

Feature Writing

State 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 2,070 students in grades 9-12. Juniors Jason Flaherty and Mark Kozoman were watching YouTube videos in the cafeteria one day when they came across a video that appeared to feature their physics teacher John Ashton on the thumbnail. He was wearing a metal helmet and armor, and he appeared to be holding a sword. Flaherty and Kozoman watched the 8-minute video of their teacher engaged in a medieval sword fight, going back eight times to confirm it was him.

After researching the group that posted the video — the Society for Medieval Culture — the pair discovered that their teacher is a member of a live-action role-playing group that meets on weekends to dress up as characters from the medieval or Renaissance time period. They compete in combat games, perform quests and create crafts.

Flaherty and Kozoman found a calendar of events and discovered that on May 10, Ashton was signed up to attend an event in Houston called SMC Knighthood where he would compete in fencing, archery and axe-throwing in hopes of being “knighted” by the SMC. They sent the information to a large group message with other students in Ashton’s physics classes with a link to purchase tickets to the SMC Knighthood event. The group made a plan to show up and support Ashton on his quest for knighthood. More than 50 students packed the stands at the event, surprising their teacher who was unaware his students knew about his secret hobby.

Ashton earned his knighthood that day and has agreed to sponsor a student chapter for the SMC at school, with Flaherty and Kozoman as founding members. The group will have its first meeting Wednesday, May 21, after school in Ashton’s classroom where they will make plans for next year.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed May 19.

■ JOHN ASHTON, physics teacher

“I’m not ashamed of it, but I never intended to tell my students about my involvement in the SMC. I just didn’t think they would all understand it. I was wrong to think that.

“When I took the field for my first fencing round, I thought I heard my name, but I figured it couldn’t be. I didn’t have any family or friends cheering for me in the stands that I knew of. Eventually, it became clear what they were saying — ‘Ashton! Ashton! Ashton!’ They were taking up half the bleachers. They had T-shirts made that said ‘Sir Ashton’ on them. I couldn’t believe it.

“I’ve been a teacher at this school for 18 years. I got into teaching because I love physics, but I stayed in it because I love my kids. Before this, I wasn’t sure if my students knew how much they meant to me. Now, I’m pretty sure they know. I was a little worried my students might make fun of my hobby or think it wasn’t cool, but I’ve heard nothing but positivity and support from them. I

■ JOHN ASHTON, continued

wish I had told them about it sooner.

"This is my 11th year to participate in SMC. It's a huge organization, and they have the United States divided into different kingdoms. I've learned so much since I've been involved. I spent a whole summer learning how to make shoes out of leather. I carved bowls and spoons out of wood and learned how to whittle and create woodworking art. I did blacksmithing a few times and gave my parents a set of really interesting gardening tools I made by hand. I spent two years as the official herald for the South Texas kingdom. I announced all the royals as they would enter the event, and I would read any public announcements that would come up. That was kind of a big job. It's just been the past three years that I've gotten more involved in the combat side of things. I started with axe-throwing. I got pretty good at archery. If I have a few tries, I can hit the center of a bull's-eye at least once from 30 yards. That took me a while to do. I've mostly been into fencing and sword fighting recently. That's my new passion.

"I know my life might seem kind of silly, especially to students. But it's my life. It's been incredibly rewarding for me to be involved in the SMC, almost as rewarding as it's been being a teacher. It's given me the opportunity to do some things I really love. And now I get to share it all with my students."

■ JASON FLAHERTY, junior

"I'm not going to lie. We did laugh for a little bit the first time we saw Mr. Ashton fighting someone with a sword in a YouTube video. Anyone who found a video of one of their teachers sword fighting in full armor would react the same way. But the longer we watched, it just started to look cool. At some point, one of us clicked on the calendar on the website and saw his name on the schedule for the knighthood event. Mark and I looked at each other, and it was like we instantly knew we had to be there. Then it just became this thing where we wanted to show up for Mr. Ashton and show him how much he means to us.

"The tournament was so cool. Mr. Ashton won six rounds but eventually lost in the semifinals, calling himself out for a touch that his opponent didn't even seem to think was a hit. Everyone around us from the SMC organization was talking about not how well he fought but how he acted with honor. That's just like he says in class that the right answer doesn't matter, but the thinking that gets toward the solution is the important thing. Physics is hard. We have to fight our way through every assignment and every test. Mr. Ashton is always showing up to cheer for us. We figured it was our turn to show up for him. I'm really glad we did it. I haven't learned much about the different parts of medieval culture, but I'm looking forward to starting this new club so we can learn."

■ MARK KOZOMAN, junior

"Mr. Ashton's fighting looks so legit. Like, his armor isn't a costume. It's a real steel helmet and leather arm bracers. He made his shield by hand. It's bigger than me. This stuff isn't a joke. After he won his last round, they finally announced his name over the loudspeaker as a list of one of the new knights. We just started screaming and going crazy for him. He started pumping his fist in the air like he had won the Super Bowl. You could see this big smile on his face as he knelt down for the king. Then the king lowered his sword down by his ear just like we see in movies."

■ MISTY ST. CLAIR, senior

"I struggled to get a B in physics last year, but Mr. Ashton helped me every step of the way. He was so patient. When it comes to physics, my friends and I think of him as our knight in shining armor. We need more teachers like him who won't leave students behind when they're ready to go on to the next thing. I think my calculus class is easier this year because I saw how it could be applied in physics last year. That's all thanks to him."

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

State 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 students showing support for their physics teacher who does live-action role-playing as a hobby.

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.

Physics teacher John Ashton is literally a knight in shining armor — both in and out of the classroom.

In the classroom, students describe him as patient and helpful. He makes sure they learn before moving on to the next physics concept.

Out of the classroom, Ashton's knighthood became official May 10.

Juniors Jason Flaherty and Mark Kozoman were scrolling through YouTube when they stumbled upon a video featuring Ashton dressed in metal armor and wielding a sword. What began as a surprising discovery soon led them to the stands of a medieval tournament and ultimately helped launch a new student club.

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 inaugural meeting of the Society for Medieval Culture (SMC) chapter will be this Wednesday after school in Ashton's classroom, where students will begin planning activities for the upcoming year.

direct quote

"I'm not going to lie," Flaherty said. "We did laugh for a little bit the first time we saw Mr. Ashton fighting someone with a sword in a YouTube video. Anyone who found a video of one of their teachers sword fighting in full armor would react the same way. But the longer we watched, it just started to look cool."

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 (“Ashton said” not “said Ashton”). 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 video was posted by the Society for Medieval Culture, a live-action role-playing organization that stages reenactments of medieval and Renaissance life through combat competitions, quests and traditional crafts. Ashton has been involved with the group for 11 years.

direct quote

“I was a little worried my students might make fun of my hobby or think it wasn’t cool, but I’ve heard nothing but positivity and support from them,” Ashton said. “I wish I had told them about it sooner.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our students.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Go, Ashton!” 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.

Ashton has agreed to sponsor a student SMC chapter, with Flaherty and Kozoman as founding members. Students will explore medieval history, craftsmanship and live-action role-play combat.

“I’ve been a teacher at this school for 18 years,” Ashton said. “I got into teaching because I love physics, but I stayed in it because I love my kids. Before this, I wasn’t sure if my students knew how much they meant to me. Now, I’m pretty sure they know.”

SAMPLE STORY

Physics teacher John Ashton is literally a knight in shining armor — both in and out of the classroom.

In the classroom, students describe him as patient and helpful. He makes sure they learn before moving on to the next physics concept.

Out of the classroom, Ashton's knighthood became official May 10.

Juniors Jason Flaherty and Mark Kozoman were scrolling through YouTube when they stumbled upon a video featuring Ashton dressed in metal armor and wielding a sword. What began as a surprising discovery soon led them to the stands of a medieval tournament and ultimately helped launch a new student club.

The inaugural meeting of the Society for Medieval Culture (SMC) chapter will be this Wednesday after school in Ashton's classroom, where students will begin planning activities for the upcoming year.

"I'm not going to lie," Flaherty said. "We did laugh for a little bit the first time we saw Mr. Ashton fighting someone with a sword in a YouTube video. Anyone who found a video of one of their teachers sword fighting in full armor would react the same way. But the longer we watched, it just started to look cool."

The video was posted by the Society for Medieval Culture, a live-action role-playing organization that stages reenactments of medieval and Renaissance life through combat competitions, quests and traditional crafts. Ashton has been involved with the group for 11 years.

"I was a little worried my students might make fun of my hobby or think it wasn't cool, but I've heard nothing but positivity and support from them," Ashton said. "I wish I had told them about it sooner."

While watching the video, the pair came across the group's event calendar, which listed an upcoming knighthood tournament where Ashton was scheduled to compete in fencing, archery and axe-throwing for a chance to be "knighted." Flaherty said he and Kozoman immediately knew they had to attend and invited other physics students to buy tickets and show their support.

"When I took the field for my first fencing round, I thought I heard my name, but I figured it couldn't be," Ashton said. "I didn't have any family or friends cheering for me in the stands that I knew of. Eventually, it became clear what they were saying — 'Ashton! Ashton! Ashton!' They were taking up half the bleachers."

More than 50 students showed up, surprising Ashton and wearing homemade "Sir Ashton" shirts in support. He won six fencing rounds and earned his knighthood with honor, even calling a hit on himself in the semifinals that his opponent hadn't noticed.

"He started pumping his fist in the air like he had won the Super Bowl," Kozoman said. "You could see this big smile on his face as he knelt down for the king."

Ashton has agreed to sponsor a student SMC chapter, with Flaherty and Kozoman as founding members. Students will explore medieval history, craftsmanship and live-action role-play combat.

"I've been a teacher at this school for 18 years," Ashton said. "I got into teaching because I love physics, but I stayed in it because I love my kids. Before this, I wasn't sure if my students knew how much they meant to me. Now, I'm pretty sure they know."

FEATURE WRITING 2025

1A—Haven Hill—Gail Borden County

The stands went wild. The students chanted his name. In a full suit of armor, the man kneeled before the king, as the sword lowered to each side of his ear, granting him knighthood. Knight in shining armor or physics teacher? John Ashton was both.

Juniors Jason Flaherty and Mark Kozoman discovered their physics teacher, John Ashton, was involved in the Society for Medieval Culture: a live-action role-playing group acting as characters from the Renaissance time period. A group of over 50 students showed up to support Ashton at one of his competitions, spiking the students' interest in the organization. Ashton agreed to sponsor a SMC student chapter, which will hold its first meeting on Wednesday in his classroom.

"I'm not ashamed of it, but I never intended to tell my students about my involvement in the SMC," Ashton said. "I just didn't think they would all understand it. I was wrong to think that."

One day at lunch, Flaherty and Kozoman accidentally stumbled across a YouTube video of their physics teacher wearing a suit of armor engaged in a sword fight. When the students found a calendar of the group's events, they decided to give their teacher a surprise.

"When I took the field for my first fencing round, I thought I heard my name, but I figured it couldn't be," Ashton said. "They were taking up half the bleachers and screaming

my name. They had T-shirts made in school colors that said 'Sir Ashton' on them. I couldn't believe it."

Ashton has been participating in the SMC for eleven years, learning a range of new skills from carving bowls and spoons out of wood and making shoes out of leather, to axe-throwing. His most recent goal he obtained with his students present: earning his knighthood. After battling through six rounds, he eventually lost in the semifinals.

"Mr. Ashton's fighting looks so legit," Kozoman said. "After he won his last round, they finally announced his name over the loudspeaker as a list of one of the new knights. We just started screaming and going crazy for him. You could see this big smile on his face as he knelt down for the king."

Ashton will now have the opportunity to not only encourage the kids in the classroom, but also as share his passions for the SMC with his students as he leads the newest SMC student chapter for the school.

"Physics is hard," Flaherty said. "We have to fight our way through every assignment and every test. Mr. Ashton is always showing up to cheer for us. We figured it was our turn to show up for him."

2A—Bailee Hosak—Gladewater Union Grove

Boredom fills them as they scroll through YouTube to find something to watch, anything to make the time go by faster as they eat. And that's when they see it—a thumbnail with someone who looks eerily similar to their physics teacher. They click the video and initially laugh out of shock, because it couldn't be him.

They rewind. And rewind. And rewind six more times until it finally hits them, it truly is their physics teacher John Ashton in full steel armor sword fighting another person.

When juniors Jason Flaherty and Mark Kozoman found Ashton's hobby as a medieval role-player, they, and the rest of their class, showed support. Because of their interest in the Society for Medieval Culture, Ashton agreed to sponsor a student chapter at the school. Their first meeting is Wednesday with Flaherty and Kozoman as the founding members.

"I'm not ashamed of it, but I never intended to tell my students about my involvement in the SMC," Ashton said. "I just didn't think they would all understand it. I was wrong to think that."

The SMC is a nation-wide organization that allows for members to role-play as characters from medieval and Renaissance periods. Ashton became a member 11 years ago, learning how to make leather shoes and other crafts.

“I carved bowls and spoons out of wood and learned how to whittle and create woodworking art,” Ashton said. “I did blacksmithing a few times and gave my parents a set of really interesting gardening tools.”

He spent two years as the official herald for the South Texas kingdom and only recently began practicing the combative side of the SMC. Ashton has a good eye for archery, but his passion lies with sword fighting.

“I’m not going to lie,” Flaherty said. “We did laugh for a little bit the first time we saw Mr. Ashton fighting someone with a sword in a YouTube video. But the longer we watched it, it just started to look cool.”

Wanting to support him, the boys researched the SMC and found Ashton had a knighthood event May 10 and they planned to buy tickets. They sent the information to the entire physics class and planned to show up in the stands with t-shirts saying ‘Sir Ashton’.

“Mr Ashton is always showing up to cheer for us,” Flaherty said. “We figured it was our turn to show up for him. I’m really glad we did it.”

His students took up half the stands, screaming and cheering his name until he lost the semifinals. Ashton had called himself out for a foul his opponent didn’t realize happened. But his name was announced and Ashton was knighted by the king himself.

“We just started screaming and going crazy for him,” Kozoman said. “He started pumping his fist in the air like he had won the Super Bowl. You could see this big smile on his face as he knelt down for the king.”

Ashton has been teaching at Leaguetown for 18 years, and although it began as just wanting to spread his love for physics, it turned into a love for his students.

“I know my life might seem kind of silly, especially to students,” Ashton said. “But it’s my life. It’s been incredibly rewarding for me to be involved in the SMC, almost as rewarding as it’s been being a teacher.”

3A—Kate Dusek—White Oak

Taking the field, physics teacher John Ashton prepares for his first fencing round. Suddenly, he hears the faint sound of his name being chanted...

‘Ashton, Ashton, Ashton.’

Is he hallucinating? Who is here to cheer them on? The sound grows louder.

‘ASHTON, ASHTON, ASHTON.’

He turns to see his students packed in the stands, cheering louder than ever for him. Not only does Ashton’s students watch as he earns his knighthood, but he inspires juniors Jason Flaherty and Mark Kozoman to follow in his footsteps.

The school’s student chapter for the Society for Medieval Culture will have its first meeting Wednesday after school in Ashton’s classroom. As sponsor, Ashton and founding members, Flaherty and Kozoman, will make plans for next year.

“I was a little worried my students might make fun of my hobby or think it wasn’t cool, but I’ve heard nothing but positivity and support from them,” Ashton said. “I wish I had told them about it sooner.”

Flaherty and Kozoman first discovered their teacher’s hobby when they came across a YouTube video of Ashton wearing a metal helmet and armor, engaged in a medieval sword fight. After researching the group that posted the video, the two discovered that Ashton is a member of the live-action role-playing group, SMC, that competes in combat games, performs quests and creates crafts.

“I’m not going to lie; we did laugh for a little bit the first time we saw Mr. Ashton fighting someone with a sword in the video,” Flaherty said. “Anyone who found a video of their teachers sword fighting in full armor would react the same way. But the longer we watched, it just started to look cool.”

In addition to the video, Flaherty and Kozoman also found a calendar that included the SMC Knighthood event in Houston. They then sent a link to purchase tickets to a large group message consisting of Ashton’s physics students. This resulted in more than 50 students attending, and they sported t-shirts with the words, ‘Sir Ashton’ on them.

“When they finally announced his name over the loudspeaker as one of the knights, we just started screaming and going crazy for him,” Kozoman said. “He started pumping his fist in the air like he had won the Super Bowl. You could see the big smile on his face as he knelt down before the king.”

Not only was Ashton knighted by the SMC, but junior Misty St. Clair and her friends think of him as their ‘knight in shining armor’ when it comes to physics.

“I struggled to get a B last year, but Mr. Ashton helped me every step of the way,” St. Clair said. “We need more teachers like him who won’t leave students behind.”

In SMC knighthood, Ashton competed in fencing, archery and axe-throwing. Additionally, he wears a real steel helmet and leather arm bracers. He also made his shield by hand.

“I know my life might seem kind of silly, especially to students, but it’s my life,” Ashton said. “It’s been incredibly rewarding for me to be involved in the SMC, almost as rewarding as it’s been being a teacher. It’s given me the opportunity to do something I really love, and now I get to share it all with my students.”

The sounds of swords clashing, arrows flying, armor clanging, and axes thudding against the wall wasn't unfamiliar to physics teacher John Ashton. What did surprise Ashton was another sound—the shouting. Ashton thought he was mistaken at first. He hadn't invited any friends or family to the event. Yet, as the cheers grew louder, it became clear. The crowd was shouting his name.

It wasn't just any crowd, though. The fans cheering Ashton on were his own students.

"They were taking up half the bleachers," Ashton said. "They had t-shirts made that said 'Sir Ashton' on them. I couldn't believe it."

After discovering a video of Ashton engaging in a medieval sword fight, Juniors Jason Flaherty and Mark Kozoman discovered that their physics teacher was part of the Society for Medieval Culture, a live-action role-playing group centered on the medieval and Renaissance period. Wanting to support their teacher, Flaherty and Kozoman gathered over 50 students to cheer on Ashton at a knighthood contest hosted by the SMC on May 10.

"Physics is hard," Flaherty said. "We have to fight our way through every assignment and every test. Mr. Ashton is always showing up to cheer for us. We figured it was our turn to show up for him."

Thanks to his students' encouragement, Ashton agreed to sponsor a student chapter for the SMC with founding members Flaherty and Kozoman. The club will hold their first meeting on May 21 in Ashton's classroom.

"Before this, I wasn't sure if my student's knew how much they meant to me," Ashton said. "Now, I'm pretty sure they know. I've heard nothing but positivity and support from them."

Ashton has participated in the SMC for 11 years. Along the way, he learned crafts like wood carving, blacksmithing, and leathercraft. Ashton worried that his students would negatively judge his hobby, think it was 'uncool' or 'weird'. To his surprise, he received nothing but admiration for his dedication and hard work.

"Mr. Ashton's fighting looks so legit," Kozoman said. "Like his armor isn't a costume. It's a real steel helmet and leather arm bracers. He made his shield by hand. This stuff isn't a joke."

Ashton was knighted before his students for his performance in fencing, archery, and axe-throwing. He made it through the first six rounds of the fencing competition. During the semifinals, Ashton accepted defeat after setting an honorable example for his students by calling himself out on a touch.

"Everyone around us from the SMC organization was talking about not how well he fought but how he acted with honor," Flaherty said. "That's just like he says in class that the right answer doesn't matter, but the thinking that gets towards the solution is the important thing."

Ashton doesn't shed his knighthood at the school doors. Students like senior Misty St. Clair value his leadership within the classroom.

"When it comes to physics, my friends and I think of him as our knight in shining armor," St. Clair said. "We need more teachers like him who won't leave students behind when they're ready to go on to the next thing."

At the school's new SMC chapter, students will have the opportunity to learn about medieval culture, crafts, and sports. Ashton is excited to share his passion.

"It's been incredibly rewarding for me to be involved in the SMC, almost as rewarding as it's been being a teacher," Ashton said. "It's given me the opportunity to do some things I really love. And now I get to share it all with my students."

The clanging of metal sounds through the amphitheater as swords clash again and again. Cheering sounds throughout the arena as knights fight, and the sound of the crowd chanting ‘Ashton! Ashton! Ashton!’ drowns out the clanging of the swords.

John Ashton, a physics teacher, heard something like this after two of his students, juniors Jason Flaherty and Mark Kozoman, discovered that their teacher is a member of the Society for Medieval Culture (SMC), a live-action role-playing group. The two organized a group of students to go watch Ashton at one of his events, and Ashton has agreed to sponsor a student chapter for SMC at school. The group’s first meeting will be Wednesday, May 21, after school in Ashton’s room, where they will make plans for next year.

“I’m not ashamed of it, but I never intended to tell my students about my involvement in the SMC,” Ashton said. “I just didn’t think they would all understand it. I was wrong to think that.”

Flaherty and Kozoman discovered their teacher’s hobby while watching YouTube videos in the cafeteria one day. They came across a video that appeared to feature Ashton, dressed in medieval armor and holding a sword, on the thumbnail. They watched the eight-minute video of their teacher engaged in a medieval sword fight, going back eight times to confirm it was him.

“I’m not going to lie,” Flaherty said. “We did laugh a little bit the first time we saw Mr. Ashton fighting someone with a sword in a YouTube video. But the longer we watched, it just started to look cool.”

The pair looked into the account that posted the video and found a calendar of events. They discovered that on May 10, Ashton was signed up to attend an event in Houston called SMC Knighthood where he would compete in hopes of being “knighted” by the SMC.

“At some point, one of us clicked on the calendar on the website and saw his name on the schedule for the Knighthood event,” Flaherty said. “Mark and I looked at each other, and it was like we instantly knew we had to be there. Then it just became this thing where we wanted to show up for Mr. Ashton and show him how much he means to us.”

Flaherty and Kozoman sent the information about the event to a large group message with other students in Ashton’s physics classes with a link to purchase tickets to the event. The group made a plan to show up and support Ashton on his quest for knighthood.

“When I took the field for my first fencing round, I thought I heard my name, but I figured it couldn’t be,” Ashton said. “I didn’t have any family or friends cheering for me in the stands that I knew of.”

More than 50 students showed up at the event, surprising their teacher who was unaware his students knew about his secret hobby. The kids made t-shirts that said ‘Sir Ashton’ to show their support.

“Eventually, it became clear what they were saying — ‘Ashton! Ashton Ashton!’” Ashton said. “They were taking up half the bleachers and screaming my name. I couldn’t believe it.”

Ashton competed in fencing, archery, and axe-throwing at this event. He won six rounds but eventually lost in the semifinals. However, he did earn the distinction of 'knight' while at the tournament.

"After he won his last round, they finally announced his name over the loudspeaker as a list of one of the new knights," Kozoman said. "We just started screaming and going crazy for him."

This year marks Ashton's 11th year of participating in the SMC. SMC divides the United States into different kingdoms, and Ashton served for two years as the official herald for the South Texas kingdom. He has been teaching for 18 years.

"I know my life might seem kind of silly, especially to students," Ashton said. "But it's my life. It's been incredibly rewarding for me to be involved in the SMC, almost as rewarding as it's been being a teacher. It's given me the opportunity to do some things I really love. And now I get to share it all with my students."

When he took the field for the first round, he thought he heard his name.

“Ashton!”

He figured that couldn’t be right. None of his friends or family were in the stands.

“Ashton!”

Then he turned around—50 of his students packed into the stands, taking up half the bleachers.

“Ashton!”

Before this moment, physics teacher John Ashton wasn’t sure if his students knew how much they meant to him. Now, he was pretty sure they knew.

Ashton, who has been a physics teacher for 18 years, is involved in the Society for Medieval Culture (SMC), a live action roleplay group that meets on weekends to dress up as characters from the medieval or Renaissance time period. While watching YouTube videos in the cafeteria, two of Ashton’s students—juniors Jason Flaherty and Mark Kozoman—found a video of their teacher engaged in a medieval sword fight. They discovered that Ashton would be participating in an event on May 10 where he would compete to be knighted by the organization. Jason and Mark gathered a group of students to show up and support their teacher. After he gained his knighthood, Ashton agreed to sponsor a chapter of the SMC at school with their first meeting on May 21.

“I’m not ashamed of it, but I never intended to tell my students about the SMC,” Ashton said. “I just didn’t think they’d understand it. I was wrong to think that.”

Ashton has been involved in the SMC for 11 years. It’s a large organization that spans the entire United States. It divides the country into different kingdoms, of which Ashton represents the South Texas kingdom.

He spent two years as the official herald—announcer—of his kingdom, but has shifted his focus to combat in the past three years, focusing on axe-throwing and archery. He can now hit a bull’s-eye from 30 yards away, given a few tries.

“That took me a while to do,” Ashton said. “I’ve been mostly into fencing and sword fighting recently. That’s my new passion.”

In early May, Jason and Mark found the video. It featured Ashton in the thumbnail, wearing a metal helmet and armor and holding a sword. They watched the video eight times to confirm it was him.

“I’m not going to lie,” Jason said. “We did laugh the first time we saw Mr. Ashton fighting someone with a sword in a YouTube video. Anyone who found a video of one of their teachers sword fighting in full armor would react the same way. But the longer we watched, it just started to look cool.”

From the video, Mark and Jason found the event where Ashton would try to earn his knighthood. They sent out the information to a large group message with other students in

Ashton's physics class with a link to buy tickets. The group made plans to surprise him at the event.

"Mr. Ashton won six rounds, but eventually lost in the semifinals, calling himself out for a touch that even his opponent didn't seem to think was a hit," Jason said. "Everyone around us from the SMC organization was talking about not how well he fought but how he acted with honor. That's just like he says in class that the right answer doesn't matter, but the thinking that gets toward the solution is the important thing."

Despite the loss in the semi-finals, Ashton gained his knighthood at the event. He smiled as he knelt before the king to accept the title.

"After he won his last round, they finally announced his name as one of the new knights," Mark said. "We just started screaming and going crazy for him. He started pumping his fists in the air like he had won the Super Bowl."

After the event, Ashton agreed to sponsor a chapter of the SMC at the school, with Mark and Jason as founding members. Their first meeting will be after school in Ashton's classroom to discuss plans for next year.

"I know my life might seem kinda silly, especially to students," Ashton said. "But it's my life. It's been incredibly rewarding for me to be involved in the SMC, almost as rewarding as it's been being a teacher. It's given me the opportunity to do some things I really love. And now I get to share it all with my students."