

Tips for Parents and Contestants of Spelling Bees

How to Prepare and Win!

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P-H-E-N-O-M-E-N-O-N

Pronunciation: fī-nŏm'ə- nŏn'

Definition: An unusual, significant, or unaccountable fact or occurrence; a marvel.

Origin: Late Latin phaenomenon, from Greek phaenomenon

Sentence: The interest in spelling bees has grown so much it is a phenomenon!

Congratulations on being a part of the spelling phenomenon! Spelling competitions have been around for almost 150 years. However, the last few years have seen an increase in the attention given to spelling contests, and the 2006 live television coverage of the bee was shown during primetime for the first time ever!

Spelling is a complicated matter for anyone trying to learn the English language. While our everyday vocabulary continues to grow, English word origins include almost every language in existence -- and some are no longer regularly spoken! Many identical sounds are spelled differently in different words and 84 of the 90 basic English spelling patterns have exceptions. It's no wonder that spelling can be a competitive event!

The educational value of spelling is getting an enormous lift from media buzz and the motion picture industry. Spelling is cool! That is why the NJSFWC Bee Competition Series has been using the theme, "Spelling Rocks!" We are committed to making spelling bees all over the Garden State a valuable component of elementary education that is fun, rewarding, competitive and most of all—a compelling experience that will keep students preparing for more. The 4th and 5th grade contestants who practice for our bees do so with purpose and with a single goal—to do their absolute best towards winning the championship!

The Scripps Bee is the country's largest and longest running spelling bee -- its purpose is to "help students improve spelling, increase vocabularies, learn concepts and develop correct English usage that will help them all of their lives."

Although the NJSFWC Spelling Bee Series is not associated with the Scripps National Spelling Bee, we can provide you with information on how to get involved with this larger, much more competitive series. The Scripps runs its bees through local newspaper sponsors. As a speller wins, he or she moves on to the next larger contest, usually a district or county bee, and finally to a regional bee, which decides the contestants for the national bee in Washington.

The regional bees are highly competitive in that only one winner from each of the regional bees is allowed to continue to the national Bee. Our NJSFWC series allows the top three winners to advance from club to district to state level competitions. Our environment is a great starting point for any aspiring national champion!

To help prepare for a bee, there are a number of techniques beyond reviewing words that should be considered. Spelling bees may not appear to be complex, but there is a strategy that champion bee-ers use. Start by watching a bee any way you can.

A great way to become comfortable with the process is to attend a spelling bee or watch a movie about them. *Akeelah and the Bee* or the documentary *Spellbound*, which follows several spellers participating in the National Bee, is very informative as well as entertaining.

These movies can be purchased on-demand or rented. *Akeelah and the Bee*, is about an “underdog” competing to win the national contest. It’s a movie released in April of 2006, and is also bringing wider attention to the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

As you watch a bee, you’ll notice a few things that spellers do to increase their chance of spelling a word correctly. For example, during a bee, you’ll want to get as much information about the word as you can.

Contestants can ask for the word to be repeated to be sure it was pronounced correctly, and contestants should ask for the definition and for the word to be used in a sentence. This will give the speller time to focus on the spelling of the word to be certain he or she is thinking of the right word.

The spelling bee website (www.spellingbee.com) offers great resources for getting prepared.

Winning spelling bees does take hard work and determination. While winning the national championship may or may not be something you aspire to, even just participating in a local bee can reward a student with an enriched vocabulary, a sense of accomplishment, and a healthy appreciation of competition and goal-setting.

Use the website of the Scripps National Spelling Bee or any current spelling bee movie or live event as a means to get interested, and get started in the world of spelling bees. Whether you are an adult supporter or the contestant, enjoy the experience and good luck!

Spelling Rocks!