SHOW ME, DON’T TELL ME

Describe it and be specific. Show the reader what it looks like, what it feels like, what it sounds like. Sure, descriptive reporting takes a lot of time and work, but the pay-off is well worth it.

I like leads that take me somewhere, that transport me to another place and time. I want to be there, and I want stories to take me. I don’t want to read a lead that says: The city’s homeless rate reached record high levels, a spokesman for the mayor’s office announced.

I want the lead to show me. What do these numbers mean in human terms?

RAY TUGGED the plastic garbage bag that served as a raincoat in a mostly unsuccessful attempt to stay dry, drew a few last puffs from a cigarette stub he found on the floor of a 7-11 store and joined the back of a line of down-and-out men, waiting for a warm bunk in the warehouse that serves as a shelter for the homeless on nights like this one.

"It must be 15 degrees out here," said Ray, who refused to give his last name. "It seems like every time the weather turns bad, this damn line gets longer and longer."

Ray is right.

A city official announced yesterday that the homeless rate has reached record high levels.

The strength of any descriptive piece lies in its use of details to appeal both to human emotions and to physical senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch.

In an article about a man who suffered near-fatal brain damage in a bicycle accident, a reporter said the brain "resembles nothing more than a large, soft, very wrinkled walnut. It weighs almost three pounds. Of that, about 2 1/4 pounds is water and the rest tissue. The combination explains why the brain is often described as looking like Jell-O, but the better comparison would be mayonnaise. Push your finger into this gray blob of protoplasm, and it will adhere."

Now that’s descriptive. And it only appealed to two of the five senses. Each of the next three leads use selective details to create an image that carries with it an emotional response. Not only do readers see something, but they also feel something as well, even if that something is a queasy feeling in the pit of their stomach.

DESCRIPTION OF A PLACE

NINE RED LEATHER chairs rest behind the mahogany table in the properly paneled and softly carpeted auditorium in the central administrative building on West Cabell Street.

All of the chairs are equal—but one is more equal than the others. It is the fifth chair, the one in the middle of the table. The back of the chair is slightly taller than the rest. This one is reserved for
Dr. Marvin Layne, who for the past 11 years has served as school board president. From this post, Dr. Layne has guided the district through several of its most turbulent years.

Flanked to the left by blue-tinted photographs of school board presidents dating back to 1911 and to the right by U. S. and Illinois flags, the 64-year-old college marine science professor has used this seat to cajole, intimidate and hammer through policies and procedures that he says have saved the district from disaster.

**DESCRIPTION OF A MOMENT**

**IN THE BACK** of ambulance 703, paramedic Hank Harky battles to keep a 17-year-old breathing, but the young man's airways are rapidly contracting. The teenager is suffering a heart attack from a drug overdose.

With sirens blaring and emergency lights flashing, the ambulance races along R. L. Thornton Freeway at 72 mph shortly before 10 p.m. Thursday, bearing down toward the Veterans Administration Medical Center.

"How far, Ben?" paramedic Harky shouts through a small window to his partner, driver Ben Bryan, who is working hard just to keep the shaking ambulance in one lane.

"Twelve minutes. We can still make the cut over to Parkland," the driver yells above the din.

The pain and excitement are exacting a toll on the patient, and his heart starts to beat erratically. Despite the intravenous medication he is receiving in his left arm, he starts grabbing at his chest and screams painfully between each laborious breath.

"Do it." paramedic Harky shouts to his partner, who revises the ambulance's destination to Parkland Memorial Hospital because it is closer.

This is a typical run on "box" 703, Dallas' busiest ambulance and the 11th busiest in the country, according to a national survey.

**APPEAL TO THE SENSES**

Successful description does more than describe. It appeals to the senses and emotions. It generates empathy between the reader and the subject by forcing readers to judge the action in terms of their own experiences.

Identifying the theme and determining the angle will assist you greatly in collecting detail. For example, the reporter in the story on page 71 has decided to tell the story of PALS, a peer drug counseling program, by examining its positive influences on a specific student, Joey Eberhart. So the theme of the story is "For Joey Eberhart and students like him, PALS has not only saved his life but allowed him to save others."
Now, the reporter has to decide on an angle, how to approach the story. She attends several sessions in which Joey counsels younger students. She interviews Joey, his counselors and the students he counsels. But she decides to angle the story on the relationship between Joey and a younger student, Brian Kennedy.

Finally, she opts to begin the story by describing one specific, though typical, counseling session. Notice how the theme, the angle and the description work together to pull the reader into the story by evoking images and emotions.

IT IS HARD TO TELL whether he is more tired or bored or ashamed as Brian Kennedy rubs his hands through his greasy, coal-black hair and then down across his chin that has yet to grow anything more than peach fuzz. He stares down at the table or darts his eyes across the room. He refuses to look forward.

For sitting across from him is Joey Eberhart. And Joey is mad.

“Damn it man, I can’t believe you did this to me,” Joey says. “I can’t believe you did it to yourself.”

Brian, a freshman, knows he has let Joey down. He closes his eyes and speaks slowly.

“You don’t know what it’s like out there. I just couldn’t turn it down. I really didn’t want to get drunk. Getting drunk isn’t that much fun anymore. But I got stuck with the wrong people.”

Joey understands. Three years ago, he was a ninth-grade drunk himself. Today, the senior is a member of PALS—teenagers who licked their own abusive habits and now help younger kids beat their own. Still rail-thin, like he was when he was popping pills and boozing, Joey’s skin is a translucent orange-yellow, the result, he says, of a vegetarian diet.

**DESCRIPTION MAKES A POINT**

We learn a lot about Brian and Joey in these five paragraphs, and what we learn is relevant. The description isn’t a random collection of details. It makes a point. Some writers overwhelm the reader with details that fail to add anything substantial to the story. (For example: Joey’s favorite band is Smashing Pumpkins. His favorite food is meatless spaghetti. The person he’d most like to meet is Robin Williams.)

Unless you’re being paid by the word, there’s no excuse to ramble on and on. Compare the story above to this flat, one-note article:

**A GROWING NATIONAL** concern about the prevention of alcohol and substance abuse has led to the development of the Peer Advisory program in Pine Valley schools.

PALS began three years ago in the Brookland district by an initial grant from the federal government. Students who are part of the PALS program voluntarily take part in an initial 16- to 20-hour training program and monthly two-hour training sessions throughout the school year.

Senior class president Cindy Greene, member of PALS, said, “Peer Advisory is a worthwhile organization because students have fellow students who can understand the problems they may be facing in their day-to-day lives.”

PALS volunteers visit ninth grade homerooms every Tuesday and offer Lunch Bunch every Thursday. Lunch Bunch is held during all lunches and openly discusses a different topic each week.

Every word of your story should advance action. The following leads contain information that serves no function other than decoration.

**EXAMPLE A**

Setting in a room filled with broken radiators and jumbled desks, valedictorian hopeful Joanna Brown looks across the brim of her wire-rim glasses and expresses her feelings about life, how she divides her time between social and academic activities and how she still maintains the highest GPA in a class of 271.

**EXAMPLE B**

In England, soccer fans are as likely to get bashed in the head and then crushed into a steel fence. Last year, six people were killed at a soccer
appeal to the senses

what did it look like?
coach miles stepped out of the field house into the blinding lights of the television cameras. the bags under his glassy eyes hung like leather pouches on a white horse. he'd been crying.

what did it smell like?
I remember that my grandmother's house smelled like old perfume and cat boxes.

what did it taste like?
on their first date, jerry kissed sue, perhaps more passionately than she had expected or wanted. she tasted like wintergreen altoids. he tasted like frito pie.

what did it feel like?
the steak was as chewy as rubber vomit.

what did it sound like?
he plays for a rock and roll band whose music sounds like a lawn mower at full throttle falling through a plate-glass roof into a pile of aluminum pots and pans.

match in liverpool, pine valley high school also has a soccer team, but it's more laid back.

example c

the spanish club started off this year with the breaking of a piñata. club members also learn, little by little, the culture of spanish speaking countries and how to learn spanish, too. the spanish club will hold its next meeting next tuesday.

is it significant?
in example A, what is the significance of the broken radiators and jumbled desks? why mention her wire-rim glasses?
in example b, the story concerns the high school's soccer team. focus on it. that soccer is popular in england is irrelevant.
in example C, who cares how the spanish club began the year? provide the specific incidents and details that show the process by which students come to appreciate a different culture. breaking a piñata isn't one of them.

consider these next two stories. the first involves romantic obsession, a provocative topic rarely covered by high school publications but certainly a reality among american teenagers. rather than taking a wide-angle view of it, the reporter chooses to focus on a specific girl and her experience with an obsessive young man.

she thought he was going to kill her. he had been angry before, even punched his hand through a window once, but he had never threatened her, never scared her like this.

now he was out of control. he pushed her into a corner and then shoved her back down when she tried to escape. "All I could think was 'I have to get out of here.' I just started crying."

that was a month ago. today, julie (not her real name) has ended her relationship with jim (not his real name), but he didn't give up without a fight.

"He'd circle my house, leave me little notes, stare at me in class," julie said. "He kind of lost it."

other high school students have similar stories. obsessive love is all too real for many teenagers...

create the desired image

this is far more effective than "webster defines obsession as. . . . many students are involved in obsessive relationships." even though we haven't described jim or julie, we have described the situation sufficiently to create the desired image.

the next example involves long distance relationships, and, again, note that it focuses on a specific couple and uses their experience as the universal experience.

nancy and bill were the darlings of last year's senior class. they dated all through high school and even into the first year of college. but there was a problem. nancy attended the university of maryland, bill the university of virginia.

"we'd see each other on weekends and talk to each other on the phone a lot," nancy said. "but
I began to feel that I was missing out on my college life, and so I started thinking about breaking up.

Bill had gone one step farther.

“I was still technically going with Nancy, but I started dating a few women at UVA,” he said.

“And I started seeing my relationship with Nancy as a drag.”

During the Thanksgiving weekend, Nancy and Bill agreed to break up.

“I still loved Nancy, but the long distance relationship wasn’t working out,” Bill said.

Too often, it doesn’t.

Counselor Mike Barry said . . .

Now, pick up with whatever statistics and other general information needed to fully develop the story. Make certain to return to the narrative about Nancy and Bill.

**STRIP STORIES TO A SINGLE THEME**

Here’s a trick I picked up along the way: strip subjects to a single sentence and then rebuild them around stories. For example, use a review of a book about teenagers and their jobs to find story ideas. Look for a local and timely angle and place at the heart of the story a teenager—a student at your school—rather than the book or the author. Do this, and the article will have personal impact. The following example shows the kind of shoddy efforts we see too often.

**EDUCATORS ARE** concerned that part-time jobs are robbing teenagers from receiving a full high-school education, according to Cameron Barton, education professor at the University of South Carolina and author of *Teenagers and Their Work*.

**PREDICTABLE LEAD.** While this isn’t plagiarism, it makes no attempt to localize the information.

**FOR MANY STUDENTS,** putting in a full day’s work means more than sitting in class from 8 to 3. More and more, students are working four-, five-, even eight-hour shifts daily at minimum-wage jobs.

However, part-time jobs are an increasing concern to educators, who worry that students lose more than they receive in their pursuit of a weekly paycheck.

According to *Teenagers and Their Work* by Cameron Barton, education professor at the University of South Carolina, “We are challenging the myth that part-time work is good for teenagers. In fact, our findings suggest the opposite.”

**UNIQUE ANGLE.** This lead localizes the situation to the school in a descriptive, appealing manner.

**AT TWO** each afternoon, while most of the students at Reagan High School are bent over their books, struggling against afternoon torpor, trying to hang in there for two more hours, senior Ricky Moreno is headed out to the parking lot.

He has an hour to dash home, change clothes, grab a bite, then drive to Tom Thumb where, for the next eight hours, he’ll handle customers’ questions and complaints, issue refunds, send cashiers on their breaks and in general keep things running smoothly at the front of the store.

Ricky is the customer service manager. It’s an unusually important job for a teenager, and he is proud of it.

“It’s teaching me responsibility,” he says, “how to deal with my own money and how companies work inside and outside.”

But many educators, sociologists, labor leaders and parents would disagree. Increasingly, they’re critical of such after-school work.

In Florida, Hawaii, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina and Ohio, state legislators are debating laws that would limit the number of hours teenagers can work. Tennessee already has passed such a law.

**PREDICTABLE LEAD**

**LAST WEEK.** Mrs. Joyce Cripe’s senior government classes participated in the Citizen Bee contest. According to Mrs. Cripe, the purpose of Citizen Bee is to help students understand world issues and events.

“We learned a lot about what’s going on
around the globe and how events in one part of
the world affect us here," junior Lance Brinson said.

**UNIQUE ANGLE**

**JENNIFER BRIGGS** couldn’t believe the
question: Who was the mayor of Berlin at the time
the wall was built?

"Who cares?" she thought. Seconds earlier, her
opponent had received what she thought was an
easy question: Who was Ronald Reagan’s vice
president?

"Why didn’t I get that one?" she asked herself,
hoping all the while that the correct answer to her
question would pop into her head.

It didn’t. And so another student advanced in
the Academic Club competition.

"I guess the most frustrating thing is that you
never know what they’re going to ask, and there’s
so much history that you can’t learn everything," Jennifer said. But that hasn’t stopped her from
competing in the meets.

"I’m a big Jeopardy fan, and this is my way of
playing Jeopardy," Samantha Haney said. "It’s
nerve-wracking, but I love it."

Now, try a few of your own with these
sentences:

1. The Student Council had a busy year.
2. She was a popular and excellent teacher.
3. The National Honor Society participated
   in many charitable activities this year.
4. Computers made a big difference in the
   school this year.
5. Soap operas remained popular with
   students.
6. The death of a popular sophomore after
   a long bout with cancer had a tremendous
   impact on students.
7. A spirit of volunteerism swept through
   the school.

**WRITE THE WAY YOU THINK**

Go to the thesaurus when you know there
is a better word but can’t think of it. Never
use it in the futile attempt to prove to
everyone what a great vocabulary you have.
Readers won’t be impressed.

So if you’re writing about video games,
say, "Red-eyed, pale as a ballerina, Zippo
slouched over Mortal Kombat, his latest video
addiction, and continued slamming buttons
and blurring, ‘Die, Mother.’"

Don’t write: "Imbued with a veritable
plethora of vexation augmented by his physical
dissipation, Zippo engaged the computerized
entertainment facility, thus terminating his
video adversaries."

**MAKE IT COUNT**

As stated earlier, make certain the
description contributes to the development of
the story’s theme. Don’t describe for the sake
of describing. For example:

**PRINCIPAL MADGE O’BRIEN** said it is an
honor to be nominated as Administrator of the Year
but added she really doesn’t expect to win.

"I’m pleased that the faculty thinks enough
of me to nominate me for this award,” O’Brien said
wistfully, her pretty blue eyes looking up over
her half-moon glasses. "It’s like an Academy Award. I’m
thrilled to be nominated, but I don’t expect to win."

Wearing a white silk blouse and blue skirt that
looked more like a first-grade teacher than a
principal of a tough high school, O’Brien said softly
that she appreciates the support she has received
from students and teachers alike.

The description here has little impact on
her nomination, and the story really goes
nowhere. What she wears, the color of her eyes
and how she speaks are not irrelevant to the
theme of the story. With another angle—an
anecdote that shows why she was nominated—
they could be. For example:

**MADGE O’BRIEN** stared over the top of her
rimless, half-moon glasses, straight into the junior’s
eyes and said, "One more mistake, Mister, and
you’re out of here."

The junior nodded, not daring to meet her cool-
blue glare. He didn’t confuse the soft voice for a
lack of authority. He knew she’d do it.

And the rest of the school has learned that
TRAIN REPORTERS TO SEE THE ACTION

This exercise, created by H.L. Hall, former adviser at Kirkwood High School (Kirkwood, MO) asks students to rewrite each paragraph, making it as descriptive as possible. Students are free to use their imaginations to create scenes as they think they may have existed. The purpose of the exercise is to spur students to think descriptively.

- Jeff Wagner, senior, ran more than 500 miles during the summer to practice for the cross country season. The temperature was over 100 for nine consecutive days. The high temperatures caused other runners who were also practicing to vomit.

- Up and down country lanes, heat waves rose from the sweltering pavement, the result of nine consecutive 100-plus days. In the distance, a pack of young men—sunburned and drenched in sweat—slogged forth, battling the record temperatures in preparation for the fall cross country season.

  Leading the pack, Jeff Wagner pushed on, rolling up more than 500 miles this summer, hanging tough at times when others dropped to the sides of the road, sick at their stomachs and gasping for breath.

- Four students spent the summer lifeguarding at city pool. Whistling down children for running and breaking other pool rules occupied much of their time. They also operated the concession stand and battled throbbing headaches and sunburn. The best part, they said, was watching other teenagers.

- The lifeguards’ life isn’t as glamorous as it’s made out to be. Sure, they get a killer tan and a plenty of time to check out members of the other sex. But they also must sell hot dogs, soft drinks and candy while keeping tabs on hordes of elementary and junior high kids whose primary interests almost always include running on wet pavement. A typical day is likely to conclude with a hammering headache and a sunburn.

- Students stood in line for hours to buy tickets to a Rolling Stones concert. One student got in line 84 hours before tickets went on sale. Traffic jams the night of the concert delayed the start of the concert by one hour. There was standing room only, and the crowd went wild.

- The line started to form days before tickets went on sale. One student waited in line for 84 hours to snatch front row seats. For what? The Rolling Stones, one of rock ‘n’ roll’s most celebrated bands, a group that survived the ’60s intact and whose appeal stretches from 50-year-old former hippies turned investment brokers to 15-year-old skateboarders.

  As usual, the band didn’t disappoint. The standing room only crowd went wild when Mick Jagger and group stormed onto the stage, despite an hour delay due to a traffic snarl created by the throngs of fans coming to see the show.

- Four students participated in the Moonlight Ramble, a 20-mile bike ride at night. Jon Byrd, sophomore, attempted to ride under a rope barrier at the start of the course. The rope caught on the seat of his bike and threw him to the ground. He still won first place.

- Sophomore Jon Byrd overcame a rough tumble at the beginning of the Moonlight Ramble—his bike seat snagged on a rope barrier, tossing him to the ground—to win the 20-mile night rally over three other students.

WE FROWN ON LEADS LIKE THESE

THE ‘BUT WAIT!’ MAYBE NOT LEAD.

Armed with a sword and shield, the man charges into battle. His opponent blocks every swing of his mighty blade. Exhausted, the man lets his defense down, giving his enemy an opportunity to attack.

With one slice of a sword to the leg, the man is on the ground, screaming and clutching his mutilated leg. Soon, the opponent has killed the disabled man—a mighty slash that splits the man’s head—and the battle is over.

But wait! There is no blood. The corpse hops up and is shaking his enemy’s hand. No longer enemies, these two are now friends! They are participants in the annual Round Top Shakespearean Festival.
O’Brien is all-business even though she looks more petite than potent. In fact, faculty members are so impressed that they nominated her for state Administrator of the Year.

“Women administrators are a relatively new phenomenon,” O’Brien said. “The stereotypical administrator is a male and often a former coach, so women have had to fight to enter the higher echelons of administration and then fight even more for respect once they arrived.”

Respect is not a commodity in short supply when it comes to O’Brien.

“I’ve taught here for 25 years and have seen six or seven principals here in that time, and Mrs. O’Brien is as good as any of them and better than most,” science teacher Edwin Holz said. “She comes from the classroom and is sensitive to the needs of classroom teachers. She’s tough, but she’s fair. That’s what has impressed me the most about her.”

Even students say O’Brien is a cut above.

“She’s open and honest, and she treats us like equals,” Student council president Liz Collier said. “She doesn’t patronize us, and she’s made the Council a partner in some decisions affecting students. She’s great.”

The purpose of description is not merely to decorate but to help the reader understand why the visual details are important. Specific details allow the readers to see not only what you’ve seen but also to appreciate why the subject is interesting and important.

**DESCRIPTION OF NEWS**

Nor is description confined to features and other non-timely content. The lead of a next-day news article can be as descriptive as the reporter wishes to make it.

As the city editor of a weekly newspaper in California, I was forced to cover school board meetings. I don’t wish this on my worst enemy. School board meetings are deadly tedious unless the subject of sex education comes up. And then everyone turns into jihad warriors.

Fact is, sex isn’t discussed much at school board meetings, at least not during the public session. Budgets are. So are outcome-based education and higher order thinking skills and performance assessment models and all kinds of eduspeak, which explains why most people would rather clean chicken coops than attend a school board meeting.

Still, school boards make decisions that have a direct impact on students. When this happens, you’ll be expected to report them. If your school board is accommodating, it will meet a day or two before deadline so that your stories will be fresh and timely. Don’t bank on it though. To wit: Meetings often end late on Monday nights, forcing parents to choose among their children’s education, Monday night football and a good night’s rest.
Consequently, you are responsible for reporting news about an event that students wouldn’t attend, even if it opened with Eminem. Still, it’s your job to make students want to read about it, to know what happened and why, to understand what the decision means to the average Nick and Nora in the halls.

**IT CAN BE DONE.**

Let’s assume that the school board votes 4-3 to shut down a school. Citing declining enrollment in the district, the board votes to close Kennedy High School and divide its students among the three other schools in the district. It’s not a popular decision.

How do you cover this?

Remember that your job is to answer not only all news questions—who, what, when, where, why and how—but also all reader questions like, “How much?” and “so what?”

Answering all the applicable questions does not ensnare you to the summary lead. In fact, you may even use the inverted pyramid form so long as you begin the story with the most important idea or angle. In developing this idea or angle, you may use a straight news lead, and there’s nothing that says a straight news lead cannot be descriptive.

You will choose the approach based on your determination that one approach more effectively communicates the content of the story. So you’ll use an anecdotal lead because you believe it best tells the story. Or you’ll use a news lead that emphasizes “why” because you believe it best tells the story.

The point is this: you will have options available to you, and you will choose the option that best fits the tone, style, readership expectations and content of the story. You will not use the inverted pyramid merely because “that’s what we’ve always done.”

Let’s return to the matter at hand. The school board has voted to close Kennedy High School. To adequately report this story, you must begin by collecting information: Who voted in favor of the plan? Why? Who voted against? Why? How many students will be affected? Where will they go? When will this go into effect? How much will it cost? How much will it save? What will happen to the faculty, staff and administration at Kennedy? What was the percentage of enrollment decline that prompted the board’s decision?

Finding answers to the questions will mean you’ll have to interview a number of people, perhaps two or three times.

Let’s assume now that you’ve collected this information. Are you through? No. You need now to find an angle that will give a human face to this news event. So you ask yourself, “How does this news event, this school board action affect students? Which students are most affected? How so?”

So now, you’re off to interview students. You could wander up and down the halls, asking the people you bump into, “What do you think about the board’s decision?”

I can predict their answers: It stinks. Let’s go for a more unusual, provocative lead. If the school has been around for any length of time, it’s probable that two or three generations of family members are graduates of the school. That being the case, interview Grandpa, Pa and Junior.

Perhaps you have a young woman who was to be the last of nine children to graduate from the school. What are her thoughts? Perhaps a teacher would have retired next year after having taught her entire career at the school. What are her plans?

Sit down with three or four members of your staff and brainstorm. How many other angles could you find for this story? It’s almost unlimited. Your major restraints will be time and space. You don’t have an infinite amount of time to devote to the article. And the publication does not have an infinite amount of space. So you must pursue the story from what you think will be the most lucrative direction, select and organize your data, determine the key news element to the story and then choose an angle that best presents that news element.

**THE PORTRAITS OF** sophomore Laura Hall’s eight brothers and sisters are scattered around the school. Her oldest brother, Rick, was an all-state basketball player in 1997. His photo hangs in the
boys' gym. Her sisters, Teresa and Rebecca, were both chosen "Most Likely to Succeed" several years ago. Their photos are in the oak trophy case in the senior hall.

Laura had hoped her senior picture might one day join them, collecting dust next to the plaques and trophies that the school has accumulated over the past 40 years. It won't happen. Not because Laura isn't an honor student. She is.

But next year—Laura's senior year—the school won't exist. By a 4-3 vote Tuesday, the school board voted to close the school and divide its students, faculty and administrators among the district's three other high schools.

For Laura and hundreds of others, the decision was devastating.

"Every day I walk these halls, I am conscious that my days here are numbered," she said. "Since my freshman year, I've looked forward to being a senior, going to the football games, homecoming, the prom. I remember watching my sisters and brothers and knowing that one day, my time would come. And now, it's all gone."

School board president Donald Sweatt was among the four members who voted in favor of the plan to close the school. He was joined by Richard Moreland, Kathy Mayeux and Mary Richter. Voting "no" were Doug Abel, Adam Cavazos and Wilma McCormick.

"It has been an unpopular move, but sometimes you have to do what you know is right, whether it's popular or not," said Sweatt, a retired Army officer. "I graduated from Kennedy. I know what these kids are going through, and I feel for them. Believe me, I do. But we could not endanger the entire district to save this high school."

The board cited declining enrollment as the primary reason for its decision. Since 1996, enrollment at the school has dropped 25 percent—from 1300 to just over 950 this year. District officials say they expect another decrease next year.

"The economy here is flat," superintendent Lois Sexton said. "We have no new businesses moving in, and we’re losing population each year. Until the economy picks up, I don't see how we can expect enrollment to stabilize."

Dr. Sexton said the district will save $2.1 million by closing Kennedy. She added that at this point, school officials are more concerned with reassuring Kennedy students that they are committed to as easy a transition as possible.

"Under the best of circumstances, moving to a new school is difficult," counselor Bob Murphy said. "We will be working especially hard to see that this move is as painless as we can make it."

For Laura Hall, that isn't good enough.

"No matter how hard they try, we're still going to be the new kids at school," she said. "We won't hold the offices. We won't edit the yearbook or be homecoming queen. We'll be at school, but we won't be at our school."
its best season in history. The typical story will say something like this:

THE VOLLEYBALL team has compiled a 27-3-2 record, its best in school history. Leading the state’s fourth-ranked team are Tara Fumerton, Sara Kurth and Markisha Drayton.

Head coach Greg Vraspie said, “The team has been playing real well so far, and we think we can go a long way once we get in the playoffs. If we maintain our focus and intensity, we could challenge for the state crown.”

Members of the team include . . .

Unless readers are already volleyball fans, they are not likely to read this story. If they’re interested, they probably go to games or follow the team in some other way. Thus, this story tells them nothing they don’t already know. How can sports provide meaningful and compelling information for both the fan and the non-fan? By concentrating on the psychological or emotional elements of the game: fears, disappointments, frustrations and dreams.

The following lead puts readers in the middle of a quiet locker room seconds before the start of a big game so that they can be a part of the dynamic tension of the moment. The reporter uses interpretation to place the season into a historical context. It’s the winningest season in history. The team won its first victory over its big rival in five years. Success is the result of an intensive off-season regiment.

SHOWCASE

By STEVE DOOLITTLE
City High School, Iowa City, IA

INSIDE THE GIRLS’ locker room, the volleyball team waits. The players are nervous with anticipation. Clustered together, the players display emotions in different ways. Some yell, scream or laugh. Others are quiet, searching for inward motivation. Silently to themselves, they all wonder: will we win the match?

But winning is not the only thing on their minds. They hear the crowd assembling in the gymnasium outside, producing a noise sounding like the slow, steady beat of a drummer. To the players, the fans are a distant rumbling but a reality they will soon face. They know that tonight the bleachers will be filled. Their ability, skill, team unity and emotion will be displayed to all their fans.

And the fans come for all types of reasons. They come because they know a player on the team, because they expect to cheer on the team that represents their school and because they want to have fun. But most of all they come because this year, the Central High School volleyball team is a team that can make things happen. A team that has been opening the eyes of people throughout the state.

A HISTORY LESSON

“We’re number one,” senior Tara Fumerton yelled while running across the court after beating Cedar Rapids Washington in four games 17-15, 10-15, 15-12 and 15-7. Even if, according to Division 4A ranking, they were number five, after the emotional victory, CHS felt as though they were number one.

This year, with a 27-3-2 record, the volleyball team is having its best season in school history. They’ve already set the CHS record for most wins in a season and have a chance to win more at district and state. The impressive season began earlier this year when they beat West High for the first time in four years.

The secret to the team’s success seems to be its stamina.

“We’ve been outlasting most of our opponents,” head volleyball coach Greg Vraspie said. “In the final games of our matches, our opponents have been slowing down and reacting poorly. But we’ve been ready on our feet and jumping to play until the very end.”

For the moment, the volleyball players are basking in the glory of their success. Their satisfaction is well deserved after the intensive
training they have been through over the summer.

“We were determined to improve during the
off-season,” Fumerton said. “So we went to the
weight room three times a week and conditioned
by running stairs at Hawkeye Arena. Our strength
is what makes us better than other teams.”

Vrapsier agrees that the players’ increased
strength has been key to their success.

“They hit the ball so much harder and with so
much more force,” he said. “They never fade at the
end of games.”

THE FUTURE

With the MVC tournament and a match against
Linn-Mar coming up before districts, the volleyball
team just has to work on the tiny details. Although
careless errors are hard to eliminate, CHS wants to
keep them to a minimum.

“The careless errors are the only things that
slow us down,” Vrapsier said.

CHS is being recognized as a contender
to throughout the state.

“We’re in that situation where all the other
teams are gunning for us. We’re a team to beat,
and we’ll continue to be a team to beat,” he added.

Vrapsier said he is optimistic about the team’s
chances at districts.

“Whenever I’m asked, ‘Just how good is your

Here’s another exceptional sports lead. Note how Patrick combines story-telling and
scene development to capture more than the

score. Note also how the interesting and
informative direct quotes build drama.

SHOWCASE

By PATRICK HEALY
Grosse Point South HS, Grosse Pointe, MI

THEY STAGGERED OFF the court after five

minutes of play, sweating and red-faced like

students taking the world’s worst final exam.

“If I live through the second half I’ll be OK,”
wheezed social studies teacher Tom Briske, one of
11 South teachers who took on their Grosse Pointe
North counterparts in the first North/South teachers’

basketball game Tuesday, Feb. 23. The lead
bounced between the sides for the first of two 25-
minute halves, but South’s teachers rebounded late
in the game and won 57-44.

“Winning was a pleasant surprise,” said social
studies teacher James Cooper. “We just wanted not
to make fools out of ourselves.”

South’s team only squeezed in one half-hour
practice before the game while the North teachers
had been practicing for weeks. This made the
victory especially sweet, Cooper said.

Scorekeeper and North science teacher Art
Weinle didn’t know what to think when he walked
into the gym. He saw 49-year-olds taking (and
missing) practice jump shots and their 5-year-old
children crawling all over the team bench.

Compared to high school games, this was chaos.

“How are we going to keep track of personal
fouls? Is someone going to keep an official score?”
he asked two Student Association (SA)
representatives who helped organize the game.

“Somebody’s got to decide these things. Are we
having a regulation game or not.”

The students stared at Weinle like he was
speaking Russian. He shrugged and flipped his
North hat on backwards.

Like most basketball games, this one started
with the national anthem. Only someone forgot to
rewind the tape.

When announcer Mike Kaselitz ’99 pressed
BE LIKE REALLY, TOTALLY INTOLERANT OF ADVERBS

In other words, dump as many adverbs as possible. They’re clumsy crutches for weak or underdeveloped verbs. For example:

- Joe walked slowly down the lane.
- Joe trudged down the lane.
- Rosemarie quickly drank her bottle of Gatorade.
- Rosemarie guzzled her bottle of Gatorade.

Upon hearing the news that the administration had banned low rise pants and tube tops during the school day, freshman Katie Melton wept pitifully.

Upon hearing the news that the administration had banned low rise pants and tube tops during the school day, freshman Katie Melton blubbered like a baby.

“play,” the song began near the end. The crowd laughed as Kaselitz rewound the tape, but the teachers were too impatient. They blared out a version of the “Star Spangled Banner” that could have shattered the gym’s fluorescent lights.

Then they took the court. The game started off friendly enough. It picked up when North teachers in the stands chanted, “Go North! Beat South!” Then it got serious.

“Work it now, work it now! Push it, push it,” science teacher Ranae Ikerd hollered as she waited to jump into the game. “There’s a lot of hacking out there, but I’m worried about just making it up and down the court.”

Going by the numbers, North football coach Frank Sumbera was the meanest. He racked up four personal fouls as he lumbered back and forth across the court.

“We tried to keep it (the game) under control, but it didn’t happen,” referee and SA President John Bershback ’99 said.

During the second half, science teacher Werner Schienke led a cheer with the South fans. Normally a forward, Schienke showed up to the game with crutches and a severed Achilles tendon, an injury that happened during the team’s lone practice. His jersey said it all. Unlucky number 13.

South’s team broke away with a 20 point lead in the second half. But by the buzzer, North’s teachers narrowed it to 13 points.

The victorious teachers slapped high fives and wiped the sweat off their bodies. They shook hands with their opponents and headed out, some to celebrate and some to bed.

North Principal Caryn Wells watched them go. “They played an awesome game,” she said, “but look out for next year. The mighty Norsemen will be ready.”

In the next example, Laura Matthews describes a moment that captures the feelings of a group of young women whose season ended weeks earlier than they had hoped. This lead serves as a smooth and effective transition into the body of the story. It is not a stack of statistics but a discussion by the players of when and where the wheels came off.

SHOWCASE

By LAURA MATTHEWS
Westlake High School, Austin, TX

ALL WAS SILENT except for the sounds of the gravel grinding beneath the bus tires, and the air was suffocatingly heavy with disappointment. Faces started blankly out of the half-opened windows, lost in their own thoughts, as an artificially bright voice cut through the gloom.

“Hey guys, remember that spike in the Georgetown game? We really took ‘em by surprise with that one . . . .”

There was lack of success stories for the varsity volleyball team to recall after its playoff loss to Taylor. But even with a season record of 21-8 and a three-way tie for first place in the South Zone, the
volleyball team members, who expected their season to end weeks later than it did, were less than satisfied.  

“It’s really hard to read about the state playoffs now because I keep thinking we could have been there,” coach Jane Patterson said.  

“It’s real tough to be on top and have people gunning for you. It’s a really mental game at that point,” she added. “The other teams have everything to gain and nothing to lose, and you’re just the opposite. It was like we were the only game of the season for a lot of the other teams.”  

Leander, Georgetown and Taylor psyched themselves up enough to beat Westlake in the last three games of the season, putting Westlake in a three-way tie for first place with Leander and Taylor.  

“After Leander, it was like ‘what happened, what went wrong?’ so we all worked on our mental preparation and all the other things we thought we had done wrong,” Patterson said. “We really got ourselves primed for the Georgetown game, and then we lost that, too.”  

THE CLASSROOM SPEECH  
A much-overlooked source of powerful content is the typical classroom speaker. These people spend their time and effort to talk to high school students because they believe they have something to say. The messages they bring can and should be made into educational experiences for the entire school. This certainly is the case in the story below:

SHOWCASE  
by Lori Lessner  
Eastlake North High School, Eastlake, OH  

Joe Muharsky knows what it’s like to hear the agonizing screams of an American soldier tied to a tree while being skinned alive and to have gasoline and salt water poured all over his raw body.  

Muharsky knows what it’s like to hold a friend and watch him bleed to death in the jungles of Cambodia while President Nixon makes his 1 1/2-hour speech denying allegations that American troops were in Cambodia in 1969.  

As a member of the U.S. Navy Black Berets, Muharsky has been to hell and back. He spent 22 months of his life in combat along the Mekong Delta during the Vietnam War.  

Muharsky, a graduate of North in 1965, is an annual speaker for Mr. Ray Smith’s senior democracy classes as well as for Mr. Bob Beutel’s senior government classes. He returned to North once again on Nov. 12 and 13.  

Muharsky told students simple yet incredible facts about the horrors of the war, which he witnessed first-hand. He also discussed his opinions based upon his knowledge and experience in the Vietnam War.  

“I’m not saying you have to agree with me. They are my opinions, but I want you to leave with questions to make you think. I certainly don’t have all the answers.  

“I think the Vietnam War is the most tragic mistake this country ever made. World War II, Korea, Vietnam—all wars are the most horrible things. If you think they are glamorous, think again,” Muharsky said.  

In patrol boats that lacked armor, Muharsky would go on raids in canals located in Vietnam and Cambodia. He used guerilla warfare in the jungles against the Viet Cong (whom the Americans referred to as “Charlie”) as well as against the second enemy, the North Vietnamese Army.  

“You have one-tenth of a second to feel sorry for the buddy of yours who was blown away with an M-16. The .223 caliber bullet travels 4,000 feet per second to kill a human being. You know you are next unless you keep fighting. I became something over there that really bothers me,” Muharsky said.  

Muharsky contrasted World War II with the Vietnam War. In ‘Nam, there was no such thing as a front line. Instead, people fought as individuals. Success was determined by which side had the lowest body count after a battle.  

Muharsky recited facts that are etched in his
memory forever. He said that out of 3 million Americans who served in Vietnam, 175,000 became disabled. Thirty percent of the men in his platoon died by friendly fire. They never even saw the enemy. Fifty-five thousand veterans committed suicide upon their return home because the American public badly rejected them. There were also few jobs available for them because of their limited education.

“Why did so many veterans kill themselves?” Muharsky said. “Well, psychiatrists believe that who you are going to be and your development occurs between the ages of 18-25. The boys coming home fell into that category and only knew how to kill. The war determined that. They had nowhere to turn.”

Muharsky also stated that he thinks there are Prisoners of War (POWs) still in ‘Nam.

“I believe there is good evidence towards the allegation that many captured servicemen were left behind in Southeast Asia. I would not go back to rescue them unless I knew for sure they were alive and in a specific location we could find by helicopter.”

“I think Muharsky is very dedicated to the veterans. I see him as a strong-willed person,” Smith said. “He has an interesting story to tell.”

Muharsky can tell of the flashbacks he experiences daily. The smell of cat food makes him smell the rotten flesh in a jungle once again.

Muharsky can tell why all the American troops carried not one but two dog tags around their necks for identification.

“If you are about to be blown up, you put one tag under your tongue. This way, because rigor mortis sets in, you can still be identified and sent home for a proper burial,” said Muharsky.

Vietnam veteran Muharsky remembers what those 22 months on the Mekong Delta felt like every single day that passes.

Muharsky knows. He was there.

This story is so much better than, “Joe Muharsky spoke to Mr. Ray Smith’s senior Democracy classes about his experiences in Vietnam. Muharsky said the war was ‘the most tragic mistake this country ever made.’ ”

What makes this such a special story is the empathy the writer feels for the speaker and the extremes to which she goes to capture the power of his message without sensationalizing or sermonizing. Instead, she provides an unflinching and unglamorous look at what it must have been like in the midst of a firefight and what it has meant to the men who were there.

**RECREATE THE SCENE**

Perhaps you’re saying: “We don’t have time to attend all of these activities that you want us to write about. We are high school students, and we’re expected to attend class and satisfy all the hoop-jumping which that entails. A few of us also participate in other programs, and band directors aren’t always so understanding when we tell them we need to skip rehearsals to watch the homeless stand in the rain.

“So how are we going to describe events that we haven’t witnessed?”

First, failure to witness an event is often an error of staff management and planning. Know what’s happening and when, and be there. Or assign someone else to cover the story.

Second, open your eyes. Learn to see, hear, taste and feel the world around you. Be aware of your environment so that you can recreate it when the situation demands.

And in those times when you can’t witness an event first hand, then interview the people who were there to a degree that you can re-create the moment anyway. Professional reporters do this when it’s the only alternative. It’s never the best option, but sometimes, it’s the only option. For example, a story in a Miami newspaper dealt with police raids on alleged crack houses. The reporter described how police kicked in the door, chased a suspect into a bedroom, threw him onto a bed, stuck a gun in his ear and said, “You blink, and your brains will be splattered all over this mattress.”

The reporter wasn’t sitting on the officer’s
shoulder during all of this. In fact, he wasn’t there at all. But he interviewed the officers in such depth that he was able to re-create the scene. He had them describe the apartment. Were there dirty dishes in the sink? Were the beds made up? Were the ashtrays bulging with cigarette butts? He had police officers tell him what the apartment smelled like. He asked them if they could remember what was playing on the radio when they kicked the door in.

This technique is difficult and time-consuming, but the payoff is substantial. For example, the lead of the next story is one of the most powerful I’ve ever read in a student publication. The image of the young mother, who is rocking her baby and crying, is unforgettable.

SHOWCASE

By CLARE BUNDY
Duncanville High School, Duncanville, TX

A GROUP OF candystripers stand around the nursery, holding incubator babies. It’s “loving time.” Another young girl steps in with her mother and picks up a baby, too. She is not in a uniform, but in a hospital gown, for the baby she holds is her own—and it’s her “loving time.”

It’s also time to say goodbye.

“I sat in a rocker and held him and rocked him, and I cried and cried and cried,” Amber, a senior, said. “I wanted that moment to last forever so I could always hold him and always be there for him.

“But I knew I couldn’t. That’s what hurt.”

Amber was 16 years old when she gave up her child for adoption. The factors: “a meaningful relationship turned sour, failure of contraception, and little-to-no parental support,” she said. “I was also only a sophomore in high school, and I had a desire—a need, really—for higher education.”

Whatever the reasons or reasoning involved, they didn’t lessen the hurt of losing her child. She remembers the day: June 19, 1985, and she vividly recalls the rest of the memory.

“When the time came to let him go, to set him down in the crib, I was still crying and I walked away,” Amber said.

“But as soon as I reached the door, he started to cry. And I knew that if I turned back to get him, I’d never be able to leave the room.

“So I just walked out.”

This traumatic situation was also an ironic one for Amber, who at 8 years of age decided she wasn’t going to have any children.

“Coming from a big family, I knew how much time and energy it took to raise children,” she said, “and I thought as an adult I’d be too selfish to devote all of that time and energy to one person.”

Yet when she found out about her pregnancy, she said, she changed her mind. She didn’t want to give up her child.

“But my parents forced the decision of adoption on me,” Amber said. “I didn’t have any choice in the matter. No alternatives were given.”

The adoption was closed through Catholic charities, and though she said she felt “99.7 percent good” about her child’s new parents, she reserved the other 3 percent for herself.

“I think I would have made a good mother,” Amber said. “I have a good sense of judgment and three little sisters as experience.

“I know what it takes to make a family,” she said, “but I also know it wouldn’t have been complete without a father. That helped with their decision.”

For it was all “their” decision in the end. Amber said that by the time her son was born, she “just wanted to hold him, just feel his presence,” she said. “I wanted to feel his tiny body resting on my chest.”

And she did get to hold him—for five days Amber mothered her child before leaving the hospital. The time she had with him was helpful as well as painful.

“It helped in that the experience was good. I
felt good about it,” Amber said. “Everything from breast feeding to changing diapers was a new, yet old, experience.

“It hurt because I knew that what I was holding and experiencing would never be mine.”

When her son turns 21, however, he will be free to contact his mother. But Amber said she is not sure if she’ll ever be emotionally prepared for their meeting.

“But I would still die to see him,” she said. And what would she say?

“I’d tell him that I love him and always will, no matter who or what he becomes,” Amber said. “And I’ll tell him the truth about what happened between his father and me. And what’s happened to me because of it. There’s no reason to lie to your children.”

Yes, there is still a “strong maternal bond,” and Amber said there always will be. This experience has left its mark on her now more than ever.

“During the pregnancy, I was loving the child, but I was apathetic to the situation,” she said. “Now I either speak cynically about it, or I cry. I never used to cry.”

This was evident as she stated the one word that described the whole ordeal:

“Pain,” she said, tears streaming down her cheeks and falling onto her pale blue sweater.

“True pain.”

SHOWCASE

By PATRICK HEALY
Grosse Point South High School,
Grosse Point, MI

HERE ARE ONLY A FEW wisps of hair on the girl’s soft head but they are the color of autumn leaves, just like her mother’s. Her hands are still too weak and too tiny to grasp her daddy’s finger, and she can only stay awake for a half-hour at a time. Her parents don’t mind, though.

Psychology teacher DeEtte Horan and her husband Patrick gently bathe their daughter Shannon Lydia, change her diapers and sing to her while she’s awake. And when the baby girl yawns and her crisp blue eyes shut, they hold her 3-pound body and gaze at her wrinkled and red face.

“She’s perfect, I think she’s perfect,” Horan said, with more pride than a smile can hold.

On Jan. 4, Horan gave birth through cesarean section to a 2-pound, 6-ounce baby girl after Horan’s blood pressure skyrocketed to deadly levels.

Shannon wasn’t due until March 20 and arrived at 29 weeks, making her 11 weeks early. At that age about 20 percent of newborns never make it out of the hospital, said Dr. Ali Rabbani, the director of St. John Hospital’s Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

Their doctors call the babies preemies, and some weigh as little as 1-pound, 3-ounces when they are born. The babies smaller than that, not even a miracle can save, Rabbani said. The ones who do survive initially rely on machines to eat, breathe, fight off infection and control their body temperatures.

“You have to be on your toes because the babies crash and everything falls apart,” Rabbani said, and smacked his hands for emphasis. “Just like that. Every minute, you never know.”

Horan’s family knew this and prayed for Shannon, asking God to save her tiny life.

Her walnut-sized heart kept beating during the first critical weeks. Her parents nicknamed the feisty lightweight “Scrapper” and now joke that Shannon’s red hair gave her fiery strength.

Now, after more than a month of tests and doctor’s the parent’s hold their daughter up like a tiny trophy for pictures and grin into the camera.

The smiles didn’t come so easy when Horan checked into the hospital on Dec. 30.

Horan’s blood pressure had always been high and she knew she risked developing pre-eclampsia when she became pregnant. For
Remember: you are the eyes of the reader; the reader is not on the scene, you are. The reader can’t see what you see. Can’t observe your interview subjects and can’t ask them questions. You have to anticipate what the reader wants to know—and needs to know.”

—Thomas Fensch
The Hardest Parts

women with this condition, if something goes wrong during labor or if the mother’s blood pressure shoots up too quickly, the placenta can sever, causing the baby to lose its oxygen supply and die. The mothers risk kidney failure, seizure or stroke.

But Horan said she monitored her blood pressure during the first six months of her pregnancy and visited her doctor regularly. She left South for Winter Break on Dec. 22, not knowing that she wouldn’t be back for months. Five days after Christmas, Horan’s blood pressure began climbing. The doctors started worrying and admitted her to the hospital and gave her drugs to lower her blood pressure.


As Horan’s blood pressure jumped past 200/100, her doctors decided to deliver the baby through emergency C-section. Shannon wasn’t due for 11 weeks but the doctors knew delivering was the only way to save the baby and the mother.

Her voice drops off to a murmur when she thinks about it. “Scary and surprising,” she said. “It was just scary and surprising.”

Horan stayed awake for the operation. As the doctors cut her stomach open to deliver the baby she slipped her hand into Patrick’s. She barely remembers anything about the operation, not even saying “I love you” to Patrick, only a feeling of constant tugging below her navel.

Shannon cried when the doctors pulled her out, and so did her parents. Her tiny lungs only let out a squeak, but Horan thanked God for the sound. It meant the baby was breathing, that she had a chance.

The next day felt like a constant battle to wake up from a deep sleep. The painkillers fogged Horan’s mind until she was too groggy and weak to leave her bed. Patrick visited Shannon in NICU that day and snapped a few proud Polaroids. Horan got her first good look of her baby from the eye of an instant camera.

“She has everything: two eyes, a nose, hands, feet, all her fingers and all her toes,” Horan said. “Everything is just so small.”

She also has a feeding tube in her nose and tiny electrodes stuck to her chest. As she sleeps, glowing green and white lines trace the little girl’s heart and breathing rates across a monitor above her incubator. The doctors and nurses chart her progress as the baby slowly gains weight and strength.

Two days after Shannon was born Horan climbed into a wheelchair and took the elevator to the hospital’s fifth floor NICU where Shannon and 34 other babies lie in their plastic wombs.

From a distance it looks like they are nothing but wires and computers, as nurses in fruit salad-colored scrubs track the babies’ progress on machines and monitors that hiss and beep throughout the day. Teddy bears and Beanie Babies sit in the corner of the incubators and watch over the babies when their parents are at work or asleep.

There is a glimmer of hope beneath the muffled yellow lights in the NICU as nervous parents learn how to bathe and hold their tiny children. Most hesitate at first, treating their babies as if a breath could topple them like a house of cards. As Horan stretched out her arms to hold Shannon for the first time, she said she felt that same twinge.

“I was nervous at first, worried that I’d hurt her,” Horan said. “But you get used to them being so small.”

Horan stayed in the hospital for the next week. She does not plan to return to South until next fall and she spends the bulk of her afternoons and evenings at the hospital. Horan and Patrick said they hope to bring Shannon home by March 20, her original due date.

The new parents wait for the day when they can give Shannon a bottle and tuck her into her crib for the night. But the pink-walled nursery is still empty. For now, they simply drape a pink patchwork quilt over the girl’s hospital incubator, say “I love you” and drive back home.
SHOWCASE

By STEPHANE MCCOLLUM
Central High School, San Angelo, TX

AS THE TEACHER wrote notes on the blackboard for the class to copy, a student readjusted the bundle she was cradling in her arms.

"She's burping," explained Michele Acevedo, junior and proud mother of April Marie, a bouncing 5-pound flour baby. Darlene Hoggett, home and family living teacher, continued to scribble notes on the board.

Hoggett reminded the class that their baby books were due the following Monday.

"If you've been carrying 'it' all week," she said, "go ahead and give 'it' a name."

"What if you don't know how to spell the name you gave the kid?" asked an unidentified "father."

The home and family living teachers, including Hoggett and Gay Young, designed the unit on parenting to answer questions students may or may not have about parenting, according to Mrs. Young. She stressed that she wanted the students to realize the responsibilities involved in parenthood.

For one week, the students carried sons or daughters made out of 5-pound sacks of flour and stuffed pantyhose. The flour babies replaced the traditional hard-boiled egg last year after Young heard about the flour babies from a friend. Mrs. Young said that the idea of using eggs had become outdated after seven years. She decided that the flour babies are more life-sized and therefore got the point across to her students. She added that cases of "egg-napping" had caused some students' failing grades.

"I love it when they make comments like, 'This isn't any fun,' " Young said, adding that she did not object to students having fun at school, but "I have a very serious motive behind it."

As part of her effort to stress the responsibility of childhood, her home and family living classes take up units "in sequence."

Teenage pregnancy is taught first, followed by marriage and parenting.

Young stressed that the unit was not all ruffles and pink lace— it includes serious topics including abortion, child abuse and how to handle incest. One speaker planned for the classes is a mother of a handicapped child who talks about her experiences.

Along with getting a preview of parenthood, Young said that the students seemed to enjoy the project. She said that a group of students who were eating lunch off-campus received strange looks from curious adults. Junior Tracy Ballard even received a warning from a Department of Human Resources worker not to mistreat her child.

Not to worry—the doting mother had made a trip to Angelo Community Hospital, along with junior Gigi Kassay, to seek bottles and birth certificates for her child.

The class project also created financial opportunities for senior Sheila Hopkins, who began work on her flour baby at the beginning of the semester. Hopkins sold disposable Cabbage Patch diapers to her classmates at 25 cents each. Young reported that most of the "children" in her fifth period class are bedecked in the latest in babywear.

Hoggett's class geared up for the "prettiest baby" contest. The proud parents introduced their children. The babies' attire ranged from footy-pajamas to sunshades and drew many snickers from the class, despite Hoggett's warnings to the contrary. "Don't ever tell a mother, 'Your baby looks just like a little monkey,'" the teacher admonished.

"He's gonna be a basketball player cause he's got long legs," junior Vanalyn Ocker boasted. Such displays of pride were evident among the "fathers" when they dressed their sons in clothing they wore as infants.

The votes were in. The class voted "Spanky," the son of junior Gene Hernandez, as winner. The "father" admitted feeling "good" about his son's accomplishment. Hernandez added that his child was very quiet, and "he didn't wet his pants either."

DON'T WADDLE INTO THE STORY

Sibling rivalry is as old as time itself. Who sits in the front seat of the car? Who gets the last piece of pie? Who gets the new clothes? Who has to help with the dishes?

This may explain why Bill beat up his younger brother, Don. Of course, it may not as well. At any rate, he did.

Times have changed since the horse-and-buggy days. Today, if people need to go someplace, they have a variety of options: airplanes, buses, trains and, of course, cars.

Many students here have cars. "I have a Honda Civic," senior Ashley Brewster said. "I love it."

But finding a place to park the car is a problem, especially since administrators decided to ban on-campus student parking.