

Feature Writing

District Meet • 2018



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 (NOT YOUR NAME) on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School, located in Texas, has an enrollment of 1,100 students in grades 9-12. Over spring break this year, senior LeighAnn Ashford spent five nights camping in a cardboard box in Little Park to raise money for the homeless. Ashford said she got the idea from government teacher Brett Boatman. At the beginning of the school year, Boatman challenged his seniors to take on a cause and “make a difference.”

The idea of making a difference inspired LeighAnn. At church, she met Makida Abdulahi, a Sudanese mother of four boys who was living in a shelter with her children. LeighAnn decided her cause would be to help the homeless. She met with the director of the shelter where Abdulahi’s family was staying, Interfaith Community Shelter, and learned if she raised \$3,000, the family would have rent for a home for a year. That became her goal — \$3,000.

During her first night of camping, LeighAnn posted photos and updates on her fundraiser website and raised \$250. Each night she posted more photos and updates, and the money continued to dribble in. On night four, it started to rain and an unexpected cold front hit the town, dropping the overnight temperatures into the low 40s. Local news station KVET came out that night and interviewed LeighAnn as the rain started to seep into her box. The segment ran on the 10 p.m. news. Both the reporter and LeighAnn’s parents tried to convince her to return home, but LeighAnn said she was determined to last the five nights and raise the \$3,000. After the news segment aired, donations poured in, and her total rose from \$365 to \$4,400 by the end of the night. On night five, LeighAnn found a new dry box and finished her campout. In all, she raised \$6,110 for the Abdulahi family.

On Friday, March 30, LeighAnn will join the Abdulahi family as they move to their first real home — a three-bedroom apartment in Southside. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed on Wednesday, March 28.

■ LEIGHANN ASHFORD, senior

“I am grateful that Mr. Boatman pushed me to think beyond myself. He told us to consider the world around us because we, as seniors, get so wrapped up in ourselves that we forget that so many need help. He was right. That next week, I met Makida and her children at church. I would have never had the idea to help Makida if Mr. Boatman hadn’t started that challenge.

“My family and I have camped all over the U.S., so camping is not new for me. Camping by myself, though, is. I didn’t think it would be scary since I was doing it in Little Park where there are lights and the police station is next door. But I was wrong. I can’t tell you how many times I woke up in the middle of the night trying to identify a weird sound. Usually it was an animal or insect, but a few times I had no idea what the sound was.

■ LEIGHANN ASHFORD (continued)

“My parents offered to camp with me, but I wanted to do this on my own. I know my dad checked on me several times during the night and asked the police to drive by several times, too. The camping part wasn’t too difficult. I didn’t use a tent because I wanted to experience more of what a homeless person experiences. Staying in the box wasn’t a big deal until the rain came and the temperature dropped. I was seriously cold and wet. I almost gave up around 1 a.m., but then I found the photo of Makida and her children. I held it in my hands for the rest of the night. I pushed through for them. They lived in a refugee camp for years before coming here. I told myself I could handle two more nights. And I did.

“The first box was a Samsung refrigerator box that I snagged from Best Buy. It was sturdy until the rain came. Luckily, my mom sent me with a few rain ponchos, just in case. I used them to keep some of the water off of me and my sleeping bag. For the fifth night, I found a computer box outside the police station. It wasn’t nearly as big, but it worked fine for one night.

“After night four, I didn’t look at the fundraising page. I wanted to be surprised when I left the campsite. I definitely was. I kept refreshing the page, thinking there was an error, but there was no error. I really did it. I can’t wait to see Makida and her family in their new home. They have an entire year in the home without having to worry about rent or bills like electricity or water. And the extra money will help them buy groceries, clothes and more. Hopefully, that will give Makida enough time to complete her job training and find a good job.”

■ BRETT BOATMAN, government teacher

“Every year since I’ve been here, I’ve challenged my seniors to make a difference. Many have taken me up on that challenge. Some have worked in shelters giving out meals at Thanksgiving. Some have volunteered at retirement homes. But none has made the impact that LeighAnn has.”

■ EVAN ASHFORD, LeighAnn’s father

“I can’t say my wife and I were excited about LeighAnn camping outside for five days by herself. Our town is safe, but that didn’t mean I didn’t worry. I told LeighAnn the only way I would be OK with it was if I went by and checked on her during the night. I promised not to bother her, but I needed to check in for my own sanity. It was hard not making her get in the car the night it was cold and rainy, but LeighAnn would have never forgiven me. My wife and I are so proud of her, and we’ve made the commitment to camp out next year to raise money.”

■ MAKIDA ABDULAH, Sudanese mother of four

“When we first came to the United States, our caseworker said it could be years before we got a home. That was OK. The shelter is much nicer than the refugee camp. But now, we get a home after only five months. It is a miracle. God is working through LeighAnn, certainly. We are grateful and humbled. My youngest son has never had his own bed. I can’t stop smiling. I just can’t stop.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Makida’s children are 4, 6, 8 and 12. Makida’s husband was killed by Sudanese government soldiers in 2014.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING CONTEST!

DISTRICT • 2018 FEATURE 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. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about a senior who camped alone to raise money for the homeless.

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 copy as you can. Some judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

The cold rain fell on the sagging roof of the Samsung refrigerator box as junior LeighAnn Ashford sat huddled inside. The rain seeped into the bottom of the cardboard box, dampening her clothes and skin. The box fell limp as the temperature dipped into the low 40s.

But here she sat, clinging to a picture in her hand — a picture of Makida Abdulahi and her four boys.

"I pushed through for them," LeighAnn said. "I almost gave up around 1 a.m., but then I found the photo of Makida and her children. I held it in my hands for the rest of the night."

The lead possibilities are endless.

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

After being challenged to "make a difference" by government teacher Brett Boatman, LeighAnn camped alone in a cardboard box for five nights in Little Park to raise money for the homeless, specifically Abdulahi, a Sudanese refugee, who currently lives in a shelter. LeighAnn's original goal was to raise \$3,000, but she more than doubled her goal and raised \$5,110. On Friday, LeighAnn will help Abdulahi and her family move to their first real home.

direct quote

"I can't wait to see Makida and her family in their new home," LeighAnn said. "They will have an entire year in the home without having to worry about rent or bills like electricity or water. And the extra money will help them buy groceries, clothes and more."

4. After you get past the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of 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 (“LeighAnn said,” not “said LeighAnn”). Don’t stack quotes. You need a transition sentence between direct quotes, and that transition sentence should provide facts or data. Also, make sure transitions do not repeat information told in a direct quote.

transition/story-telling

LeighAnn said she would have never had the idea to help Makida without Boatman’s senior challenge.

direct quote

“Every year since I’ve been here, I’ve challenged my seniors to make a difference,” Boatman said. “Many have taken me up on that challenge. But none has made the impact that LeighAnn has.”

transition/story-telling

To raise money, LeighAnn posted photos and updates of her camping experience to her fundraiser website. And although LeighAnn had camped before, she had never camped without a tent or without her family.

direct quote

“I didn’t think it would be scary since I was doing it in Little Park where there are lights, and the police station is next door,” she said. “But I was wrong. I can’t tell you how many times I woke up in the middle of the night trying to identify a weird sound.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our own LeighAnn Ashford.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “She is an amazing student.” These statements are personal opinion and should not be made in a feature story.

6. Use the verb “said” as the verb of attribution unless you have a very good reason not to. For example, if someone asks something, use the verb “asked.” If someone added something, you could use “added.” Otherwise, use “said.”

7. Finally, look for a strong quote to use as a closing statement. It should give the reader a sense of satisfaction or resolution.

But there was no error. And now Abdulahi and four children, ages 4, 6, 8 and 12, will get a home — something they haven’t had for a very long time.

“When we first came to the United States, our caseworker said it could be years before we got a home,” said Abdulahi, whose husband was killed by Sudanese government soldiers in 2014. “But now, we get a home after only five months. It is a miracle. God is working through LeighAnn, certainly. We are grateful and humbled.

“I can’t stop smiling,” she added. “I just can’t stop.”

SAMPLE STORY

The cold rain fell on the sagging roof of the Samsung refrigerator box as junior LeighAnn Ashford sat huddled inside. The rain seeped into the bottom of the cardboard box, dampening her clothes and skin. The box fell limp as the temperature dipped into the low 40s.

But here she sat, clinging to a picture in her hand — a picture of Makida Abdulahi and her four boys.

“I pushed through for them,” LeighAnn said. “I almost gave up around 1 a.m., but then I found the photo of Makida and her children. I held it in my hands for the rest of the night.”

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“I can’t wait to see Makida and her family in their new home,” LeighAnn said. “They will have an entire year in the home without having to worry about rent or bills like electricity or water. And the extra money will help them buy groceries, clothes and more.”

LeighAnn said she would have never had the idea to help Makida without Boatman’s senior challenge.

“Every year since I’ve been here, I’ve challenged my seniors to make a difference,” Boatman said. “Many have taken me up on that challenge. But none has made the impact that LeighAnn has.”

To raise money, LeighAnn posted photos and updates of her camping experience to her fundraiser website. And although LeighAnn had camped before, she had never camped without a tent or without her family.

“I didn’t think it would be scary since I was doing it in Little Park where there are lights and the police station is next door,” she said. “But I was wrong. I can’t tell you how many times I woke up in the middle of the night trying to identify a weird sound.”

Night four brought an even bigger surprise — rain and an unexpected cold front.

“I didn’t use a tent because I wanted to experience more of what a homeless person experiences,” she said. “Staying in the box wasn’t a big deal until the rain came and the temperature dropped. I was seriously cold and wet.”

That night, a reporter from local news station KVET interviewed LeighAnn. After the news segment aired, donations poured in.

“After night four, I didn’t look at the fundraising page,” she said. “I wanted to be surprised when I left the campsite. I definitely was. I kept refreshing the page, thinking there was an error.”

But there was no error. And now Abdulahi and her children, ages 4, 6, 8 and 12, will get a home — something they haven’t had for a very long time.

“When we first came to the United States, our caseworker said it could be years before we got a home,” said Abdulahi, whose husband was killed by Sudanese government soldiers in 2014. “But now, we get a home after only five months. It is a miracle. God is working through LeighAnn, certainly. We are grateful and humbled.

“I can’t stop smiling, she added. “I just can’t stop.”