

Feature Writing

Regional Meet • 2025



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 1,020 students in grades 9-12. Junior Emily Armendariz takes a different vacation with her dad, Frank Armendariz, every year during spring break. They have climbed Machu Picchu. They have biked the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. They have kayaked fjords in Alaska. For spring break this year, the two took a trip to the San Juan Islands in Washington to go hiking, fishing and spend time in the ocean.

Experienced in outdoor activities, the two set out on the ocean to go rafting on March 28, hoping to see orcas, humpback whales and other wildlife off the island coast. Emily and her dad each used their own inflatable packraft.

Around mid-day, Mr. Armendariz took out his phone to record a video of Emily in her raft, and as he hit record, he heard the sound of a large wave behind him. He turned around to look, and as he panned his camera back toward Emily, she and her raft were gone.

After 10 seconds, she bobbed back up to the surface gasping for air, followed by her raft. Then the fluke, or tail, of a humpback whale emerged from the water, and the whale dove back down below. The humpback had come to the surface to feed on a small school of fish and had accidentally caught Emily and her raft in its mouth.

Emily held onto her raft, and the two made their way to the nearest shore. Emily was uninjured, and Mr. Armendariz had recorded the whole thing on video. Emily posted it to YouTube, and after collecting millions of views, the pair will appear on “Good Morning America” Wednesday, April 30.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed April 28.

■ EMILY ARMENDARIZ, junior

“Dad and I love adventure. We love hiking, biking and anything near the ocean. We actually thought we were taking it a little easy this year by visiting Washington, but it didn’t turn out that way. The morning of our rafting trip, it was cold and a little rainy. But the terrain around the islands was so beautiful up against the crashing waves of the ocean. We got to see the sun come up over the hills, and within a half hour of being in the water, a small pod of three orcas followed us for 20 minutes. It was incredible. That was the closest I had ever been to whales — at least up until that point.

“I started to feel like I wanted a break in the middle of the day and asked Dad if we could turn back. He said he wanted to take a video of me in my little raft with the mountains in the background. He creates a little video of each trip we take, and we put it on YouTube. Normally no one watches.

“I was only a few yards away from him at that point. I turned to smile for the video, and we both heard what sounded like a huge crashing wave. I felt something hit me in the side. Then I was instantly enveloped in what felt like slime. Everything went dark, and I felt myself start to sink. From what I

■ EMILY ARMENDARIZ, continued

could feel around me, I remember having the thought, ‘Something has eaten me. I am in the mouth of a creature. Just stay calm.’ So I closed my eyes and waited for whatever was about to come next. After a few seconds, I could feel my life jacket lifting me toward the surface and finally caught a breath of fresh air.

“When I heard the sound of my dad’s voice shouting ‘Emmie! Emmie!’ — that’s when I knew I was still alive, and I had survived something weird, whatever it was. Then I saw the whale’s fluke come out of the water right next to me. It took me a moment, but I put it together. A whale had almost swallowed me whole, and I survived. I like to think that the humpback showing me his fluke was a way of apologizing for swallowing me and spitting me back out. I can’t believe I wasn’t injured at all. I was just cold, wet and in shock from what had happened.

“I know our vacation videos don’t normally get a lot of views, but it wasn’t surprising that this one did. How many people can say they were almost swallowed by a whale? I’m looking forward to being on ‘Good Morning America’ in a few days. We will fly to New York, and Robin Roberts is going to interview us. After the interview, Dad and I are going to do a tour where we connect to a harness and climb a skyscraper. We can’t help it. We love a good adventure.”

■ FRANK ARMENDARIZ, Emily’s father

“Emily’s mother died when she was in kindergarten, so I have always wanted our trips to be special. We love creating lasting memories together. This trip was no different. Emily is on the swim team and has plenty of experience with outdoor activities. This was just a random encounter with wildlife that we will hopefully never experience again, although we can laugh about it now.

“I can’t tell you the painful fear I felt when I turned my camera and my daughter was gone. It felt like my stomach had become a heavy stone in my body. I began screaming her name. Then all of a sudden, she was back, and we saw that whale wave goodbye to us. She was in shock and a little too weak to get back up into her raft, so I attached her raft to mine and got us both to shore.

“I’m just grateful for every day I still have my daughter. We may stay away from marine life for a while, but this experience won’t keep us out of the ocean. We love it too much, so we’ll be back in the water at some point.”

■ DR. CHRISTOPHER HUANG, Professor of Marine Biology at Texas A&M

“I have been interviewed by several reporters about this incident and how it could have been possible. We don’t typically see whale encounters like this. Humpback whales do not eat people. In fact, they have baleen instead of teeth, and their throats are only about the size of the width of my arm. This whale rushed to the surface to scoop up a school of small fish or krill and in doing so, accidentally picked up Emily. She was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

■ ROHAN BHANDARI, junior

“Emily is strong. If anyone could be swallowed by a whale and live to tell the tale, it’s Emily. We’re on the swim team together. She’s an incredible athlete, and I know how much she looks forward to the trips with her dad. I’m sure she’ll be a beast in the pool next year. She swam her way out of a whale’s mouth. I think she could make it to state in the 100-yard freestyle.”

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

Regional Meet • 2025 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 who was briefly picked up in the mouth of a whale during a spring break vacation.

2. The lead of a feature story must grab the reader's attention. It does not have to be a certain length or include the 5Ws and H. It should set a scene and get the reader into the story. Although you have freedom to describe the scene as you think it might have existed, try to stay close to the prompt. Judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

For junior Emily Armendariz, the story of her spring break adventure is more than a mouthful.

Against a backdrop of majestic mountains and the open ocean, her trip was a once-in-a-lifetime adventure — one that ended up with Emily inside the mouth of a humpback whale. Her father, Frank Amendariz, happened to catch it on camera, and after she arrived safely back to shore, she uploaded it to YouTube.

3. Once you get past the lead, make sure you include a nut graph. It tells the reader what the story will be about. Follow the nut graph with a direct quote and then go into the transition/quote formula.

nut graph

The video collected millions of views, and now the father-daughter duo will appear on "Good Morning America" Wednesday to share their story.

direct quote

"I know our vacation videos don't normally get a lot of views, but it wasn't surprising that this one did," Emily said. "How many people can say they were almost swallowed by a whale?"

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 ("Emily said" not "said Emily"). 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

The pair has taken adventurous spring break trips every year with past

trips including climbing Machu Picci, biking Morroco's Atlas Mountains and kayaking Alaskan fjords. This year, their trip included hiking, fishing and rafting in Washington at the San Juan Islands.

direct quote

"Emily's mother died when she was in kindergarten, so I have always wanted our trips to be special," Mr. Armendariz said. "We love creating lasting memories together."

5. Always use third person. Don't say "our student" or "our students." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "Go Emily!" 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.

After their television appearance and interview with Robin Roberts on "Good Morning America" in New York City, Emily said she and her father plan to harness up and climb a skyscraper — consistent with their track record of father-daughter travel.

"We can't help it," she said. "We love a good adventure."

SAMPLE STORY

For junior Emily Armendariz, the story of her spring break adventure is more than a mouthful.

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The video collected millions of views, and now the father-daughter duo will appear on “Good Morning America” Wednesday to share their story.

“I know our vacation videos don’t normally get a lot of views, but it wasn’t surprising that this one did,” Emily said. “How many people can say they were almost swallowed by a whale?”

The pair has taken adventurous spring break trips every year with past trips including climbing Machu Picchu, biking Morocco’s Atlas Mountains and kayaking Alaskan fjords. This year, their trip included hiking, fishing and rafting in Washington at the San Juan Islands.

“Emily’s mother died when she was in kindergarten, so I have always wanted our trips to be special,” Mr. Armendariz said. “We love creating lasting memories together.”

While paddling in separate inflatable packrafts, the two hoped to spot orcas, humpback whales and other marine life. Emily’s father took out his phone to record a video of his daughter with mountains in the background when he heard a large wave behind him. When he turned to pan his camera back to her, she was gone.

“I can’t tell you the painful fear I felt when I turned my camera and my daughter was gone,” he said. “It felt like my stomach had become a heavy stone in my body.”

Mr. Armendariz screamed his daughter’s name.

“I felt something hit me in the side,” Emily said. “Then I was instantly enveloped in what felt like slime, everything went dark, and I felt myself start to sink.”

Trying to stay calm, Emily closed her eyes and waited for what would come next. Luckily, the whale spit her back out, and her life jacket carried her back to the surface.

“When I heard the sound of my dad’s voice shouting ‘Emmie! Emmie!’ — that’s when I knew I was still alive, and I had survived something weird, whatever it was,” she said. “Then I saw the whale’s fluke come out of the water right next to me. It took me a moment, but I put it together. A whale had almost swallowed me whole, and I survived. I like to think that the humpback showing me his fluke was a way of apologizing for swallowing me and spitting me back out.”

Mr. Armendariz said Emily was in shock after the incident and too weak to pull herself back into her raft, so he pulled her back to shore.

“I’m just grateful for every day I still have my daughter,” he said. “We may stay away from marine life for a while, but this experience won’t keep us out of the ocean.”

Dr. Christopher Huang, a professor of marine biology at Texas A&M, said humpback whales do not eat people since they have baleen instead of teeth, used to filter small fish and krill. Their throats are no wider than a human arm.

“This whale rushed to the surface to scoop up a school of small fish or krill and in doing so, accidentally picked up Emily,” Huang said. “She was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

After their television appearance and interview with Robin Roberts on “Good Morning America” in New York City, Emily said she and her father plan to harness up and climb a skyscraper — consistent with their track record of father-daughter travel.

“We can’t help it,” she said. “We love a good adventure.”