

Feature Writing

State Meet • 2023



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 4,212 students in grades 9-12. Senior Laura Alaniz was diagnosed with a rare malignant brain tumor called anaplastic astrocytoma when she was in seventh grade. She had surgery to remove the tumor and missed most of that school year while she was in treatment. In March of 2018, Alaniz returned to finish middle school and started high school healthy, going in for a scan every three months to ensure the cancer had not returned.

In December, Alaniz went in for her regular scan and doctors found that the cancer had returned in the form of another brain tumor. Instead of surgery, doctors recommended treatment with chemotherapy and radiation to extend her life. Doctors also told Laura that symptoms she might begin to experience going forward would include a slow loss of speech as well as the inability to use her arms and legs. These changes would likely be permanent. Her first question was whether or not it would be possible for her to attend prom on June 3.

By February, the damage to Alaniz's brain was affecting her speech, and she had begun using a wheelchair. She attended school about half the time and has been homebound for the other half.

Knowing how important prom was to her, Alaniz's English teacher, Misty Lee, met with student council leaders to plan a surprise prom for Alaniz on May 6, a month before the regular prom, to ensure that she would be able to attend. Student leaders sprang into action planning a second dance and getting the venue, refreshments, decorations and DJ all donated by community members who heard about Laura's story. On the night of the dance, Alaniz's boyfriend took her to the venue where she thought they would have a photo shoot for her senior pictures. Instead she was greeted by more than 800 classmates ready to have the night of their lives.

On May 22, Alaniz, Lee and two members of student council will appear on the "Wake Up Texas" morning show to tell their story. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed May 19.

■ LAURA ALANIZ, senior

"This was a night I'll never forget. I spent the whole day being pampered like a princess. I got my nails done. I picked out a huge gold gown covered in jewels and sequins. A diamond tiara. I had my hair and makeup done at a salon. My parents and boyfriend took me to the Leaguetown Country Club to have a photo shoot in their courtyard. I could sit on their benches so my wheelchair wouldn't be in the photos. I thought it was the perfect day, but when we went inside, I couldn't believe what I saw.

"There was a DJ blasting my favorite song, "We Found Love" by Rihanna. Everyone I know was there. All my friends. All my teachers. Hundreds of

■ LAURA ALANIZ, continued

people. The ballroom was decorated with gold balloons. There was gold everywhere. I couldn't dance all night, but I danced a lot. It was like a dream come true. Better than any prom I could have imagined.

"I'm so grateful to Mrs. Lee, student council and all the people who made this possible for me. You go to classes with people. You see them at basketball games or whatever. And I have a lot of close friends. But all the people there who donated time and money, and people who came up to dance with me or give me a hug — these people really care about me. I was surrounded by love. It was the best night of my life."

■ MISTY LEE, English teacher

"I love teaching Laura. She's bright and creative. She wrote poetry and even had several pieces published in our literary magazine. Her positive attitude is infectious, too. She's had the best attitude through this whole thing. I knew middle school was hard on her health-wise, so it was a huge jolt to everyone when her cancer came back. She didn't cry when she told me until she brought up the question of prom. I knew she was worried that she may not be able to speak or walk by then. And I could tell she was worried she may not live that long.

"I talked to administrators and student council. Everyone I spoke to was immediately on board to make this dance happen for her. The country club was free. The DJ was free. Parents in the community donated food, drinks and decorations. The yearbook staff even made a photo booth. I always knew Leaguetown was a special community, but everyone came together for this event to really put that to the test. I'm proud of Leaguetown High School, and I'm proud to be a part of this community."

■ FRANCISCO RAMOS, student council president

"We plan for prom literally all year, so when Mrs. Lee brought up the idea of doing a prom for Laura in just a few weeks, I'll admit I wasn't sure if we could pull it off. But then I thought of Laura. The look on her face when she came through the door and saw a full prom just for her made all the hard work worth it. She put her hands on her cheeks and just cried. Everyone did but only for a few minutes. After we heard the music playing, there were no more tears. It became the most incredible party with music bumping, laughs and everyone taking pictures. We wanted Laura and her family to remember each moment of her prom. It was the best thing I've done since joining student council freshman year."

■ MARY ALANIZ, Laura's mother

"Laura hasn't asked for a lot since her diagnosis. She hasn't complained about her treatment. She doesn't mind missing school. She understands she may not be able to walk across the stage at graduation. But the idea of going to prom is something she's talked about for years.

"I was a little worried about what it might be like for Laura when Mrs. Lee called me to float the idea of doing an early prom. What if she got sick and couldn't make it? What if it made her upset instead of happy? What if no one showed up? Well, Leaguetown High School showed up for Laura in a big way. I can't thank Mrs. Lee enough. She was always Laura's favorite teacher, and now a piece of her will live in our hearts forever. She's a reflection of all the giving that goes on here. In Leaguetown, we really do take care of each other. I'll spend the rest of my life paying it forward in this community.

"I loved getting to see my baby in her dress, with her hair done, with red lips and all the jewels. I love her so much, and I will cherish the pictures and videos from that night. She looked like a princess. She is a princess."

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

State • 2023 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 community throwing a special prom in one student's honor.

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.

Perfect hair, makeup and a fairy tale ball gown. When senior Laura Alaniz approached the Leaguetown Country Club, she was excited to take her senior pictures in such a beautiful space. But behind the main doors, 800 of her classmates were ready to surprise her with a prom night she would never forget.

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

Alaniz, English teacher Misty Lee and two student council members will appear on the "Wake Up Texas" morning show on May 22 to tell their story.

direct quote

"This was a night I'll never forget," Alaniz said. "I spent the whole day being pampered like a princess. I thought it was the perfect day, but when we went inside, I couldn't believe what I saw."

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 ("Alaniz said," not "said Alaniz"). Avoid stacking quotes. 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

Alaniz was diagnosed with a rare malignant brain tumor called anaplastic astrocytoma in seventh grade. In 2018, Alaniz was in remission and receiving scans

every three months to monitor tumor growth. Last December, doctors found that the tumor had returned and recommended chemotherapy and radiation.

direct quote

“Laura hasn’t asked for a lot since her diagnosis,” Laura’s mother, Mary Alaniz, said. “She hasn’t complained about her treatment, but the idea of going to prom is something she’s talked about for years. When doctors mentioned she may lose some of her brain function beginning this spring, that was her first concern.”

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 made 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.

Alaniz said she had the best night of her life surrounded by people who love and care about her. And her mother agreed.

“I loved getting to see my baby in her dress, with her hair done, with red lips and all the jewels. I love her so much, and I will cherish the pictures and videos from that night,” Mary Alaniz said. “She looked like a princess. She is a princess.”

SAMPLE STORY

Perfect hair, makeup and a fairy tale ball gown. When senior Laura Alaniz approached the Leaguetown Country Club, she was excited to take her senior pictures in such a beautiful space. But behind the main doors, 800 of her classmates were ready to surprise her with a prom night she would never forget.

Alaniz, English teacher Misty Lee and two student council members will appear on the “Wake Up Texas” morning show on May 22 to tell their story.

“This was a night I’ll never forget,” Alaniz said. “I spent the whole day being pampered like a princess. I thought it was the perfect day, but when we went inside, I couldn’t believe what I saw.”

Alaniz was diagnosed with a rare malignant brain tumor called anaplastic astrocytoma in seventh grade. In 2018, Alaniz was in remission and receiving scans every three months to monitor tumor growth. Last December, doctors found that the tumor had returned and recommended chemotherapy and radiation to extend Laura’s life as much as possible.

“Laura hasn’t asked for a lot since her diagnosis,” Laura’s mother Mary Alaniz said. “She hasn’t complained about her treatment. But the idea of going to prom is something she’s talked about for years.”

Doctors informed Laura that the treatment could cause slurred speech and the inability to use her arms and legs. By February, Alaniz began using a wheelchair, experienced slurred speech, and attended school about half the time.

“I knew middle school was hard on her health-wise, so it was a huge jolt to everyone when her cancer came back,” Lee said. “She didn’t cry when she told me until she brought up the question of prom. I knew she was worried that she may not be able to speak or walk by then. And I could tell she was worried she may not live that long.”

Prom is scheduled for June 3, but Lee and members of student council sprang into action, planning a full second prom a month early — just for Laura. Her prom, held on May 6, had a venue, food, decorations and music, which were all donated.

“I talked to administrators and student council, and everyone I spoke to was immediately on board to make this dance happen for her,” Lee said. “The country club was free. The DJ was free. Parents in the community donated food, drinks and decorations. The yearbook staff even made a photo booth.”

When Alaniz’s boyfriend escorted her inside, she was moved to tears by the surprise. A room full of friends. Gold balloons and decorations. Everyone in the room cried for a few minutes before they began dancing, laughing and taking pictures for the rest of the night.

“We plan for prom literally all year, so when Mrs. Lee brought up the idea of doing a prom for Laura in just a few weeks, I’ll admit I wasn’t sure if we could pull it off,” student council president Francisco Ramos said. “But then I thought of Laura. The look on her face when she came through the door and saw a full prom just for her made all the hard work worth it.”

Alaniz said she had the best night of her life surrounded by people who love and care about her. And her mother agreed.

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