



UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

Feature Writing

Study Packet 2020

This Feature Writing packet contains tests and keys from **only** 2020 Invitational A, B, District and Region. State is not available.

This item is intended for High School grade levels.

Feature Writing

Invitational A Meet • 2020



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, located in West Texas, has 300 students in grades 9-12. Freshman Athena Pyatt, who has lived in Leaguetown all her life, was diagnosed with bradycardia (a slow heartbeat) shortly after her first birthday. When she was 12 years old, she had a pacemaker implanted because her heartbeat had become increasingly slower as she got older. The pacemaker helps Athena maintain a steady, regular heartbeat. The pacemaker consists of a small battery and tiny computer, which was placed in her chest wall. Athena has lived without an incident with the pacemaker until winter break when she was ice skating at Cherry Pond.

Minutes after arriving at the frozen pond with her father and best friend Victoria, Athena collapsed on the ice. Victoria yelled for Athena's father. Immediately, Jackson Pyatt saw that his daughter had lost consciousness and stopped breathing. He called 911 and started yelling for help. Victor Jones, a local firefighter, was at the pond with his daughter when he heard Athena's dad calling for help. Jones skated over and started performing CPR. In between compressions, Jones threw his car keys to his 12-year-old daughter and told her to get the AED (automated external defibrillator) machine out of his trunk. After one shock, Jones was able to detect a pulse.

By the time the ambulance arrived, Athena's pulse was steady again, and she was beginning to regain consciousness. Athena spent a week in the hospital where doctors made adjustments to her pacemaker, hoping to prevent any further complications. After the incident, Athena nominated Jones for Hartley County's Hometown Hero award. Jones won and will be honored at a banquet on Friday, Feb. 14.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, Feb. 11.

■ ATHENA PYATT, sophomore

"I've had a slow heartbeat since I was born, but mostly doctors have just monitored me. I have a cardiologist, but my slower heartbeat had never caused me any problems. Three years ago, that changed. I started getting really tired and dizzy after my soccer games. At first, my parents thought it was because of the heat, but then I had a fainting spell. We immediately went to the hospital where my doctor realized that my heart had slowed even more. I either had to get a pacemaker or stop doing anything. We opted for the pacemaker.

"Since it was implanted, I haven't had any issues. In fact, I have never felt better. That is, until that day when we went ice skating and, even then, I didn't feel bad. When I started skating, I did feel my heart start to race, but I thought it was anxiety. I have skated only once on the ice. I was nervous. But it wasn't anxiety. Minutes after going out on the pond, I collapsed and stopped breathing. I don't remember anything except waking up and looking at a complete stranger

who was yelling at the paramedics to hurry.

“I am so thankful for Mr. Jones. He saved my life. It took the paramedics five minutes to get to the pond, which isn’t that long, but it is when you are not breathing. My doctor says Mr. Jones saved my life. No doubt. I was incredibly lucky that he had an AED machine in his car. Because of that shock, I was revived much quicker than with CPR alone.

“I heard about Hometown Heroes from my English teacher, and I thought Mr. Jones was perfect for it. I wrote a letter describing what happened and so did my dad and doctor. I want the whole county to know what a great man he is. He’s my hero for life.”

■ **JACKSON PYATT, Athena’s dad**

“That day was the scariest day of my life. My wife and I have always watched Athena a little more closely because of her heart issues, but once she got the pacemaker, I thought all of her issues were solved. I was wrong. Our doctor says if Victor wouldn’t have acted so quickly and used the AED machine, Athena would probably not be here. My wife and I are so grateful for his quick action. He saved my little girl’s life. He deserves the title of Hometown Hero and so much more.

“During Athena’s hospital stay, the doctors made some modifications to her pacemaker to prevent this from happening again. Basically what happened at the pond was that Athena’s heart raced up to 280 beats — that’s about 200 beats faster than normal. Her heart essentially short-circuited, and she had a heart attack.”

■ **VICTOR JONES, local firefighter**

“I am so honored to be called a Hometown Hero, but Athena is the real hero. She is the one who pushed through and defied the odds. She’s the fighter. I simply performed CPR and used an AED machine on her.

“I am a man of faith, and I do believe God had a hand in this, too. The only reason I had that AED machine in my trunk was because earlier in the week, I had done a training with a group of new police officers. I had been so busy that I had not had time to return it. In fact, I was on my way to the station to return the AED, but my daughter begged me to take her ice skating first. I am so glad she did.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

As a Hometown Hero, Jones will have his name added to the hero plaque in the county courthouse. He also will receive a check for \$1,000.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

INVITATIONAL A • 2020 FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/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 student who has a heart condition and was saved by a local firefighter.

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.

When sophomore Athena Pyatt went ice skating at Cherry Pond in December, she thought it was anxiety making her heart race.

“I have skated only once on the ice,” she said. “I was nervous.”

But it wasn't anxiety. Her heart was short-circuiting. She collapsed and stopped breathing.

Luckily for her, firefighter Victor Jones was at Cherry Pond and performed CPR and used an automated external defibrillator (AED).

“My doctor says Mr. Jones saved my life,” Athena said. “No doubt.”

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

That's why Athena, who suffers from a heart condition, nominated Jones for Hartley County's Hometown Hero Award, which he won. Jones will be honored at a banquet on Friday.

direct quote

“I am so honored to be called a Hometown Hero, but Athena is the real hero,” Jones said. “She is the one who pushed through and defied the odds. She's the fighter.”

4. After you get past 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 (“Athena said,” not “said Athena”). Avoid stacking quotes. Try to 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

Since birth Athena has lived with bradycardia, a slow heartbeat. Doctors regularly monitor Athena, but her life was not much different than most healthy teens until three years ago.

direct quote

“I started getting really tired and dizzy after my soccer games,” Athena said. “At first, my parents thought it was because of the heat, but then I had a fainting spell.”

transition/story-telling

That was when Athena went to the emergency room and doctors found that her heart had slowed even more. To stay active, Athena needed a pacemaker to help her maintain a steady heartbeat. For three years, it has worked without complications.

direct quote

“Since it was implanted, I haven’t had any issues,” Athena said. “In fact, I have never felt better. That is, until that day when we went ice skating and, even then, I didn’t feel bad.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our own Athena.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Mr. Jones is an awesome guy.” 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.

“I want the whole county to know what a great man he is,” she said. “He’s my hero for life.”

SAMPLE STORY

When sophomore Athena Pyatt went ice skating at Cherry Pond in December, she thought it was anxiety making her heart race.

“I have skated only once on the ice,” she said. “I was nervous.”

But it wasn't anxiety. Her heart was short-circuiting. She collapsed and stopped breathing.

Luckily for her, firefighter Victor Jones was at Cherry Pond and performed CPR and used an automated external defibrillator (AED).

“My doctor says Mr. Jones saved my life,” Athena said. “No doubt.”

That's why Athena, who suffers from a heart condition, nominated Jones for Hartley County's Hometown Hero Award, which he won. Jones will be honored at a banquet on Friday.

“I am so honored to be called a Hometown Hero, but Athena is the real hero,” Jones said. “She is the one who pushed through and defied the odds. She's the fighter.”

Since birth Athena has lived with bradycardia, a slow heartbeat. Doctors regularly monitor Athena, but her life was not much different than most healthy teens until three years ago.

“I started getting really tired and dizzy after my soccer games,” Athena said. “At first, my parents thought it was because of the heat, but then I had a fainting spell.”

That was when Athena went to the emergency room and doctors found that her heart had slowed even more. To stay active, Athena needed a pacemaker to help her maintain a steady heartbeat. For three years, it worked without complications.

“Since it was implanted, I haven't had any issues,” Athena said. “In fact, I have never felt better. That is, until that day when we went ice skating and, even then, I didn't feel bad.”

On that day, Athena had been skating on the pond for only a few minutes when she collapsed and stopped breathing. The next thing she knew, she was staring face-to-face with Jones.

“I don't remember anything except waking up and looking at a complete stranger who was yelling at the paramedics to hurry,” she said.

Athena said she was incredibly lucky that Jones had an AED machine in his trunk. Jones attributes it to divine intervention.

“The only reason I had that AED machine in my trunk was because earlier in the week, I had done a training with a group of new police officers,” Jones said. “I had been so busy that I had not had time to return it. In fact, I was on my way to the station to return the AED, but my daughter begged me to take her ice skating first.”

After the incident, Athena spent a week in the hospital where doctors made modifications to her pacemaker to prevent this from happening again.

“Basically what happened at the pond was that Athena's heart raced up to 280 beats — that's about 200 beats faster than normal,” her dad, Jackson Pyatt, said. “Her heart essentially short-circuited, and she had a heart attack.”

Pyatt said he and wife are grateful to Jones for saving their “little girl's life.”

“He deserves the title of Hometown Hero and so much more,” he said.

Athena said she decided to nominate Jones for the Hometown Hero award after learning about the award from her English teacher. For the award, Jones will have his name added to a plaque in the courthouse, and he will receive a \$1,000 check.

“I want the whole county to know what a great man he is,” she said. “He's my hero for life.”

Feature Writing

Invitational B Meet • 2020



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 900 students in grades 9-12. Sophomore Jacob Reese fell in love with basketball when he was only a toddler. In fact, he joined his first team when he was 4 years old. As he grew up, Jacob's love for basketball grew. Not only did he play the sport year-round, he also dreamed of one day playing basketball for the high school team. When he was in seventh grade, two days before trying out for the middle school basketball team, Jacob had a seizure at school. After being rushed to the hospital, doctors diagnosed Jacob with Photosensitive Epilepsy, which means he can't be in a dark room with one light source — so no movie theaters, no theme parks after dark and also, no contact sports, including basketball.

Despite the devastating news, Jacob tried to find the bright side: with medication and diligence his epilepsy could be controlled — mostly. He also tried to find a new passion. After dabbling in archery, painting and gardening, Jacob found a new love his freshman year in videography. Jacob threw himself into his new hobby just like he had done with basketball when he was younger. He began filming everything — family birthday parties, school events, little league games, events at his church. Varsity basketball coach Dale Butler saw Jacob filming a band concert in October and asked him if he would be interested in filming a few varsity practices. From there, the coaches asked him to be the team videographer. Jacob now films every varsity game.

The coaches credit Jacob with helping the team reach the regional tournament this year, which is the farthest the team has ever gone in post-district play. For his work, the coaches will honor Jacob with a varsity letterman jacket at the basketball banquet Friday, March 13. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Thursday, March 12.

■ JACOB REESE, sophomore

“My mom used to joke that I was born with a basketball in my hands because I loved the sport so much. When I started playing, I was the youngest kid on my team, but I knew more about the game than the coach. I always thought I would play on the high school team. When I was in fifth grade, my dad and I started going to the varsity games, and we became big fans. I couldn't wait to play for the team, but then I had that seizure.

“The diagnosis was shocking to me and everyone in my family. None of us had ever heard of Photosensitive Epilepsy before. My parents were pretty shaken up, so I tried to stay as positive as I could. I'm not going to lie. When the doctors told me I would not be able to play any contact sports, I cried. I cried a lot. But then, I figured I could either wallow in self-pity or be grateful that I didn't have anything worse. I chose the latter, and I began searching for a new passion. It's not that I stopped loving basketball, but it was hard to go to games and watch it

■ JACOB REESE (cont.)

on television. I kind of took a break from the game. That is, until this year.

“When coach Butler asked me to film some practices, I hesitated a little. I wasn’t sure I was ready to be near basketball again. I also didn’t think videography would ever lead me back to basketball. But I couldn’t say no. I love the game and, if I could be helpful to the team, I wanted to do it. This season, I traveled with the team and filmed every game. After the Friday night games, I would share my videos and my thoughts with the coaches on the following Saturday. Sometimes, I would see things that they would miss. I kind of feel like a coach. Coach Butler has started calling me ‘Coach V’ for videographer.

“I still miss playing the game. Filming, though, is the next best thing. I am a part of the team, and I think I found my future career — sports analyst.

“I planned to go to the banquet, but I didn’t realize the coaches were going to honor me until last week. They asked me to their office to try on letterman jackets. I can’t believe I am getting a varsity jacket.

“Since that seizure in seventh grade, I’ve had two more — one at school and one at church. Both were scary, but I’ve been pretty lucky. Most kids with this condition have had a lot more seizures.”

■ DALE BUTLER, varsity coach

“Sometimes after practice, Jacob or Coach V, as we all call him now, will shoot around with me and the other coaches. He has a heck of a shot. We’ve played horse a few times, and he’s won every time. With his condition, he can still shoot baskets, but he can’t play in a game due to the potential contact. It’s such a shame. He is, though, an integral part of our team. More than once, Jacob’s footage has helped us overcome an opponent and improve our team. We would have never beat Southside without his film and his insights. He’s a great videographer and even better sports analyst. He deserves that letterman jacket just as much as any player on the team.”

■ DEWON NIGHLY, senior basketball player

“Jacob made a highlight film for all of the seniors. It’s what helped me get my scholarship. Jacob also helped with my shot. At the beginning of the season, my outside shots were off. I asked Jacob for some help. He filmed me during one practice and then the two of us reviewed the film. I saw my hand taking a weird angle, but I had no idea I was doing it. I went from averaging seven points a game to averaging 21. That’s a huge jump, and I have Jacob to thank for it.”

■ PATRICK BEACH, junior basketball player

“Jacob and I played on the same basketball team throughout elementary school. He was really good. I hate that he can’t play anymore, but he’s still impacting the team. He’s not dunking the ball in the basket, but he’s definitely adding points to our game. And our opponents have no way to stop him. Coach V is our secret weapon. With him on the team, we could go all the way to State next year.”

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INVITATIONAL B • 2020 FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

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1. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about a student who can't play sports anymore because of a medical condition, but he is still a part of the team.

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.

Sophomore Jacob Reese's mom likes to joke that he was born with a basketball in his hands. He was only 4 years old when he joined his first team. Basketball was his passion, and he dreamed of playing on the high school team.

But that basketball dream was shattered when Jacob had a seizure during school two days before middle school tryouts. Doctors diagnosed Jacob with Photosensitive Epilepsy. He can't be in a dark room with one light source. This meant no movie theaters, no trips to the theme park after dark, no contact sports — no basketball.

"I'm not going to lie," Jacob said. "When the doctors told me I would not be able to play any contact sports, I cried. I cried a lot."

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 losing basketball, Jacob searched for a new passion. Eventually, he fell in love with videography, and this new passion led him back to basketball, something he didn't expect. Jacob has served as the varsity team's videographer all year. He's become such an "integral part" of the team that Jacob will be honored with a letterman jacket at the basketball banquet tomorrow.

direct quote

"More than once, Jacob's footage has helped us overcome an opponent and improve our team," varsity coach Dale Butler said. "We would have never beat Southside without his film and his insights. He's a great videographer and even better sports analyst. He deserves that letterman jacket just as much as any player on the team."

4. After you get past the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of the 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 (“Jacob said,” not “said Jacob”). Avoid stacking quotes. Try to 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

Jacob’s journey from playing basketball to filming basketball didn’t happen overnight. After his diagnosis, he dabbled in archery, painting and gardening. During his freshman year, he found his new love: videography. And just like with basketball, Jacob threw himself into this new hobby. He started filming everything from family birthday parties to school events.

direct quote

“It’s not that I stopped loving basketball, but it was hard to go to games and watch it on television,” Jacob said. “I kind of took a break from the game. That is, until this year.”

transition/story-telling

In October, Butler saw him filming a band concert and asked if he would be interested in filming a few varsity practices.

direct quote

“When coach Butler asked me to film some practices, I hesitated a little,” Jacob said. “I wasn’t sure I was ready to be near basketball again. But I couldn’t say no. I love the game and, if I could be helpful to the team, I wanted to do it.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our own Jacob.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Jacob is an awesome guy.” 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.

“Filming, though, is the next best thing,” he said. “I am a part of the team, and I think I found my future career — sports analyst.”

SAMPLE STORY

Sophomore Jacob Reese's mom likes to joke that he was born with a basketball in his hands. He was only 4 years old when he joined his first team. Basketball was his passion, and he dreamed of playing on the high school team.

But that basketball dream was shattered when Jacob had a seizure during school two days before middle school tryouts. Doctors diagnosed Jacob with Photosensitive Epilepsy. He can't be in a dark room with a light source. This meant no movie theaters, no trips to the theme park after dark, no contact sports — including basketball.

"I'm not going to lie," Jacob said. "When the doctors told me I would not be able to play any contact sports, I cried. I cried a lot."

After losing basketball, Jacob searched for a new passion. Eventually, he fell in love with videography, and this new passion led him back to basketball, something he didn't expect. Jacob has served as the varsity team's videographer all year. Jacob will be honored with a letterman jacket at the basketball banquet tomorrow.

"More than once, Jacob's footage has helped us overcome an opponent and improve our team," varsity coach Dale Butler said, "We would have never beat Southside without his film and his insights. He's a great videographer and even better sports analyst. He deserves that letterman jacket just as much as any player on the team."

Jacob's journey from playing basketball to filming basketball didn't happen overnight. After his diagnosis, he dabbled in archery, painting and gardening. During his freshman year, he found his new love: videography. And just like with basketball, Jacob threw himself into this new hobby. He started filming everything from family birthday parties to school events.

"It's not that I stopped loving basketball, but it was hard to go to games and watch it on television," Jacob said. "I kind of took a break from the game. That is, until this year."

In October, Butler saw him filming a band concert and asked if he would be interested in filming a few varsity practices.

"When coach Butler asked me to film some practices, I hesitated a little," Jacob said. "I wasn't sure I was ready to be near basketball again. But I couldn't say no. I love the game and, if I could be helpful to the team, I wanted to do it."

It wasn't long before the coaches asked Jacob to be team videographer. This season, he traveled with the team, filming every game. Following the games, he would share his videos and thoughts on the team's performance with the coaches.

"Sometimes, I would see things that they would miss," Jacob said. "I kind of feel like a coach. Coach Butler has started calling me, 'Coach V' for videographer."

Junior basketball player Patrick Beach said he played on the same basketball team as Jacob throughout elementary school and Jacob was "good — really good."

"I hate that he can't play anymore, but he's still impacting the team," he said. "He's not dunking the ball in the basket, but he's definitely adding points to our game. And our opponents have no way to stop him. Coach V is our secret weapon. With him on the team, we could go all the way to State next year."

Jacob, who has had only two seizures since his diagnosis, said he still misses being on the court.

"Filming, though, is the next best thing," he said. "I am a part of the team, and I think I found my future career — sports analyst."

Feature Writing

District Meet • 2020



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Leaguetown High School has 600 students in grades 9-12. Over spring break this year, junior Gabi Ramirez and her parents went backpacking in Los Padres National Forest in central California. For the first three days, the family spent their days boulder-hopping and floating the Arroyo Seco River on inner tubes to get to the Arroyo Seco narrows. At night, they slept in mummy sleeping bags with mesh bags over their heads to keep the bugs away.

When they arrived at the Arroyo Seco narrows, the family planned to continue to float the river and down the waterfall, which would lead them to public campgrounds. On the fourth day of the trip, the family reached the narrows, a spot in the river surrounded by solid rock up to 40 feet high on each side, but the water currents were too strong for the family to tube down safely. Essentially, the family was stuck. They couldn't float upstream to return to where they started, and they couldn't float down the river either.

After several hours of trying to find a route out, Gabi suggested they put a rescue note in her plastic water bottle and send it down the narrows. Gabi found a receipt and a pen and carved 911 into the outside of the hot pink water bottle. On the receipt, Gabi wrote the date and the words, "We are trapped at the narrows waterfall. Send help." She put the note in the bottle, and Gabi's father tossed it into the narrows.

On the sixth day when their water and food supply were getting low, the family heard a helicopter overhead. The three went to a clearing near the waterfall and began waving their hands. The rescue chopper saw the family and airlifted them from the area.

Next weekend, April 4-5, Gabi and her family will return to California. There, they will meet Jan and Stan Hughley, the couple who found the water bottle and called the park rangers. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, March 31.

■ GABI RAMIREZ, junior

"Backpacking is a pretty normal vacation for my family. We've done it all over the United States. This was my first time to go to California though. Until day four of the trip, it was a perfect trip. The weather was beautiful. The area was breathtaking, and tubing down a river is not a bad way to travel — unless you need to go back up the river.

"My parents are nature bunnies, or that is what I like to call them. They call themselves naturalists, whatever that means. We've never done the 'normal' family vacations like Disney parks or cruises, and I am grateful. Ours are definitely more adventurous than most. I have seen and done things kids my age will never experience. We've hiked Kesugi Ridge in Alaska, the Appalachian Trail, Mount Rainier National Park and so many other beautiful places. Our happiness

■ GABI RAMIREZ (cont.)

is sleeping under the stars and exploring new lands.

“I was definitely scared a bit when we realized we didn’t have a way out, but my parents were super calm. That kept me from panicking. I was worried we would run out of food and water, but my dad assured me that he could purify water if we had to. Luckily, we didn’t.

“I didn’t think the water bottle idea would work, but I thought it couldn’t hurt. I got the idea when I saw a log floating in the river that looked like a water bottle. The receipt was from a little diner we ate at right before we went on vacation.

“When we heard the helicopter, my mother grabbed our hands and pulled us to the clearing. She didn’t want it to miss us. We all waved our hands crazy and jumped up and down shouting, ‘Here we are! Here we are!’ We must have looked like three weirdos, but we didn’t care. We wanted out of there.

“By the time we landed back at the camp grounds, the Hughleys had left so we couldn’t thank them. I am so excited about meeting them next weekend. I know my mom is going to scare them a bit. She’s a big hugger and a big crier. She still gets weepy any time we talk about the adventure. And yes, I call it an adventure. It was — maybe not the adventure we had planned, but an adventure all the same.

“This incident won’t stop us from camping and hiking in the future. I am so grateful my parents share backpacking with me. I love the freedom we have on our trip. I love that we see something new every day. The outdoors is where we find our peace and our place in the world.”

■ MARTHA RAMIREZ, Gabi’s mom

“I can’t wait to give the Hughleys a big hug. That’s the couple who found Gabi’s water bottle. My husband and I tried to remain calm after we realized we didn’t have a way out because we didn’t want to scare Gabi, but it wasn’t easy. We didn’t have a Plan B if no one found the bottle.

“We are avid hikers and campers, but that area didn’t have much of anything to sustain us if we had not been rescued. My husband thought maybe the river would calm down enough in a week or so, but he wasn’t sure. And a week is a long time to go with little to no food.

■ DARREN OSBORN, park ranger

“This was my first search and rescue that started with a message in a bottle. It was an ingenious idea. In my 15 years as a park ranger, we’ve had to rescue a few people from the narrows. Usually, people are able to float down through that area safely, but whenever we have a lot of rain, the waterfall area gets too dangerous. That’s what happened when the Ramirez family got stuck. We had had several days of torrential rain before they arrived. It takes a while for the river to calm down again.”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Ramirez family had no cell phone reception while they were trapped in the narrows.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

DISTRICT • 2020 FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/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 student who had to be rescued while on vacation with her family during spring break.

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.

Junior Gabi Ramirez carved "911" on the outside of her hot pink water bottle. Then she wrote the message: "We are trapped at the narrows waterfall. Send help." on a receipt from a diner and stuffed it in the bottle. Her dad tossed it into the river, and the family hoped for the best.

"I didn't think the water bottle idea would work, but I thought it couldn't hurt," she said.

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

But her idea did work. Two days later, Jan and Stan Hughley, who were camping at Los Padres National Forest, found the water bottle and alerted park rangers. Hours later, the family was rescued by helicopter.

direct quote

"This was my first search and rescue that started with a message in a bottle," park ranger Darren Osborn said.

4. After you get past the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of the 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 ("Jacob said," not "said Jacob"). Avoid stacking quotes. Try to 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

This was also the first time Gabi and her parents had to be rescued during a

vacation. And the family has embraced “more adventurous vacations,” Gabi said.

direct quote

“We’ve hiked Kesugi Ridge in Alaska, the Appalachian Trail, Mount Rainier National Park and so many other beautiful places,” she said. “Our happiness is sleeping under the stars and exploring new lands.”

transition/story-telling

For this vacation over spring break, Gabi and her parents planned to camp, backpack and tube down the Arroyo Seco River to eventually land at public campgrounds where they could catch a bus to their car. Unfortunately, once they reached the Arroyo Seco narrows, the river became too rough to travel on. The family was stuck.

direct quote

“Until day four of the trip, it was a perfect trip,” Gabi said. “The weather was beautiful. The area was breathtaking, and tubing down a river is not a bad way to travel — unless you need to go back up the river.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our own Gabi.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Gabi is so brave.” 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.

“I am so grateful that my parents share backpacking with me,” she said. “I love the freedom we have on our trip. I love that we see something new every day. The outdoors is where we find our peace and our place in the world.”

SAMPLE STORY

Junior Gabi Ramirez carved “911” on the outside of her hot pink water bottle. Then she wrote the message: “We are trapped at the narrows waterfall. Send help.” on a receipt from a diner and stuffed it in the bottle. Her dad tossed it into the river, and the family hoped for the best.

“I didn’t think the water bottle idea would work, but I thought it couldn’t hurt,” she said.

But her idea did work. Two days later, Jan and Stan Hughley, who were camping at Los Padres National Forest, found the water bottle and alerted park rangers. Hours later, the family was rescued by helicopter.

“This was my first search and rescue that started with a message in a bottle,” park ranger Darren Osborn said.

It was also the first time Gabi and her parents had to be rescued during a vacation. And the family has embraced “more adventurous vacations,” Gabi said.

“We’ve hiked Kesugi Ridge in Alaska, the Appalachian Trail, Mount Rainier National Park and so many other beautiful places,” she said. “Our happiness is sleeping under the stars and exploring new lands.”

For this spring break vacation, Gabi and her parents planned to camp, backpack and tube down the Arroyo Seco River to eventually land at public campgrounds where they could catch a bus to their car. Unfortunately, once they reached the Arroyo Seco narrows, the river became too rough to travel on. The family was stuck.

“Until day four of the trip, it was a perfect trip,” Gabi said. “The weather was beautiful. The area was breathtaking, and tubing down a river is not a bad way to travel — unless you need to go back up the river.”

Since that wasn’t an option, Gabi’s family was forced to be creative. That’s when she thought of using her water bottle with a note.

“When we heard the helicopter, my mother grabbed our hands and pulled us to the clearing,” Gabi said. “She didn’t want it to miss us. We all waved our hands crazy and jumped up and down shouting, ‘Here we are! Here we are!’”

When the family landed at the camp grounds, the Hughleys had already left. Next weekend, Gabi and her parents will fly to California to meet the couple and thank them in person.

“I know my mom is going to scare them a bit,” Gabi said. “She’s a big hugger and a big crier. She still gets weepy any time we talk about the adventure. And yes, I call it an adventure. It was — maybe not the adventure we had planned, but an adventure all the same.”

The adventure was still scary for Gabi once she realized they were trapped, but she said her parents were “super calm.”

“That kept me from panicking,” she said. “I was worried we would run out of food and water, but my dad assured me that he could purify water if we had to. Luckily, we didn’t.”

Osborn said it’s not the first time park rangers have rescued people from the narrows.

“Usually, people are able to float down through that area quite safely, but whenever we have a lot of rain, the waterfall area gets too dangerous,” he said. “That’s what happened when the Ramirez family got stuck.”

Gabi said this incident won’t slow her family down though.

“I am so grateful that my parents share backpacking with me,” she said. “I love the freedom we have on our trip. I love that we see something new every day. The outdoors is where we find our peace and our place in the world.”

Feature Writing

Region Meet • 2020



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 400 students in grades 9-12. In February, junior Dante Brown made it to “Teen Chopped,” a reality show cooking competition on the Food Network. For the competition, Dante faced three other teens from around the U.S. Using unusual basket ingredients like Gummi Bears or pig brains, each teen had to prepare a three-course meal consisting of an appetizer, entree and dessert. At the end of each timed course, three judges chop the teen chef who fails to measure up in terms of taste, presentation and creativity.

This week, the episode aired, and Dante won first place and a \$25,000 scholarship to culinary school.

With the help of his grandmother, Dante started cooking when he was 9. Dante said he fell in love with cooking and started watching every cooking show he could. Two years ago, he started a food blog called “Dante’s Kitchen Inferno.” There, he shares his unique recipes, which often have a Jamaican flare, since his grandmother is from Kingstown.

Twice a month, Dante cooks at a homeless shelter with his grandmother. When he graduates, he wants to attend culinary school and then open his own restaurant.

On Friday, April 24, to celebrate his win, Dante will recreate the Starburst pesto pasta he made for the appetizer round on “Chopped.” Students will be able to purchase the meal for \$5, and all proceeds will go to the League County Homeless Shelter.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, April 21.

■ DANTE BROWN, junior

“I am so glad the episode finally aired. I wasn’t allowed to tell anyone other than my family that I won the contest. That has been the hardest part. My friends have asked me about a million times how I did, and I couldn’t tell them.

“The hardest round for me was the first one. Our basket items included lemon Starburst candy, sugar snap peas, ground lamb and Thai black garlic. How to use the candy stumped me. I had no idea what to make. Finally, after five minutes I thought of pesto, but I had wasted one fourth of my time. I was a bit panicked and almost burned the lamb meatballs while blending the pesto. Luckily, I turned around just in time. I plated the appetizer with only 30 seconds left on the clock. I didn’t even get to taste anything before serving it to the judges. I was so nervous. I thought for sure the judges would chop me in that round. But the judges loved my appetizer.

“For the main course, our basket ingredients included a granola bar, chicken thighs, leeks and oyster mushrooms. I made a Jamaican stew with those ingredients in honor of my grandmother. And for the dessert round, I made caramel ice cream with a carrot cake cookie.

■ DANTE BROWN (cont.)

“After I made it through the appetizer round, my nerves calmed down a bit. Cooking the Jamaican stew was the easiest round for me because it is one of my go-to dinners at home. The beautiful thing about a stew is you can throw anything into it if you use fresh spices and have high-quality meat. Chicken thighs are perfect.

“The other teens I competed against were all nice and super-good cooks. They were a bit more serious than I was. I like to dance when I cook. It relaxes me. I didn’t dance much during the appetizer round because I was so stressed out, but once I did fine in that round, my moves came back to me. My grandmother calls me Chef Wiggles. It’s pretty silly, I know, but I started dancing and cooking when I was 9. My dance moves were pretty much wiggles. Hopefully now, my moves have improved along with my cooking.

“On Friday, I am making a huge batch of the Starburst pesto pasta and meatballs. The only ingredient I am changing is the ground lamb. It’s too expensive, so I am using ground beef. I hope a lot of students and teachers try the pesto. My goal is to raise at least \$500 for the shelter.

“I am stunned that I won. It still feels like a dream – a wonderful, super-awesome, fantastic dream. Culinary school was going to be tough for my family because it’s so expensive. The \$25,000 scholarship will make it possible for me to go.”

■ TANYA SHIRVANI, junior

“Dante is a beast in the kitchen. I am not surprised that he won. We’ve been friends since fifth grade, and I eat at his house every chance I get. I love his food. In fact, I don’t think he’s ever cooked me anything I didn’t like. When I was younger, I didn’t eat many vegetables — until I started eating at Dante’s. He would hide the vegetables in all of the Jamaican spices and stews. Now, I eat almost anything.

“Dante is not just an amazing cook. He’s an amazing person. Twice a month, he spends almost his entire Saturday cooking at the homeless shelter. He even makes extras so the staff can take dinners home to their families. And he’s not serving canned green beans and boxed mashed potatoes. Everything he cooks is fresh. Last week when I went by to help him, he was cooking jerk chicken, coconut rice and beans and homemade bread. It was all delicious.”

■ BO GILLUM, one of the “Chopped” judges and owner of Bo’s Bistro in New York City

“Dante’s happy dances and positive energy won the judges over almost as much as the food. Dante has a natural instinct for combining foods. He had a remarkable understanding of the basket ingredients and an innate ability to look at a group of mismatched ingredients and know how to bring them together. His Jamaican stew was one of the best meals served on the show. It was definitely the favorite of all of the judges. I told Dante that if he ever needs a job to give me a call. I would hire him in a minute.”

■ AMARIKA BROWN, Dante’s grandmother

“That child has made us so proud. Cooking is how we express our culture, and I am so proud that he has embraced his Jamaican roots. When he decided to make the Jamaican stew in the second round, I couldn’t stop crying. I knew he would win with that recipe. I can’t wait to eat at his restaurant when he graduates from culinary school.”

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Freshco’s Grocers donated the food for the Friday school luncheon.

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REGION • 2020 FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

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1. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about a student using his talent to raise money for the local homeless shelter.

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.

Junior Dante Brown stared at the ingredients: lemon Starburst candy, sugar snap peas, ground lamb and Thai black garlic. He had only 20 minutes to create an appetizer for his first round on the reality cooking show "Teen Chopped," and he was stumped.

"I had no idea what to make," he said. "Finally, after five minutes I thought of pesto, but I had wasted one fourth of my time."

Dante rushed to create his dish and plated the food without even tasting it.

"I was so nervous," he said. "I thought for sure the judges would chop me in that round."

But they didn't. The judges loved his pesto, and Dante made it to the next round — and the next, beating out his three competitors and winning the title of Chopped Champion.

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

In February Dante wowed the judges on "Chopped," a Food Network show where contestants cook three timed meals using unusual ingredients. He took home the title and a \$25,000 scholarship to culinary school. But it wasn't until this week that the episode aired on the network.

direct quote

"I am so glad the episode finally aired," he said. "I wasn't allowed to tell anyone other than my family that I won the contest. That has been the hardest part. My friends have asked me about a million times how I did, and I couldn't tell them."

4. After you get past the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of the 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 (“Dante said,” not “said Dante”). Avoid stacking quotes. Try to 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

To celebrate his win, Dante will cook his Starburst pesto for students and staff on Friday. The lunch will cost \$5, and all proceeds will go to the League County Homeless Shelter.

direct quote

“I hope a lot of students and teachers try the pesto,” he said. “My goal is to raise at least \$500 for the shelter.”

transition/story-telling

Dante’s journey into the kitchen began when he was 9 years old. His grandmother, who is Jamaican, taught him how to cook. In the second round of the competition, Dante made a Jamaican stew out of the basket ingredients.

direct quote

“Cooking the Jamaican stew was the easiest round for me because it is one of my go-to dinners for my family,” he said. “The beautiful thing about a stew is you can throw just about anything into it if you use good spices and have good meat.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our own Dante.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Dante is so amazing.” 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.

Even months after winning, Dante said he is still stunned that he won.

“It still feels like a dream,” he said, “A wonderful, super awesome, fantastic dream.”

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“Cooking the Jamaican stew was the easiest round for me because it is one of my go-to dinners for my family,” he said. “The beautiful thing about a stew is you can throw just about anything into it if you use good spices and have good meat.”

Bo Gillum, one of the “Chopped” judges and owner of a New York City restaurant, called Dante’s stew “one of the best meals I’ve ever had on the show.” But it wasn’t just his food that impressed the judges.

“Dante’s happy dances and positive energy won the judges over almost as much as the food,” Gillum said.

Dante said he loves to dance when he cooks.

“It relaxes me,” he said. “I didn’t dance much during the appetizer round because I was so stressed out, but once I did fine in that round, my moves came back to me.”

Childhood friend junior Tanya Shirvani, who regularly eats at Dante’s house, said she was not surprised that Dante won.

“I love his food,” she said. “In fact, I don’t think he’s ever cooked me anything I didn’t like. When I was younger, I didn’t eat many vegetables until I started eating at Dante’s.”

But Tanya said Dante is more than an amazing cook — he’s an amazing person, too. Twice a month he spends an entire day cooking at the homeless shelter.

“He even makes extras so the staff can take home dinners for their family,” she said. “And he’s not serving canned green beans and boxed mashed potatoes. Everything he cooks is fresh and homemade.”

Even months after winning, Dante said he is still stunned that he won.

“It still feels like a dream,” he said, “A wonderful, super-awesome, fantastic dream.”