

The Spelling Bee  
April 24th

Apparently, “I before E” is a rule in English spelling. But it can’t be that great of a rule if people always break it!

This was one of many discrepancies I noticed while studying the massive list of spelling words on my desk. The list was eight pages long, and I had four more days to master it before the school Spelling Bee.

My English teacher, Mr. Comma, gave everyone in my class the same list on Monday and told us we would have the contest, or spelling bee, that Friday. The first session took place in our classroom during the morning. If you placed in the top ten, you advanced to the second session in the auditorium that same afternoon and the whole middle school watched.

The three judges were the school librarian, Mr. Comma, and the vice principal. (I’m not sure why we needed more than one, but it did make the whole thing feel much more official!) There would only be three winners, one from each grade, and they would each receive a \$15 coupon for the snack bar at the local pool. And ‘the joy of winning’ (Mr. Comma’s words, not mine).

There are fifty students in my grade, and most are pretty smart. I knew I had to study to make it in the top ten. And, of course, I knew I would have to REALLY study if I wanted to win! So, I sat at my desk and read through the list over and over all week.

Side note: Why was I so eager to win? Well, because when Grant was in seventh grade, he came in third...and, I know we’re different, but I couldn’t help but feel like I could do it, too. (Not to mention, you can get a lot of ice cream for \$15.)

On Wednesday night, two days before the contest, I went to my desk to study after dinner. It wasn’t long before Grant, Ty, and Ruby all appeared in my room.

Grant said, “We’re all playing cards downstairs.”

“Yeah, and we NEVER see you anymore!” Ty piped up. “You always study!”

“Pacificaly this week!” Ruby added with emphasis.

“Pacificaly?” Grant asked Ruby. “Don’t you mean: specifically?”

“That’s what I said,” Ruby shrugged.

Ty grabbed my hand, pulled me away from my desk, and led me downstairs.

“Why don’t you guys just play with Mom and Dad?” I protested as he tugged.

“We need even numbers for this game!” Ty said, not letting go of my wrist.

“SPE-CIF-IC-ALLY!” Grant said slowly as we all marched down the stairs. “See Ruby, that’s different from ‘Pa-cif-ic-ally.’”

“No, it’s not!” Ruby said, just to bother Grant.

Grant put his hands on his head, “Oh my gosh, listen to yourself, Rubs! The ‘*Pacific*’ is an ocean. ‘*Specific*’ means clearly defined. *Not the same!*”

My parents were waiting for us at the table. My dad said he was proud of me for working so hard but was glad I was taking a study break. He dealt out the cards, and I partnered with my mom. She's definitely the best at cards, so I thought "Hey, this could be a very winning week for me!"

As we were playing, Ruby began singing a song she made up called 'Pacific is the same as specific,' and it drove Grant absolutely crazy! He began chanting: "S-P-E-C-I-F-I-C-A-L-L-Y! Ruby is the worst. I want to punch her in the eye!" They kept at it until the game finished.

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By Friday morning, I felt ready. I had gone over the list again and again and was pretty sure I had it memorized. At 10 a.m., we rearranged the classroom, lined up, and began the contest. The room was packed with fifty of us (between the two classes in my grade). And although it was quiet, you could feel the nervous energy. My palms began to sweat.

I was twenty-ninth in line, and on my turn, my English teacher said the word 'edition.' I remembered that one from page three: "E-D-I-T-I-O-N. Edition." I recited, and it was correct. After the first round, we were already down to thirty-five students.

We began the second round, and the words were getting more challenging.

Mine was 'Vehicle,' and again, I got it right. By the third round, there were only twenty of us left. On my turn, I got 'Improve,' and for just a moment, I questioned if it had one 'O' or two.

Think, think, think; it was one.

Then after correctly spelling 'Extreme' and 'Coverage' in rounds four and five, I made it into the afternoon session!

The ten of us who made it through the first session were allowed to call our parents during lunch and invite them to the afternoon session. Both my mom and dad were working, but they wished me luck!

If I thought the classroom was packed, the auditorium was even worse! There were over two hundred people in the audience, including students, teachers, and parents. I watched as the sixth graders went first.

After about fifteen minutes, a very short boy wearing glasses won with the word 'Ambition.' There was thunderous applause, and he threw his hands in the air in tight little fists, closed his eyes, and smiled victoriously, making everyone cheer louder.

My class was up next.

I sat in the fifth of ten chairs lining the stage. On the right side, the three judges sat at a table with the list of words. A single microphone stood in the center of the stage, and behind it were hundreds of eyes staring at us. I gulped nervously.

The four students ahead of me correctly spelled 'Transmit,' 'Headline,' 'Exclusive,' and 'Climate.' Then it was my turn, and my mouth began to feel dry. I walked up to the microphone, stared at the massive crowd of faces, and then over at the judges.

'Verify,' they said; I took a deep breath, thought about it, and spelled out "V-E-R-I-F-Y. Verify." Thankfully, the vice principal said, "Correct."

It took two rounds to get someone out and three more to get us down to five. After that, no one missed any words.

"Well..." Mr. Comma said, scratching his beard. "For the first time ever, we've run out of words from the list. Please wait patiently while Ms. Dewey retrieves a new list from the library." The audience whispered, and I looked at the other contestants wide-eyed.

When the librarian returned, she held several pages of paper in the air. She addressed the audience, "Ladies and gentlemen, for the first time in our history: a second list!"

Everyone cheered, and I became very nervous about the new mystery words. I was now third in line. This round was brutal: the first student misspelled 'commentary,' Amy got 'compassion' wrong (no surprises there), and the fifth missed 'edible.'

Just like that, we were down to two. Me versus Roger Hickens.

It was my turn first. I stood up from my chair, approached the center of the stage, and saw Simone and Shelby waving excitedly in the crowd.

I took another deep breath and the Vice Principal leaned into the microphone and said "Celery."

Oh geez! My hand trembled as I grabbed the microphone, wondering, "*How the heck do you spell celery? I don't even like celery!*" So many people were staring at me, so I decided to just go for it.

"C-E-L-E-R-I-E. Celery?" I guessed.

Thump, thump, thump, my heart pounded in my chest. The entire auditorium was silent.

"I'm sorry, but that's incorrect," our Vice Principal said. As my heart dropped, I let out a sigh.

So that's not how you spell celery. I felt my feet walking back to my seat, and I hung my head heavily. Oh the irony, spelling celery to win ice cream...

Now everyone's eyes shot to Roger. My English teacher clarified that if he spelled his word right, he would win the history-making-seventh-grade spelling bee. I watched intently.

Once Roger was at the microphone, our librarian's voice rang out: "Specifically."

I had to keep from laughing as I remembered Grant's angry chanting with Ruby! I sang in my head: "S-P-E-C-I-F-I-C-A-L-L-Y! Ruby is the worst. I want to punch her in the eye!" Too bad I didn't get *that* word!

Roger announced each letter: "S-P-E-C-I-F-I-C-A-L-L-Y. Specifically." The judges confirmed it was correct, and everyone clapped and cheered. Roger smiled widely. And, from my seat, I clapped for him, too.

In all the commotion and nervousness, it hadn't really dawned on me how well I'd done. Second place! Out of fifty! Not bad! (Better than Grant actually!) And celery is a weird word!

I smiled widely, too, as I walked off stage and the English teacher handed me a silver medal.

Your Friend,  
Joanie