and that Mr. Thornton stopped to help. He deserves so much more than an award from the mayor. He saved my kids. I owe him everything. If walking home isn’t as safe as it used to be, maybe I’ll have the kids take the bus from now on. If other drivers are like Mr. Thornton, I know they’ll be in good hands.”

“Timothy is such a brave big brother for hanging on to his sister. He’s always protective of her. I think he was impressed that Mr. Thornton put together those seat belts to save them. He’s been talking about him non-stop. He used to only talk about Spider-Man and Thor. I guess Timothy has a new hero now.”

■ **HAKIM RAMOS, freshman**

“Thurman has always been a cool bus driver. He’ll let us play music and sometimes knows the words to the songs we’re listening to, but I didn’t know he was this cool. Like, save-peoples-lives cool. When we pulled over in that neighborhood, I was a little worried because I was the last person on the bus that day. I didn’t want to get trapped because of the rain and flooding.

“Thurman shot up and yelled at me to stay in my seat and don’t move. He doesn’t normally yell, so I figured I had better do what he said. I saw the whole rescue go down. It looked like something out of a movie. By the time the ambulance showed up, Thurman had saved those kids. The whole thing took about five minutes.”

■ **JOLIE WILLIAMS, neighbor**

“I could see the kids in the tree from my front window, so I ran outside to help. Right about the time I got there, Thurman’s bus pulled up. And he was so quick to come up with a plan and call 911. I’ve known the Winters kids for years and see them walk home from school every day. I’m so glad Thurman drove by and saw them out in the rain.”

■ **JULIANA CURRY, mayor**

“We know Leaguetown hires the best of the best to work with students in this community. But in this case, Thurman Thornton went above and beyond the call of duty when he pulled these children out of the creek. Leaguetown is honored to present him with the Hometown Hero award. His actions represent everything this award means for the city of Leaguetown.”

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

Invitational B • 2024 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 bus driver who saved two children in a flash flood.

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 as close to the prompt as you can. Some judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

It took only a faint scream to make bus driver Thurman Thornton pull over. Through heavy rain and flooding, Thornton was on his way to drop off the last student on his route when he heard it. A cry for help. What he did next would save the lives of two children stuck in cascading waters.

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

nut graph

After this act of bravery, Mayor Juliana Curry will present Thornton with a Hometown Hero Award at a ceremony on Feb. 11.

Siblings 8-year-old Jacie Winters and 10-year-old Timothy Winters took their usual walk home from school when they got caught against a tree in flooding waters. Timothy grabbed onto the tree as his sister held onto him.

direct quote

"At first I heard a child screaming," Thornton said. "I looked out and saw these two little faces screaming for help. One boy was hanging on to a tree and trying to help a little girl hang on with him. I could tell he was struggling to hang on to her and the tree."

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 ("Thornton said" not "said Thornton"). 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

The siblings were taken by ambulance to Leaguetown Medical center with minor cuts, but were otherwise unharmed. Thornton said he wouldn't have seen Jacie and Timothy if he had not taken a different route that day.

direct quote

"It's nice that the mayor wants to honor me with an award, but I think I did what anyone would do in that situation," Thornton said. "My mom taught me to help whenever I can. I saw an opportunity to help someone, so I did."

5. Always use third person. Don't say "our student" or "our students." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "We are proud." 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.

Kristen Winters said Timothy was impressed by Thornton's rescue and has not stopped talking about him since the incident.

"He used to only talk about Spider-Man and Thor," Winters said. "I guess Timothy has a new hero now."

SAMPLE STORY

It took only a faint scream to make bus driver Thurman Thornton pull over. Through heavy rain and flooding, Thornton was on his way to drop off the last student on his route when he heard it. A cry for help. What he did next would save the lives of two children stuck in cascading waters.

After this act of bravery, Mayor Juliana Curry will present Thornton with a Hometown Hero Award at a ceremony on Feb. 11.

Siblings 8-year-old Jacie Winters and 10-year-old Timothy Winters took their usual walk home from school when they got caught against a tree in flooding waters. Timothy grabbed onto the tree as his sister held onto him.

“At first I heard a child screaming,” Thornton said. “I looked out and saw these two little faces screaming for help. One boy was hanging on to a tree and trying to help a little girl hang on with him. I could tell he was struggling to hang on to her and the tree.”

Several neighbors gathered to help the siblings just as Thornton pulled over to assist.

“Right about the time I got there, Thurman’s bus pulled up,” neighbor Jolie Williams said. “And he was so quick to come up with a plan and call 911.”

Williams assisted Thornton in hooking together seat belts detached from bus seats. He attached one end to an extra seat cushion, which he threw out for the children to be pulled to safety. Freshman Hakim Ramos, the last student on Thurman’s bus route, saw the rescue.

“It looked like something out of a movie,” Ramos said. “By the time the ambulance showed up, Thurman had saved those kids. The whole thing took about five minutes.”

The siblings were taken by ambulance to Leaguetown Medical center with minor cuts but were otherwise unharmed. Thornton said he wouldn’t have seen Jacie and Timothy if he had not taken a different route that day.

“It’s nice that the mayor wants to honor me with an award, but I think I did what anyone would do in that situation,” Thornton said. “My mom taught me to help whenever I can. I saw an opportunity to help someone, so I did.”

Jacie and Timothy’s mom Kristen Winters said closed roads prevented her from picking up her kids before they headed home in the rain.

“I’m so grateful my neighbors saw them and that Mr. Thornton stopped to help,” she said. “He deserves so much more than an award from the mayor. He saved my kids. I owe him everything.”

Thornton said he is grateful he took the route that led him to those kids that day.

“And now I have two new friends — Jacie and Timothy,” he said. “They came to visit me a few days later and they are the sweetest little kids. Hopefully, I’ll get to drive them on my route one day.”

Kristen Winters said Timothy was impressed by Thornton’s rescue and has not stopped talking about him since the incident.

“He used to only talk about Spider-Man and Thor,” Winters said. “I guess Timothy has a new hero now.”