

Feature Writing

District 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 920 students in grades 9-12. Upon returning from spring break on March 18, art teacher Dondi Vinson entered her classroom to find several things out of place. Three cups of paint brushes had been knocked off her supply shelf onto the floor. One cabinet door was ajar. And there were small paw prints near a paint project that was left to dry. Security camera footage confirmed it was a cat.

After opening every closet door, cabinet, box and looking through every square inch of her classroom, Vinson finally found the cat two days later hiding under a bookcase in her room. After using a broom handle to draw the animal out from under the bookcase, Vinson finally met her new pet — a 3-year-old cat with long black hair. She named her Aurora.

When Vinson brought Aurora home, she soon realized that her new pet was pregnant, and on April 4, she gave birth to eight kittens. Since Vinson found Aurora on campus, she thought it would be right to offer the kittens for adoption to members of the school community.

On April 11, Vinson will partner with Leaguetown Cat Rescue to have a cat adoption event on campus, where Aurora's eight kittens will be among several other cats and kittens up for adoption. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed April 9.

■ DONDI VINSON, art teacher

"We had been gone for a week. No one had been in the school. I got to school at 6:30 that morning and could immediately tell something was off. It wasn't like someone had broken in. The room was mostly clean and organized the way I left it, which is why the little clues stood out.

"One cabinet door was ajar. I would have never left a cabinet open in my room. I have a shelf by my window where I keep cups of paint brushes for students to use. Three of those cups had fallen over onto the counter. If I wasn't looking around the room for clues, I probably wouldn't have seen the last and most important clue. Over by my storage closet, I have these racks where students who are painting can leave their work to dry. I saw two little gray splotches on the ground off the corner of the rack. They're very faint, but I could see the shape clearly — paw prints. I didn't know what kind of paw prints. It could've been rats or raccoons for all I knew.

"I went to Mr. Moran and we pulled any footage we could find from our hallway during spring break, and we finally got to one clip where we see this black fuzzball blip across the corner of the screen. I screamed at Moran to go back, and sure enough, you can see her floofy tail and black ears. That was the first time I saw Aurora.

"Then it became all about how to find her, assuming she was still in the building somewhere. My mom gave me some cat food to bring to school and

■ **DONDI VINSON, continued**

leave out. The first night, no one touched it, but the second night I left the cat food out, that bowl was cleaned out. No crumbs.

“Finally, one day I had a couple of kids working in my room after school. I glanced underneath one of my cabinets, and I saw these two yellow eyes staring back at me. So I yelled at the kids to run and close the door. I got a broom from the supply closet and tried to sweep her out from under the cabinet without poking her. After a few minutes, she came running out straight into my arms. We had a solar eclipse that week, so I named her Aurora. It means ‘dawn.’ Ever since I saw her run out into my classroom, she’s been my little best friend.

“I took her home, and a few days later, I was sitting on my couch with her when I saw her little belly moving around. I knew what that meant. We went to the vet and made sure she was healthy. I’m in love with little Aurora, but I knew I couldn’t keep eight kittens in my apartment. Since Aurora is now an official Leaguetown kitty, I thought her kittens should go to students and teachers at Leaguetown High School. They can be the Leaguetown litter forever.”

■ **MIKE MORAN, assistant principal**

“When Ms. Vinson came into my office demanding to see security footage from her hallway because she found clues in her room, I thought she had been watching too many episodes of ‘True Detective.’ When she saw the little poofball run across the screen, I think she felt vindicated. My assistant even ran in to make sure everyone was OK, because she screamed out so loud, ‘There it is! Right there!’ I don’t think I’ve ever laughed so hard at school.”

■ **CONNIE LOREY, junior**

“I was in Ms. Vinson’s room working on my art project one day when she yelled at me to jump up and shut the door. It scared me to death because I was working on my project. I was in the zone, I guess. So I jumped up and shut the door. When the cat finally came running out to her, she was so happy. You could see the sense of relief and happiness on her face. She said something about calling animal control, but after holding the cat for a while and petting her, you could tell that no one would be calling animal control. She was now an LHS kitty. She was home.”

■ **CYNTHIA VILLARAMA, sophomore**

“I’m the president of National Honor Society, and my group plans to offer a cornhole tournament at the adoption event. We’ll charge \$5 for each player to enter, and all that money will go to Leaguetown Cat Rescue. I know we have at least 14 students from NHS who want to play, and I’m sure we’ll have more community members who come out that day to sign up. These types of events are my favorite thing about being involved in NHS. Giving back to our community is what it’s all about.”

■ **MARTIN SHEIN, Leaguetown Cat Rescue**

“I volunteer with Leaguetown Cat Rescue. At our event, we will raise money to spay and neuter animals when they come in off the street and pay for additional foster care for cats in the area. The choir is going to sing a few songs, and we’re going to sell cotton candy and popcorn. Clubs will be there and have outdoor games set up to play. We’ll have plenty of adoptable cats and kittens available for the community to meet. And hopefully, we can get Aurora’s kitties adopted to good homes. They won’t be able to leave their mother until they’re about eight weeks old, but we will allow people to come meet the cats and pick out the one they want. Then they’ll get to go home when they’re old enough.”

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

District 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 an art teacher finding a cat in the school and having an adoption event at school for its kittens.

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. Judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

When art teacher Dondi Vinson returned to her classroom after spring break, she knew something was off. Three cups of paint brushes lay scattered on the floor. A cabinet door stood ajar, and mysterious prints near a drying paint project hinted at an intruder.

Security footage revealed the culprit — a cat. The surprise did not end there as the feline felon, later adopted by Vinson who named her Aurora, gave birth to eight kittens April 4.

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

Those eight kittens and other adoptable animals will be available at an on-campus cat adoption event on April 11.

direct quote

“We had solar eclipse that week, so I named her Aurora,” Vinson said. “It means ‘dawn.’ Ever since I saw her run out into my classroom, she’s been my little best friend.”

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 (“Vinson said” not “said Vinson”). 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 finding paw prints in her classroom, Vinson said she went to assistant principal Mike Moran to look at spring break hallway footage and solve the mystery.

direct quote

“When she saw the little poofball run across the screen, I think she felt vindicated,” Moran said. “My assistant even ran in to make sure everyone was OK because she screamed out so loud, ‘There it is! Right there!’ I don’t think I’ve ever laughed so hard at school.”

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

Vinson said ever since finding Aurora, the cat has been her “little best friend.”

“I’m in love with little Aurora,” Vinson said. “But I knew I couldn’t keep eight kittens in my apartment. Since Aurora is now an official Leaguetown kitty, I thought her kittens should go to students and teachers at Leaguetown High School. They can be the Leaguetown litter forever.”

SAMPLE STORY

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Security footage revealed the culprit — a cat. The surprise did not end there as the feline felon, later adopted by Vinson who named her Aurora, gave birth to eight kittens April 4.

Those eight kittens and other adoptable animals will be available at an on-campus cat adoption event on April 11.

“We had the solar eclipse that week, so I named her Aurora,” Vinson said. “It means ‘dawn.’ Ever since I saw her run out into my classroom, she’s been my little best friend.”

After finding paw prints in her classroom, Vinson said she went to assistant principal Mike Moran to look at spring break hallway footage and solve the mystery.

“When she saw the little poofball run across the screen, I think she felt vindicated,” Moran said. “My assistant even ran in to make sure everyone was OK because she screamed out so loud, ‘There it is! Right there!’ I don’t think I’ve ever laughed so hard at school.”

Two days later, while students worked in Vinson’s classroom after school, she caught a glimpse of two yellow eyes staring at her from underneath a cabinet and yelled for the students to shut the door. After a few minutes of trying to sweep the cat out into the open, Aurora ran out into Vinson’s arms.

“She said something about calling animal control, but after holding the cat for a while and petting her, you could tell that no one would be calling animal control,” junior Connie Lorey said. “She was now an LHS kitty. She was home.”

To help the kittens find loving homes, Vinson partnered with Leaguetown Cat Rescue for the adoption event. The money raised will go to spaying and neutering animals when they come into the cat rescue and pay for additional foster care for cats in the area.

“We’ll have plenty of adoptable cats and kittens available for the community to meet,” Leaguetown Cat Rescue staff member Martin Shein said. “And hopefully, we can get Aurora’s kitties adopted to good homes.”

Clubs will offer games, and the groups will sell cotton candy and popcorn to raise money at the adoption event in the hopes of helping Leaguetown Cat Rescue save other animals in the community. The National Honor Society plans to host a cornhole tournament.

“These types of events are my favorite thing about being involved in NHS,” club president Cynthia Villarama said. “Giving back to our community is what it’s all about.”

Vinson said ever since finding Aurora, the cat has been her “little best friend.”

“I’m in love with little Aurora,” Vinson said. “But I knew I couldn’t keep eight kittens in my apartment. Since Aurora is now an official Leaguetown kitty, I thought her kittens should go to students and teachers at Leaguetown High School. They can be the Leaguetown litter forever.”