

News Writing

District Meet • 2018



You are a reporter for the League-town **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, located in South Texas, has 300 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In early March, the high school principal and yearbook adviser selected a new photographer to take the senior portraits for the 2018-19 school year. Last week, the photographer sent the contract to the superintendent for approval. After reviewing the contract, the superintendent made one modification — inserting a clause about the dress code. The added statement to the contract says: “All students must be in school dress code when taking senior portraits. Students may not have bare shoulders or wear skirts or shorts higher than two inches from the knee.” This clause poses a problem for the photographer because she uses an off-the-shoulder wrap for female senior portraits. The photographer Mary Goldsmith shared her concerns with the principal and yearbook teacher. When questioned, the superintendent said he wanted his amendment added to the contract and said the photographer could either find different wraps to cover the girls’ shoulders or she could simply not take the formal portraits. Goldsmith said she would not purchase new wraps for the seniors, even though that photo is the traditional photo used in the yearbook.

The editors for the 2018-19 yearbook frustrated with the decision by the superintendent started a petition asking the school board to overturn the superintendent’s decision. Every junior, including male students, signed the petition. The editors will present the petition to the school board at its next meeting Thursday, March 29.

■ JOHN HEALY, superintendent

“In my last school district, our senior photographer had no problem supplying a wrap that covered our female students’ shoulders. I fail to see what the big problem is. Our dress code is very clear that all students, not just female students, may not wear off the shoulder shirts or even spaghetti strap shirts. Why would we allow and even encourage every female student to violate that dress code in the yearbook? It makes no sense to me. If we are going to have a dress code, then it needs to be followed.

“If the board feels like our dress code is out-dated or needs to be revised, I am happy to look into it. But revamping a dress code does not happen over night. We would need to form a committee to get input from all of the stakeholders. Then, we would need to share recommendations with the community and students. It takes time to do it right.”

■ **GRACE ORTIZ, junior and yearbook editor for 2018-19 yearbook**

“I’ve spent my entire high school career wondering exactly why shoulders are so offensive. I never understood why we couldn’t wear spaghetti strap shirts or a shirts with the shoulders cut out. The ones that are so popular now. Even my mom wears those.

“I went back and looked at old yearbook books. For the past 25 years, female students have worn off-the-shoulder wraps for senior portraits. That’s two and a half decades. It’s not like we are running the halls in the wraps or even coming to school in them at all. Senior portraits are taken at the photographer’s studio over the summer. Needless to say, we didn’t have any problem getting the signatures for the petition. We got our final signature yesterday. I hope the board overturn’s the superintendent’s decision. If he doesn’t, I don’t know what we will do for senior portraits for the yearbook.”

■ **LIBBY MILLS, yearbook teacher**

“We were all a little surprised by Dr. Healy’s change to the photographer’s contract. We’ve used those type of wraps since I was in high school. Most schools across the state use those wraps. I reached out to our journalism organization, and not a single yearbook teacher has ever had a problem like this. I know Leaguetown is a conservative town, but this is over the top. It’s a bit ridiculous if you ask me.

“I am very proud of the editors for next year. Rather than whine and complain about the decision, they went into action and created the petition. I’ve had several parents ask if they could sign the petition, but the editors wanted the petition to be for students only. We are encouraging parents to attend the board meeting to support the editors.”

■ **SUSAN SIVER, parent of a junior**

“I was flabbergasted when my daughter told me about the situation. Who bans senior wraps? It’s a senior tradition. Hasn’t the superintendent looked at a yearbook, from anywhere, for the last three decades? I asked to sign the petition as did several of my friends. I understand why they want it to be from students only. We support the students, though, and we are going to show it by showing up to the school board meeting next week. In fact, we are having a sign making party at my house Friday night. We don’t want to be disruptive, but we want the board to notice us. So far, 20 parents have said they are coming to the sign party. I expect many more at the school board meeting. The board usually listens to the community. I hope they do this time, too.”

■ **MARY GOLDSMITH, photographer**

“Those wraps are not cheap. I spent \$500 last year buying new ones. I can’t afford to buy more again this year just for Leaguetown. I take senior portraits for several high schools in the area, and no one has ever asked for a different wrap.

“We can do senior portraits without the wraps. Female students could bring a nice dress or something. But the yearbook would lose it uniformity with those photos. Senior sections in the yearbook look so much classier when the seniors are in formal wear.”

■ **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The school board members decline to comment for the story.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

DISTRICT • 2018

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 discussion and walk is happening Friday.

After three students dressed up in “inappropriate” villain costumes last week and triggered an argument in the cafeteria, the Student Council organized a unity discussion and walk for 7 a.m. Friday at the stadium.

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 (“Urbina said,” not “said Urbina.”) 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

The students wore the costumes — Hitler, Osama Bin Laden and a slave master — for the spring pep rally when they were encouraged to dress up like villains “to scare off the competition.” Most students came in superhero or “Star Wars” villain costumes.

direct quote

“I will be the first to say that those students’ costumes were inappropriate, which is why the administration acted so quickly,” Principal Mica Urbina said. “But I also want to say that I don’t think the students meant harm. They did not intend to offend others.”

transition

Sophomore Noah Shriver, who dressed up like Hitler, said he thought it would be funny and unique.

direct quote

“I didn’t mean to offend anyone,” he said. “I really am sorry, but no one is listening to me.”

3. Use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “Mica Urbina, our principal” or “Some of our students...” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Shriver is awful...” 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 most-

ly of brief paragraphs.

SAMPLE STORY

After three students dressed up in “inappropriate” villain costumes last week and triggered an argument in the cafeteria, the Student Council organized a unity discussion and walk for 7 a.m. Friday at the stadium.

“Our goal is not to point fingers or say anyone is bad or stupid,” Student Council president Angela Trevino said. “Our goal is to get the students to talk to each other without shouting. If we can do that, we can begin healing.”

The students wore the costumes — Hitler, Osama Bin Laden and a slave master — for the spring pep rally when they were encouraged to dress up like villains “to scare off the competition.” Most students came in superhero or “Star Wars” villain costumes.

“I will be the first to say that those students’ costumes were inappropriate, which is why the administration acted so quickly,” Principal Mica Urbina said. “But I also want to say that I don’t think the students meant harm. They did not intend to offend others.”

Sophomore Noah Shriver, who dressed up like Hitler, said he thought it would be funny and unique.

“I didn’t mean to offend anyone,” he said. “I really am sorry, but no one seems to be listening to me.”

When Urbina saw the students in the costumes at the pep rally, she escorted them out and contacted their parents for a change of clothes.

“They [the students] thought they were being original and creative,” Urbina said. “I believe they are starting to understand the implications of dressing in those particular costumes.”

In the last two days, the school has had four fights concerning this incident and a heated shouting match in the cafeteria.

“One of the things I loved most about Leaguetown was its diversity and acceptance of everyone,” Trevino, a senior, said. “Unfortunately, this incident has caused so many hurt feelings and divided our school. It makes me sick to think about that.”

That’s why Trevino suggested the Student Council bring in Roberto Gomez, director of Peace Now!, for a unity event.

“He’s an amazing speaker and facilitator, and I knew he could help our school,” she said.

Sophomore Janie Cohen, who is Jewish and black, said she will attend the event to share her story — something she already did with the student who wore the slave master costume.

“At first, I was disgusted by those boys’ costumes,” she said. “After talking to him, I understand that he didn’t wear the costume to offend students. He thought it would be funny.”

After she finished sharing her personal story about dealing with racism, the student hugged her and apologized, Cohen said.

“He had no idea about some of the things I have had to go through because of my race and religion,” she said. “That’s what we need — we need to share. Our students are good, but many don’t understand because they have never lived it.”

Shriver said he is unsure if he and his two friends will go to the event, but Gomez is encouraging all students to attend.

“The goal for Friday is to open minds and hearts,” Gomez said. “Before we begin, I will lay out the ground rules – no insults, no profanity, no hateful language. The students need to share and listen. I invite every student, parent and staff member to join us Friday.”

Urbina said the issue is a “matter of not understanding” and hopes the unity talk and walk will help reunite the students.

“I honestly believe that our students are not racists or bigots,” she said. “When you’ve never walked in those shoes, it’s not always easy to understand.”