

Feature Writing

Regional 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 1,220 students in grades 9-12. After grading papers one evening, geometry teacher Charlie Seward sat down on his living room sofa to eat dinner and watch the local news when he saw the face of one of his students on the TV screen. Sophomore Homer Foy and his parents appeared in an interview as part of their search for a live kidney donor for Foy, who has stage 4 kidney disease. None of Homer's relatives were a match.

Without a donor, Foy would be forced to go on dialysis and receive multiple treatments each week for up to six hours at a time to keep his body functioning. More than 94,000 people are on the national kidney donor waiting list, so it would take years to wait for a deceased person's kidney.

Seward went to bed that night thinking about the Foys' search for a donor. In the morning, he called the University of Texas Southwestern Transplant Center using the number that appeared on the news and signed up for a blood test to see if he might be a match. After taking the test, Seward learned that his blood type was O positive — the same as Foy. A month later, and after a few additional tests, Seward got the call that he was a good candidate to become a living kidney donor for Foy. The next day, the transplant center called the Foy family to notify them that they had an anonymous living donor. A week before their scheduled surgery, Seward called the Foy family to let them know that their son's kidney donor would be his own geometry teacher.

On April 29, Foy and Seward will have surgeries to transplant one of Seward's kidneys to Foy. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed April 26.

■ CHARLIE SEWARD, geometry teacher

"Homer has been a great math student all year. He has always turned in his work on time, and I can tell he prepares for every test. But he's quiet. I had no idea he was suffering every day with a life-threatening illness. When I saw his face flash across my TV screen that night and then listened to his parents' desperate pleas for help, it stayed with me. I knew I wouldn't be able to look this student in the face every day during class, not knowing if I was a match and could potentially save his life.

"Surgery can be especially tough on the donor. But I'm not the brave one. Homer has endured enough pain in his life. I'm honored to donate my kidney, and it's worth it to experience a little bit of pain to give him his life back.

"At first, I didn't want the Foys to know the kidney was coming from me. I wanted to make sure everything was in place before they knew because I didn't want them to get their hopes up and then it not work out. When I called his parents to let them know I was their anonymous donor, there were a lot of tears over the phone. They were all in shock. We met up at school a few days before the surgery and just hugged. We didn't say much. Just tears and long

■ CHARLIE SEWARD, continued

hugs. I would like to say I'm donating my kidney as a selfless act to help someone else, but the truth is, I'm doing it for me too. It feels good to help someone who needs it — even if it will hurt.

“I'll be out for a couple weeks recovering from surgery, but I have all my lesson plans lined up, so my students will be able to stay on track while I'm out. I guess I'll give Homer a few extra days to do his makeup work, but he probably won't even need it.”

■ HOMER FOY, sophomore

“I don't love geometry, but I can do it. I like Mr. Seward's class. He's funny, and he makes the class entertaining. I wouldn't say we've been close this year, but we definitely are now. I couldn't believe it when he called my house to say he was giving me one of his kidneys. ‘Mr. Seward?’ I asked. ‘Like my math teacher, Mr. Seward?’ My parents explained what was happening through tears, but it didn't really hit me until we met up with him at school a few days before the surgery. Hugging him, I couldn't hold back my emotions. Someone I see every day to learn trigonometry and the Pythagorean Theorem is teaching me so much more about giving and sacrifice. He's been the greatest teacher of my life. Teachers give a lot to their students — time, energy and compassion. And I've always been grateful because I know they don't get much back. But I never thought I'd get a kidney from a teacher. Mr. Seward is saving my life.”

■ JESSINIA FOY, Homer's mother

“Homer has been struggling for most of his life with health problems. Starting in middle school, he would go through periods of feeling weak. His eighth grade year was when his doctors saw signs of kidney problems. For the next couple years, we watched his body slowly go into kidney failure and knew he would need a transplant. We tested everyone in the family: siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles. We couldn't find a match, until we got that call telling us we had an anonymous donor. I felt so relieved.

“When Mr. Seward called, I thought maybe Homer missed an assignment with all that's been going on. He's always been a good student, even through all his health problems. But to hear my son would be getting a kidney from one of his teachers was so surprising. Teachers give so much of their time and energy to our students. But my son's teacher is giving him an internal organ. No one has a bigger heart than a teacher. Mr. Seward is proof of that. We are so grateful for him.”

■ DONNATELLA COOPER, sophomore

“I'm in Homer's geometry class with Mr. Seward. I don't think of teachers as real people. It's always bizarre to see them in real life at the grocery store or at a restaurant. But this is a real thing Mr. Seward is doing. I can't imagine having one of my teacher's organs inside my body. It's going to be so weird having them both out of class on Monday. I'm not sure I'll be able to concentrate knowing where they are and what they're doing, but I'll try to stay focused for Mr. Seward. I liked him as a teacher before, but this? This is seriously cool.”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During kidney dialysis, machines clear excess water and toxins from blood when a person's kidneys can no longer perform that function. For patients on dialysis, most have to come to a clinic and go through the procedure three times a week. Humans have two kidneys but need only one to live. With the transplant, doctors will remove one of Seward's kidneys and give it to Foy. Each surgery will take around three hours to perform, and with no complications the patients can leave the hospital within a few days, according to the UT Southwestern Transplant Center.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

Regional Meet • 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 geometry teacher who will become a live kidney donor for one of his students.

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.

Sophomore Homer Foy always knew teachers gave a lot to their students. Time. Energy. Compassion. But, he never expected this.

For more than a year, Homer and his family searched for a live donor to save him from stage 4 kidney disease. Then, a phone call from his geometry teacher, Charlie Seward, revealed that the teacher would become his unexpected hero by donating one of his kidneys.

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

The transplant to save Homer's life is scheduled for April 29.

direct quote

"Surgery can be especially tough on the donor. But I'm not the brave one," Seward said. "Homer has endured enough pain in his life. I'm honored to donate my kidney, and it's worth it to experience a little bit of pain to give him his life back."

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 ("Seward said" not "said Seward"). 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

After seeing the Foy family's plea on the news, Seward signed up for a blood test to determine if he was a potential match.

direct quote

"When I saw his face flash across my TV screen that night and then listened to his parents' desperate pleas for help, it stayed with me," he said. "I knew I wouldn't be able to look this student in the face every day during class, not knowing if I was a match and could potentially save his life."

5. Always use third person. Don't say "our student" or "our students." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "Seward is our incredible hero." 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.

And when it comes to geometry class, what used to be a cordial relationship between teacher and student has become something a bit more special.

"Someone I see every day to learn trigonometry and the Pythagorean Theorem is teaching me so much more about giving and sacrifice," Foy said about Seward. "He's been the greatest teacher of my life."

SAMPLE STORY

Sophomore Homer Foy always knew teachers gave a lot to their students. Time. Energy. Compassion. But, he never expected this.

For more than a year, Homer and his family had searched for a live donor to save him from stage 4 kidney disease. Then, a phone call from his geometry teacher, Charlie Seward, revealed that the teacher would become his unexpected hero by donating one of his kidneys.

The transplant to save Homer's life is scheduled for April 29.

"Surgery can be especially tough on the donor. But I'm not the brave one," Seward said. "Homer has endured enough pain in his life. I'm honored to donate my kidney, and it's worth it to experience a little bit of pain to give him his life back."

Seward had his blood tested after seeing Foy's parents telling their story on the evening news.

"When I saw his face flash across my TV screen that night and then listened to his parents' desperate pleas for help, it stayed with me," he said. "I knew I wouldn't be able to look this student in the face every day during class, not knowing if I was a match and could potentially save his life."

Without a live donor, Homer would face dialysis and receive multiple treatments each week for up to six hours at a time to keep his body functioning. A deceased person's kidney donation would have taken years to obtain since more than 94,000 are on the waiting list.

"Homer has been a great math student all year," Seward said. "He has always turned in his work on time, and I can tell he prepares for every test. But he's quiet. I had no idea he was suffering every day with a life-threatening illness."

After taking a blood test, he learned that his blood type was a match. And after a month of additional testing, he was deemed a suitable candidate. The Foy family was notified of an anonymous live donor, and a week before the surgery, Seward informed Homer's parents of his donation.

"They were in shock," Seward said. "We met up at school a few days before the surgery and just hugged. We didn't say much. Just tears and long hugs."

Homer's health problems started in middle school with periods of weakness. After doctors found signs of kidney problems in the eighth grade, Homer's family watched him go into kidney failure for the next couple years. Jessina Foy, Homer's mother, said she was relieved when they received the call confirming an anonymous live donor.

"Teachers give so much of their time and energy to our students," she said. "But my son's teacher is giving him an internal organ. No one has a bigger heart than a teacher. Mr. Seward is proof of that."

But Seward said he's getting something in return.

"I would like to say I'm donating my kidney as a selfless act to help someone else, but the truth is, I'm doing it for me too," he said. "It feels good to help someone who needs it — even if it will hurt."

And when it comes to geometry class, what used to be a cordial relationship between teacher and student has become something a bit more special.

"Someone I see every day to learn trigonometry and the Pythagorean Theorem is teaching me so much more about giving and sacrifice," Foy said about Seward. "He's been the greatest teacher of my life."