

Feature Writing

Invitational A 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 1,217 students in grades 9-12. During the first week of school, senior Daniel Rodriguez was in the school lunch line when he noticed that the student in front of him had a negative balance in his school lunch account. As a result, the lunch staff picked up his tray of turkey spaghetti with green beans and fruit salad and handed him a brown bag that contained a cheese sandwich, an apple and plain milk.

A few days later, Rodriguez observed a similar incident in the cafeteria. This time, he noticed the student crying as he walked away with his bag lunch. This sparked Rodriguez to call the district's nutrition services office and ask how much it would take to pay off each student's lunch debt. The total was \$17,000. He then developed a plan to raise funds with the goal of paying off all student lunch debt in the district by the end of the year.

He and a group of his friends worked through the fall to make friendship bracelets with messages on them to sell to students and community members for \$5 each. Rodriguez called his program "Beads for Bites." He sold 832 bracelets in the first week alone and has expanded the project to include online donations through GoFundMe.

After Rodriguez shared the idea on social media, the GoFundMe received \$6,000 in donations from all over the country, and the group has an additional \$7,325 in bracelet profits, making them \$3,675 away from their goal. The local craft store donated enough beads and other supplies to keep the project going.

On Jan. 12, Beads for Bites will host a bracelet trading party after school in the cafeteria where they will try to sell the last of their bracelets. All students and staff are invited to attend. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Jan. 9.

■ DANIEL RODRIGUEZ, senior

"I feel so bad for those students when they have their hot lunches taken away and replaced with cheese sandwiches. I feel a little embarrassed for those students when I see it. School is hard sometimes. By the time I get to lunch, I've been to three classes, plus a P.E. class, so I'm normally starving. I can't imagine having a cheese sandwich and apple instead of a real lunch to get me through the rest of my day.

"I talked to some of my friends, and we knew we wanted to do something to erase all this student lunch debt so no kid has to go through this in Leaguetown. Three of us went to Taylor Swift's 'Eras Tour' last summer and traded bracelets with some of the other fans around us. We used beads to make different phrases from Taylor's songs. Our bracelets had these tie-dye looking beads on them that everyone seemed to love. So when we started looking for a way to raise money, this was the first thing we thought of.

"Our bracelets say 'End Hunger,' 'Beads for Bites' or 'What's for lunch?'"

■ **DANIEL RODRIGUEZ, continued**

Of course, the first thing we did to promote the fundraiser was to make a TikTok about it and, yes, we tagged Taylor. We didn't have many views for the first couple of days, but on the third day, Taylor actually commented with just a heart emoji. We couldn't believe it. That was cool enough on its own, but then people actually started buying bracelets and donating to the GoFundMe. People I had never heard of in my life. When I saw that heart comment from Taylor, I actually jumped out of my chair during my yearbook class and screamed. I think my yearbook adviser thought I was hurt. Thanks to that little heart, it looks like no student will have to go through the year without a real lunch.

"If we raise more than the current amount of debt, we'll start a scholarship for Leaguetown students who can't pay for college through the Leaguetown Education Foundation."

■ **JENNIFER SKILLING, freshman**

"I've had my lunch account dip below zero before. It's humiliating. Everyone around me knew I couldn't afford lunch. And the cheese sandwiches are gummy and dry. It feels like a prison meal. Not edible. Luckily, my mom got a new job last year, so it hasn't happened to me in a while, but I've seen my friends have hot food taken from their hands and thrown directly into the trash because there wasn't enough money in their account. I just felt powerless to do anything about it. I don't know anything about the bracelets, but I shared the Beads for Bites posts on my Snapchat and plan to buy a bracelet or two before the trading party."

■ **MERI JAMES, director of nutrition services**

"We never turn a student away at lunch time. But providing that alternative meal allows us to keep our costs down. We encourage all students and parents who qualify to apply to our free and reduced lunch program to ensure that each student can go through the lunch line and get the daily hot lunch, pizza, chicken, salad or whatever they may want to eat for lunch.

"That being said, I am so impressed by what these students are doing to help their classmates. We try not to make the situation awkward when we offer students an alternative lunch, but sometimes it can't be helped. Anything students can do to help other students will always impress me."

■ **SANDRA HORVATH, junior**

"Daniel and I had the best time at the Taylor Swift concert this summer. He has such a big heart. That's why he's my best friend. When he asked if I wanted to make more bracelets to raise money so students don't have to carry any lunch debt, I was immediately behind him. I think I made around 300. My fingers hurt, but it was worth it. I guess you could say we're in our 'Every Student Gets a Decent Lunch' Era. The Beads for Bites trading party is going to be amazing. We have balloons. We've made signs with a QR code so people can donate, and we're going to make dozens of cheese sandwiches as a nod to the 'alternative lunch.' But we'll use good cheese and bread, not the yucky kind."

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

Invitational A 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 student planning a fundraiser to pay student lunch debt.

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.

Daniel was starving as he waited in the soft drone of the cafeteria line. Lifting his head, he noticed one student ahead of him, anticipating his turn. The student's lunch balance flashed across the monitor, a negative sign reflecting from the screen. His tray of warm turkey spaghetti, green beans and fruit salad was replaced by the crinkle of a brown paper bag and a dry cheese sandwich.

When it happened a second time, senior Daniel Rodriguez knew he wanted to do something to prevent other students from experiencing the embarrassment of having their lunches taken away because they couldn't afford to pay.

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 calling the district's nutrition services office to find out how much was owed, he became determined to raise the money to pay off the district's \$17,000 student lunch debt by the end of the year. He decided to sell friendship bracelets through a program he named "Beads for Bites." On Jan. 12, the program will host a bracelet trading party after school in the cafeteria to raise the remaining funds.

direct quote

"I felt so bad for those students when they had their hot lunches taken away and replaced with cheese sandwiches," Rodriguez said. "By the time I get to lunch, I've been to three classes, plus a P.E. class, so I'm normally starving. I can't imagine having a cheese sandwich and apple instead of a real lunch to get me through the rest of my day."

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 (“Rodriguez said” not “said Rodriguez”). 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

Freshman Jenifer Skilling said having a hot lunch replaced by a cold sandwich can be humiliating.

direct quote

“I’ve had my account dip below zero before,” Skilling said. “Everyone around me knew I couldn’t afford lunch. And the cheese sandwiches are gummy and dry. It feels like a prison meal.”

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.

But thanks to some inspiration from Taylor Swift and Beads for Bites, Rodriguez said the cheese sandwich lunch might be a thing of the past.

“When I saw that heart comment from Taylor, I actually jumped out of my chair during my yearbook class and screamed,” Rodriguez said. “I think my yearbook adviser thought I was hurt. Thanks to that little heart, it looks like no student will have to go through the year without a real lunch.”

SAMPLE STORY

Daniel was starving as he waited in the soft drone of the cafeteria line. Lifting his head, he noticed one student ahead of him, anticipating his turn. The student's lunch balance flashed across the monitor, a negative sign reflecting from the screen. His tray of warm turkey spaghetti, green beans and fruit salad was replaced by the crinkle of a brown paper bag and a dry cheese sandwich.

When it happened a second time, senior Daniel Rodriguez knew he wanted to do something to prevent other students from experiencing the embarrassment of having their lunches taken away because they couldn't afford to pay.

After calling the district's nutrition services office to find out how much was owed, he became determined to raise the money to pay off the district's \$17,000 student lunch debt by the end of the year. He decided to sell friendship bracelets through a program he named "Beads for Bites." On Jan. 12, the program will host a bracelet trading party after school in the cafeteria to sell the rest of their bracelets and raise the remaining funds.

"I feel so bad for those students when they have their hot lunches taken away and replaced with cheese sandwiches," Rodriguez said. "By the time I get to lunch, I've been to three classes, plus a P.E. class, so I'm normally starving. I can't imagine having a cheese sandwich and apple instead of a real lunch to get me through the rest of my day."

Freshman Jenifer Skilling said having a hot lunch replaced by a cold sandwich can be humiliating.

"I've had my account dip below zero before," Skilling said. "Everyone around me knew I couldn't afford lunch. And the cheese sandwiches are gummy and dry. It feels like a prison meal."

Inspired by the friendship bracelets from Taylor Swift's "Eras Tour," Rodriguez and his friends began raising funds by selling beaded bracelets with phrases such as "End hunger" and "What's for lunch?" — a craft they made and traded at the concert.

"I think I made around 300," junior Sandra Horvath said. "My fingers hurt, but it was worth it. I guess you could say we're in our 'Every Student Gets a Decent Lunch' Era."

After posting about the project on social media and receiving a red heart emoji comment from Taylor Swift herself, people began buying the bracelets and donating to Beads for Bites via GoFundMe. The project has received \$6,000 in donations and \$7,325 in bracelet profits, leaving the group \$3,675 away from their goal.

"I am so impressed by what these students are doing to help their classmates," nutrition services director Meri James said. "We try not to make the situation awkward when we offer students an alternative lunch, but sometimes it can't be helped. Anything students can do to help other students will always impress me."

A local craft store donated enough beads to supply the project for as long as needed, and if they raise extra funds, the students plan to start a scholarship through the Leaguetown Education Foundation.

"The Beads for Bites trading party is going to be amazing," Horvath said. "We've made signs with a QR code so people can donate, and we're going to make dozens of cheese sandwiches as a nod to the 'alternative lunch.' But we'll use good cheese and bread, not the yucky kind."

But thanks to some inspiration from Taylor Swift and Beads for Bites, Rodriguez said the cheese sandwich lunch might be a thing of the past.

"When I saw that heart comment from Taylor, I actually jumped out of my chair during my yearbook class and screamed," Rodriguez said. "I think my yearbook adviser thought I was hurt. Thanks to that little heart, it looks like no student will have to go through the year without a real lunch."