

News Writing

State Meet • 2019



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **news 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 **45 minutes**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry.

Put your number NOT YOUR NAME on your paper.

Leaguetown High School has 950 students enrolled in grades 9-12. On Tuesday at the request of a student, theater teacher Melvin Mennefy played a pro-gay, marital-rights rap song by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. Mennefy often plays music for his students while they work on set designs. On this particular day, his students were building “The Lion King” set for an elementary summer camp.

Before playing the song, Mennefy listened to the song to ensure that it contained no profanity and did not promote violence. The song, “Same Love,” is about marriage equality, depicting the life of a gay man from beginning to end. Some of the lyrics include: “Can’t change, even if I tried ...” and “If you preach hate at the service, those words aren’t annointed ...”

After the class, a sophomore complained to her assistant principal about the song. On Thursday, May 2, Principal Brad Wilson called Mennefy to his office. After questioning him about the song, Wilson suspended him with pay.

Several theater students who were in that class heard about the suspension and requested a meeting with Wilson. He refused, claiming it was a personnel issue. You are writing for the online issue of the Press to be distributed Monday, May 6.

■ MELVIN MENNEFY, theater teacher

“I was stunned. Mr. Wilson called me to his office and asked if I played the song. I said, ‘Yes.’ He asked if I had permission from any administrators to play the song. We never needed permission before. We play music any time my students are building a set, which is quite often for this theater tech class. I always listen to the music first to make sure it’s appropriate, and this song is. Yes, it has a gay theme, but that is why my student asked if we could play it. She said she was getting bullied by some of her peers because she identifies as a lesbian. She thought if more students heard the song, they might appreciate the message. It is a beautiful message about equality and love for all.

“Dr. [Gina] Chen called me and talked to me about the suspension. She said she would override it, but I haven’t heard anything official yet on when I can return to school. I have taught here for 24 years, and I don’t have a single blemish on my record. I want to be back in my classroom.”

■ CARRIE PAGE, junior

“I was the one who asked Mr. Mennefy to play the song. I feel so bad. I didn’t mean to get him in trouble. The song isn’t bad. It doesn’t have profanity, and it’s not about shooting police or anything violent. It’s about equal rights.

“Last year, I came out, and everyone was completely supportive. But this year, things have changed. A few students — none of them are my close

■ **CARRIE PAGE, (cont.)**

friends — have started taunting me. One of them told me I need to play on the boys' basketball team if I was going to dress like a boy. Another called me a sinner and said I was a freak. On my desk in English class, someone carved my name and the word, well, I don't think I can say that word for the newspaper.

"I thought if more students heard the Macklemore song, maybe they would be more accepting. I have strong support from my friends and family, so those incidents don't bother me. But not every gay student has that, and if I am getting bullied, I am sure others are, too."

■ **GINA CHEN, superintendent**

"I was unaware of Mr. Mennefy's suspension until Thursday afternoon. I did not approve the suspension and have no intention of upholding it. I listened to the song, and while I may not agree with everything the singer says, I do not find it inappropriate for high school students. I plan to investigate the situation more, but rest assured, Mr. Mennefy will be back in the classroom on Tuesday morning.

"I am concerned about the bullying allegations. After I heard about them, I spoke with several teachers who said they are seeing more bullying than ever before. Next week, I am going to appoint a committee to address this bullying issue, and the first person I am going to ask to be on the committee is Carrie Page. I also will include teachers, administrators, counselors and a parent or two. Bullying is unacceptable, but if we want to change it, we have to do more than punish the bully. We have to change the culture of our school so that everyone is respected and welcomed. I thought that was the culture we had, but apparently, I was wrong."

■ **KARI COOKS, junior**

"I wish I knew who complained about Mr. Mennefy. He's is best teacher at this school, and he didn't do anything wrong. I'm in Carrie's English class, so I saw the carving on the desk. I didn't think kids at this school were mean like that. I've attended Leaguetown schools all my life, and I've never seen this type of stuff. Carrie told me about the student who called her a freak and a sinner. Everyone used to be nice here, but apparently something is changing. I told Carrie she should turn those students in to the principal, but she said that stuff doesn't bother her."

■ **KRISSY SANDERS, social studies teacher**

"I have noticed a shift in our culture this year. Students are more cruel. They are not as supportive of each other as they have been in years past. We have a lot of discussions in my class. The rule is that you don't have to agree with everyone, but you have to be respectful. Several times this year I've had to admonish students for being disrespectful to their peers during our discussions. This is not something I've had to do in the past.

"Mr. Mennefy's suspension is one more example of the culture change. He was trying to be inclusive and give all students a voice. He was suspended for that. I heard that Dr. Chen has intervened. I am grateful. We need to listen to our students when they ask for help and when they ask for a voice."

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Wilson declined to comment on the Mennefy situation.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

STATE • 2019

NEWS 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. Open with the newest information. In this instance, the teacher will be back at school Tuesday.

After being suspended last week for playing a pro-gay marriage song in class, theater teacher Melvin Mennefy will be back in the classroom tomorrow morning, Superintendent Gina Chen said.

2. Use direct quotes and get those quotes high in the story. After you introduce quotes, use 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 ("Mennefy said," not "said Mennefy.") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions tell information to help the action of the story and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

Principal Brad Wilson suspended Mennefy for two days after he played the song in his theater tech class. Junior Carrie Page said she asked Mennefy to play the song because she was getting harrassed by other students about being gay.

direct quote

"A few students — none of them are my close friends — have started taunting me," Page said. "One of them told me I need to play on the boys' basketball team if I was going to dress like a boy. Another called me a sinner and said I was a freak. I thought if more students heard the Macklemore song, maybe they would be more accepting."

transition

After hearing about Page's experience, Chen said she spoke with several teachers who confirmed that they are seeing more bullying this year. Chen said she will appoint a committee "to try to help solve this bullying issue."

direct quote

"The first person I am going to ask to be on the committee is Carrie Page," she said.

3. Use third person. Don't say "our student" or "Melvin Mennefy, our theater teacher" or "Some of our students..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "Mennefy is awesome ..." without attributing that quote to someone. These statements are personal opinion and cannot be made in a news story.

4. Note how in the earlier example of transition/quote each quote is its own paragraph. Don't be frightened away from using one- and two-sentence paragraphs. Journalistic writing consists mostly of brief paragraphs.

SAMPLE STORY

After being suspended last week for playing a pro-gay marriage song in class, theater teacher Melvin Mennefy will be back in the classroom tomorrow morning, Superintendent Gina Chen said.

"I did not approve the suspension and have no intention of upholding it," Chen said. "I listened to the song, and while I may not agree with everything the singer says, I do not find it inappropriate for high school students."

Principal Brad Wilson suspended Mennefy after he played the song in his theater tech class. Junior Carrie Page said she asked Mennefy to play the song because she was getting harrassed by other students about being gay. Wilson declined to comment.

"A few students — none of them are my close friends — have started taunting me," Page said. "One of them told me I need to play on the boys' basketball team if I was going to dress like a boy. Another called me a sinner and said I was a freak. I thought if more students heard the Macklemore song, maybe they would be more accepting."

After hearing about Page's experience, Chen said she spoke with several teachers who confirmed that they are seeing more bullying this year. Chen said she will appoint a committee "to address this bullying issue."

"The first person I am going to ask to be on the committee is Carrie Page," she said.

The committee, which will include students, teachers, administrators and parents, will focus on changing the culture of the school so everyone is respected and welcomed, Chen said.

"I thought that was the culture we had, but apparently, I was wrong," she said.

Social studies teacher Krissy Sanders said she's noticed a shift in the school culture this year.

"Students are more cruel," she said. "They are not as supportive of each other as they have been in years past."

Page agrees the environment is different this year. She said when she came out last year, everyone was supportive and kind.

But this year, "on my desk in English class, someone carved my name and the word, well, I don't think I can say that word for the newspaper," she said.

This harrassment is what prompted Page to ask Mennefy to play the song, "Same Love," by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. It's a rap song promoting gay marital rights.

"We play music any time my students are building a set, which is quite often for this theater tech class," Mennefy said. "I always listen to the music first to make sure it's appropriate, and this song is. It is a beautiful message about equality and love for all."

After Mennefy played the song, a student complained to an assistant principal, and Principal Wilson met with Mennefy and suspended him.

"He asked if I had permission from any administrators to play the song," he said. "I never needed permission before."

Mennefy said Chen called him and told him she would override the suspension.

"I have taught here for 24 years, and I don't have a single blemish on my record," he said. "I want to be back in my classroom."

2019 News Writing CHAMPIONS

1A Champion

Landry Neal, Savoy High School

Theater teacher Melvin Mennefy was suspended without pay last Thursday for playing a song during class that addressed marriage equality. A student requested the song, “Same Love,” by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, that previous Tuesday because she has been bullied for her sexual preferences. A sophomore complained to administration about the song, and Principal Brad Wilson issued the suspension. Superintendent Gina Chen has issued a statement saying she will not uphold the suspension and that she has plans to reinstate Mr. Mennefy.

“I was the one who asked Mr. Mennefy to play the song,” said junior Carrie Page. “I feel so bad. I didn’t mean to get him in trouble. That song isn’t bad. It doesn’t have profanity, and it’s not about shooting police or anything violent. It’s about equal rights.”

Mr. Mennefy’s theater class often listens to music while they work on set designs. Last Tuesday, after Carrie’s request, Mr. Mennefy listened to the song to make sure it did not contain obscenities before playing it. Two days later, he was called in for a meeting with Mr. Wilson.

“I was stunned,” said Mennefy. “He asked if I had permission from any administrators to play the song. We never needed permission before. I always listen to music first to make sure it’s appropriate, and this song is. Yes, it has a gay theme, but that is why my student asked if I could play it. She said she was getting bullied by some of her peers because she identifies as a lesbian. She thought if more students heard the song, they might appreciate the message.”

The bullying that led to Carrie’s request is a fairly new occurrence at Leaguetown High the School.

“Last year, I came out, and everyone was completely supportive,” said Carrie. “But this year, things have changed. A few students — none of them are my close friends — have started taunting me. One of them told me I need to play on the boys’ basketball team if I was going to dress like a boy. Another called me a sinner and said I was a freak. On my desk in English class, someone carved my name and the word, well, I don’t think I can say that word for the newspaper.”

Several students support Carrie and oppose Mr. Mennefy’s suspension. Some theater students who were in class when the song was played even requested a meeting with Mr. Wilson, but they were denied and told it was a “personal issue.”

“I wish I knew who complained about Mr. Mennefy,” said junior Kari Cooks. “He’s the best teacher at this school, and he didn’t do anything wrong. I’ve attended Leaguetown schools all my life, and I’ve never seen this type of stuff here. Carrie told me about the student who called her a freak and a sinner. Everyone used to be so nice here, but apparently something is changing.”

Though Wilson declined to comment on the situation, superintendent Gina Chen has been in contact with Mr. Mennefy, and has reassured him she will override his suspension.

“I was unaware of Mr. Mennefy’s suspension until Thursday afternoon,” said Dr. Chen. “I did not approve of the suspension and have no intention of upholding it. I listened to the song, and while I may not agree with everything the singer says, I do not find it inappropriate for high school students. I plan to investigate the situation more, but rest assured, Mr. Mennefy will be back in the classroom on Tuesday morning.”

As for the bullying that set this whole situation in motion, Dr. Chen has a plan for that too.

“I am concerned about the bullying allegations,” said Dr. Chen. “Next week, I am going to appoint a committee to address this bullying issue, and the first person I am going to ask to be 1A-15 on the committee is Carrie Page. I also will include teachers, administrators, counselors, and a parent or two. Bullying is unacceptable, but if we want to change it, we have to do more than punish the bully. We have to change the culture of our school so that everyone is respected and welcomed. I thought that was the culture we had, but apparently, I was wrong.”

2A Champion

Maggie Krah, Lindsay High School

Because theater teacher Melvin Mennefy played a pro-gay, marital-rights rap song in class while his students built sets for “The Lion King” on Tuesday, he was suspended without pay by Principal Brad Wilson. Wilson denied the request from the students for a meeting about the suspension. Superintendent Gina Chen plans to remove the suspension.

“I was unaware of Mr. Mennefy’s suspension until Thursday afternoon,” Dr. Chen said “I did not approve the suspension and I have no intention of upholding it. I plan to investigate the situation more, but rest assured, Mr. Mennefy will be back in the classroom on Tuesday morning.”

The rap song, “Same Love” by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis depicts the life of a gay man. Though the song does not contain profanity or promote violence, a student in Mennefy’s class complained to the assistant principal. Mennefy has been teaching for 24 years and has never had to ask for permission to play a song for his class.

“I always listen to the music first to make sure it’s appropriate, and this song is,” Mennefy said. “It a beautiful message about equality and love for all.”

Carrie Page, the student who requested Mennefy play the song, identifies as a lesbian. After an increased amount of bullying from

her peers, Page thought playing the song would help other students be more accepting.

"Last year, I came out, and everyone was completely supportive," Page said. "But this year, things have changed. I have strong support from my friends and family, so those incidents [of bullying] don't bother me. But not every gay student has that, and if I am getting bullied, I am sure others are, too."

Mennefy's suspension has brought the bullying issue to Dr. Chen's attention. In fact, next week she will appoint a committee of teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents to address the issue. One of those members will be Carrie Page.

"I have noticed a shift in our culture this year," teacher Krissy Sanders said. "Students are more cruel. They are not as supportive of each other as they have been in the past."

No official news on the suspension for Mennefy has been announced. Principal Wilson declined to comment on the situation.

"Mr. Mennefy's suspension is one more example of the culture change," Sanders said. "He was trying to be inclusive and give all students a voice. We need to listen to our students when they ask for help and when they need a voice."

3A Champion

Madeline Ayers, Whitney High School

Following the suspension of theater teacher Melvin Mennefy on Thursday by Principal Brad Wilson after a complaint was made by a student for the playing of a pro-gay, marital-right rap song in his class, superintendent Gina Chen guarantees Mennefy will be back in the classroom tomorrow.

"I was unaware of Mr. Mennefy's suspension until Thursday afternoon," Chen said. "I did not approve the suspension and have no intention of upholding it. I listened to the song, and while I may not agree with everything the singer says, I do not find it inappropriate for high school students."

The song was played at the request of junior Carrie Page who has had several bullying incidents regarding her identification as lesbian. Chen plans to appoint a committee next week to address the bullying issue, with Page as her first member.

"I thought if more students heard the Macklemore song, maybe they would be more accepting," Page said. "I have strong support from my friends and family, so those incidents don't bother me. But not every gay student has that, and if I am getting bullied, I am sure others are, too."

Page claims that students have told her she needs to join the boys' basketball team, called it her a freak and sinner, and carved vulgar words into her desk.

"I'm in Carrie's English class, so I saw the carving on the desk," junior Kari Cooks said. "I didn't think kids at this school were mean like that. I've attended Leaguetown schools all my life, and I've never seen this type of stuff."

Mennefy has been teaching at the school for 24 years and plays music in his classroom while the students work.

"We play music any time my students are building a set, which is quite often for this theater tech class," Mennefy said. "I always listen to the music first to make sure it's appropriate, and this song is. Yes, it has a gay theme, but that is why my student asked if we could play it."

Several teachers and students have noticed a shift in the school's culture this year and noticed that students are not supportive of one another and have become cruel.

"We have to change the culture of our school so that everyone is respected and welcome," Chen said. "I thought that was the culture we had, but apparently, I was wrong."

4A Champion

TOPS IN TEXAS

Ashley Wilkinson, Henderson High School

Teacher Melvin Mennefy will return to the school tomorrow after being suspended without pay last Thursday for playing "Same Love" by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis during his theatre tech class at the request of a bullied student. The superintendent, who did not approve the suspension, will appoint a committee next week to address bullying issues.

"I was unaware of Mr. Mennefy's suspension until Thursday afternoon," Superintendent Gina Chen said. "While I may not agree with everything the singer says, I plan to investigate the situation more."

"Same Love" depicts the life of a gay man and advocates for marriage equality. However, the song does not have any profanity and does not promote violence.

"Yes, it has a gay theme, but that is why my student asked if we could play it," Mennefy said. "She thought if more students heard the song, they might appreciate the message."

Junior Carrie Page, who requested the song, came out as a lesbian last year and has been bullied by her peers.

"I have strong support from my friends and my family, but not every gay student has that," Page said. "If I am getting bullied, I am sure others are, too."

Teachers have reported to Chen that they have been seeing more incidents of bullying this year than in the previous years.

"I have noticed a shift in our culture this year," social studies teacher Krissy Sanders said. "Students are crueler. Mr. Mennefy's suspension is one more example of the culture change. He was trying to be inclusive and give all students a voice, and he was suspended for that."

Mennefy has been teaching at the school for 24 years without a blemish on his record. The suspension will be overridden.

“He is the best teacher at this school, and he didn’t do anything wrong,” junior Kari Cooks said. “Everyone used to be so nice here, but apparently something is changing.”

Page will be asked to serve on the committee, along with teachers, administrators, counselors, and one or two parents.

“Bullying is unacceptable,” Chen said. “If we want to change it, we have to do more than good punish the bully. We have to change the culture of our school.”

5A Champion

Madyson Martinez, Gregory-Portland High School

Because theater teacher Melvin Mennefy played a pro-gay, marital-rights song for his students, Principal Brad Wilson suspended him with pay, but Superintendent Gina Chen plans to investigate further and reinstate Mennefy Tuesday morning.

“I was unaware of Mr. Mennefy’s suspension until Thursday afternoon,” Chen said. “I did not approve the suspension and have no intention of upholding it. I listened to the song, and while I may not agree with everything the singer says, I do not find it inappropriate for high school students.”

Last Tuesday, junior Carrie Page, one of Mennefy’s students, requested he play the song. “Same Love,” while the class worked on building “The Lion King” set for an elementary summer camp.

“We play music any time my students are building a set, which is quite often for this theater tech class,” Mennefy said. “I always listen to the music first to make sure it’s appropriate, and this song is. Yes, it has a gay theme, but that is why my student asked if we could play it.”

The song depicts the life of a gay man and promotes marriage equality. This year, Page said she has experienced taunting, bullying, and other forms of harassment from students because she identifies as a lesbian.

“I thought if more students heard the Macklemore song, maybe they would be more accepting,” she said. “I have strong support from my friends and family, so those incidents don’t bother me. But not every gay student has that, and if I am getting bullied, I am sure others are, too.”

Social studies teacher Krissy Sanders said she has noticed a shift in school culture this year with students being more cruel and disrespectful to their peers.

“Mr. Mennefy’s suspension is one more example of the culture change,” Sanders said. “He was trying to be inclusive and give all students voice. He was suspended for that.”

Concerned about the recent increase in bullying, Chen will appoint a committee of students, teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents next week to address the issue.

“Bullying is unacceptable, but if we want to change it, we have to do more than punish the bully,” she said. “We have to change the culture of our school so that everyone is respected and welcomed. I thought that was the culture we had, but apparently, I was wrong.”

6A Champion

Tramy Nguyen, Sterling High School

In response to Principal Brad Wilson’s suspension of theater teacher Melvin Mennefy over his decision to play a pro-gay, marital-rights rap song for his students, Superintendent Gina Chen said that she will override the decision so that Mennefy can return to school tomorrow.

“I did not approve the suspension and have no intention of upholding it,” Chen said. “I listened to the song, and while I may not agree with everything the singer says, I do not find it inappropriate for high school students.”

The song, “Same Love” by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, was played by Mennefy last Tuesday at the request of junior Carrie Page. Page, who identifies as gay, said that she hoped that students would be more accepting if they heard the song.

“I didn’t mean to get him in trouble,” Page said. “The song isn’t bad. It doesn’t have profanity, and it’s not about shooting police or anything violent. It’s about equal rights.”

Page said that she began to get bullied by other students over her identity this year. Junior Kari Cooks, who witnessed this bullying, said that “something is changing” with the school culture.

“I didn’t think kids at this school were mean like that,” Cooks said. “I’ve attended Leaguetown schools all my life, and I’ve never seen this type of stuff.”

Faculty members, such as social studies teacher Krissy Sanders, said that they have noticed a shift in school culture as well. Sanders said that students have become “more cruel.”

“Mr. Mennefy’s suspension is one more example of the culture change,” Sanders said. “He was trying to be inclusive and give all students a voice.”

Chen said that she is concerned about these bullying allegations, and she will act to make sure that bullying remains “unacceptable.”

“Next week, I am going to appoint a committee to address this bullying issue, and the first person I am going to ask to be on the committee is Carrie Page,” Chen said.

Chen said that the committee will be a part of the steps taken to “change the culture” of the school so that all students and faculty feel respected and welcomed.

“I thought that was the culture we had, but apparently, I was wrong,” Chen said.