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Cast of Characters

SUNNY SANDSTONE, the cheerleader

MR. SANDSTONE, her father

GREG SANDSTONE, her brother

DAVID LICHTENSTEINBERGER, the overconfident genius

MRS. LICHTENSTEINBERGER, his mom

MR. LICHTENSTEINBERGER, his dad

IMAGINE PEARSON, the drama queen

STAR PEARSON, her mom

DEBRA, Star's assistant

JEFF MATTHEWS, the jock

GRANDPA MATTHEWS, his grandfather

COACH BRICK, his coach

DESIREE WORTHINGTON, the spoiled rich kid

MRS. WORTHINGTON, her mom

ELOISE, her maid

MR. LANFORD, the announcer

Acknowledgments

Show and Spell was commissioned by The New Players Company of Ridgewood, New Jersey. It received its premiere performance on July 20, 2005.

SHOW AND SPELL

by Julia Brownell

Prologue

(Lights up on an empty stage. SUNNY, DAVID, IMAGINE, JEFF, and DESIREE stand in a row, facing the audience. MR. LANFORD stands off to the side.)

MR. LANFORD. And the winner of the thirty-seventh annual Waytown County Spelling Bee is...

(Spotlight on SUNNY.)

SUNNY. S-U-N-N-Y S-A-N-D-S-T-O-N-E. Sunny Standstone. I'm a cheerleader from South Waytown. I love cheerleading, and spelling, and cheerleading and spelling at the same time! I'd like to thank my dad, and my brother, Greg, for being the best family a girl could have!

(MR. SANDSTONE and GREG come onstage from the audience and wave. Lights down on SUNNY. Lights up on DAVID.)

DAVID. D-A-V-I-D L-I-C-H-T-E-N-S-T-E-I-N-B-E-R-G-E-R. David Lichtensteinberger. I'm from East Waytown, and my hobbies include studying, learning, and reading books. In my spare time, I like to do science experiments and solve equations. I really did all the work myself, but I'd like to thank my parents for driving me here since I don't have my driver's license yet.

(MR. L and MRS. L join DAVID onstage from the audience and wave. Lights down on DAVID. Lights up on IMAGINE.)

IMAGINE. I-M-A-G-I-N-E P-E-A-R-S-O-N. Imagine Pearson. I'm an actress from West Waytown. I'm the daughter of the famous actress Star Pearson and I have played several parts in her movies, most recently as Girl #5 in her upcoming summer film. I'd like to thank my mom, Star, and her assistant, Debra.

(STAR and DEBRA join IMAGINE onstage from the audience. Lights down on STAR. Lights up on JEFF.)

JEFF. J-E-F-F M-A-T-T-H-E-W-S. Jeff Matthews. I'm a baseball and soccer and basketball and football and lacrosse and tennis and hockey and pickleball champion from Central Waytown. I'd like to

thank my dad and my coach, Coach Brick, for teaching me to always give 150 percent.

(MR. MATTHEWS and COACH BRICK join JEFF onstage from the audience. Lights down on JEFF. Lights up on DESIREE.)

DESIREE. D-E-S-I-R-E-E-W-O-R-T-H-I-N-G-T-O-N. Desiree Worthington. I'm from North Waytown and my hobbies include shopping, going on cruises, and watching movies in my own private home theater. I'd like to thank my mom for giving me lots of money and my maid for helping my study.

(MRS. WORTHINGTON and ELOISE join DESIREE onstage from the audience and wave. Lights down on DESIREE. Lights back on MR. LANFORD.)

MR. LANFORD. Once more, congratulations to our 2005 champion speller! Thank you, and see you next year!

Scene One.

(Two bedrooms, one on each side of the stage. SUNNY studies in one room; DAVID in the other. Sunny's room is full of pom-poms and cheerleading trophies; David's is crowded with books. Lights up on Sunny's room.)

SUNNY. *(With pom-poms:)* Azalea. Hmm... Give me an A, give me a Z, give me an A, give me an L-E-A! What does that spell? Azalea! Fustanella. Give me an F, give me a U, give me an S-T-A! Give me an N-E-L-L-A! What does that spell? Fustanella! Yeah!!

GREG. *(Offstage:)* Be quiet, Sunny! I'm trying to listen to music!

SUNNY. Oops! Sorry, Greg! *(Whispering:)* Aberrant. Give me an A, give me a B, give me an E! Give me an R-R-A-N-T! What does that spell? Abberant! Woo!

GREG. *(Offstage:)* Sunny, shut up! Stop cheering your words!

SUNNY. How am I supposed to spell if I can't cheer?

GREG. The way normal people do!

SUNNY. I can't remember words if I can't cheer them. Cessation. Give me a C, give me an E, give me an S—

(GREG enters and grabs her pom-poms.)

GREG. Give me an S-H-U-T-U-P! What does that spell? Shut UP!!!
Yay!

SUNNY. Greg! Give me back my pom-poms!

GREG. Not until you promise to stop cheering words!

SUNNY. How am I supposed to *practice*? Give me BACK my pom-poms!

(SUNNY and GREG struggle over the pom-poms. MR. SANDSTONE enters.)

MR. SANDSTONE. What's going on here? Stop it! Sunny! Greg!

SUNNY. He won't give me back my pom-poms!

GREG. She won't stop cheering!

MR. SANDSTONE. Okay. Greg, give Sunny back her pom-poms.

(GREG does.)

MR. SANDSTONE. Sunny, I don't know what to do with you. When I tried sending you outside to practice, the neighbors complained. When I sent you to practice at school, the custodians complained. Is there any way you cheer more quietly?

SUNNY. But Dad! I want to do my absolutely positively most very best that I can do!

MR. SANDSTONE. Okay. The bee's in two days. Greg, is there anyway you could go spend the night at a friend's house tonight?

GREG. I'm getting kicked out of my own house so that she can do stupid spelling cheers? That's ridiculous. I'm the older one!

SUNNY. And I'm the happier one!

GREG. So?

MR. SANDSTONE. All right, I can see that's not going to work. Greg, why don't we go out for pizza and to the movies while Sunny studies?

GREG. Now I'm getting *bribed* to leave my own house while my sister studies?

MR. SANDSTONE. It's a good bribe, Greg. Take it.

GREG. I just want to listen to music in my room!

SUNNY. Give me an L-E-D! Give me a Z-E-P-P-E-L-I-N! What does that spell—

GREG. Stop it! See how annoying this is? That's a band, it's not even a spelling word! She's doing it on purpose to bother me!

MR. SANDSTONE. She's just practicing.

SUNNY. For your information, zeppelin also means—

GREG. Dad, tell her to stop spelling my interests.

MR. SANDSTONE. Sunny, please stop spelling your brother's interests.

SUNNY. But Dad, I have to spell everything if I want to win!

MR. SANDSTONE. Greg, just let her spell for two more days. She'll thank you for it. I'll thank you for it.

SUNNY. Give me a G-R-A-T-I-T-U-D-E! What does that spell?

GREG. (*Exiting:*) Arghhh!

SUNNY. Thanks, dad!

MR. SANDSTONE. You're welcome, honey. I know you're working very hard. Please promise me you won't take this *too* seriously, though. I don't want you just to spell non-stop for the next two days. Promise?

SUNNY. I promise!

MR. SANDSTONE. That's my girl. Now, what do you want for dinner?

SUNNY. Hmm... Give me an S, give me a P, give me an-

MR. SANDSTONE. (*Exiting:*) Okay, okay. I get it. I'll make some pasta.

(Lights down on Sunny's room as she continues cheering. Lights up on David's room.)

DAVID. *(Reading the dictionary and muttering to himself:)* Cephalopod, Cepheid, ceraceous. C-E-P-H—

(MRS. L enters with a plate of cookies.)

MRS. L. David?

DAVID. Can't you see that I'm previously occupied, mother?

MRS. L. I was just wondering if you'd like some cookies. You didn't eat breakfast, and you didn't come down for lunch—

DAVID. I'm not hungry. Fulfilling my hunger for knowledge is what satiates me.

MRS. L. I don't want to hear that excuse again, David, you've been saying that since you were two. At least have a cookie.

DAVID. Do they have fish in them?

MRS. L. They're cookies. Why in the world would they have fish in them?

DAVID. Fish is brain food, mother. Omega-three acids. I told you that I refuse to eat anything without omega-three acids until Saturday.

MRS. L. David, I refuse to put fish in cookies. You know how your father reacted after I tried salmon in a pie.

(MR. L enters.)

MR. L. How's the studying going, David?

(Reaches for a cookie.)

Yum, cookies.

(Pauses; sniffs the cookie.)

Do these have fish in them?

DAVID. Unfortunately, no.

MR. L. (*Eating the cookie:*) Mmm, delicious. Even without the fish.

MRS. L. Thank you. I'm glad someone likes them.

MR. L. So how's the spelling going?

DAVID. I'm making progress.

MR. L. Why don't you take a break? It's a beautiful day out! We could throw a ball around.

DAVID. No, thank you.

MRS. L. Would you at least go for a walk with us? I worry about you. You haven't been outside in two days—

DAVID. A vitamin A deficiency will not affect my spelling.

MR. L. Well, do you want some help with the studying? We could quiz you on the words—

MRS. L. Yes, let's do that.

DAVID. Mother, father, you can't pronounce these words.

MR. L. I'm sure there's another way we could help you practice.

MRS. L. Besides, the dictionary has a pronunciation key.

DAVID. (*Handing over the dictionary:*) All right, fine. Here.

MR. L. (*Looking at the book:*) Okay. Allrighty. Let's see. This word is cer—or maybe ker—or care— (*Handing the book to MRS. L.:*) Why don't you try this one?

MRS. L. Okay, umm... Your father's right, it's cer—or care—or it could be ker— Its definition is "an instrument for recording chronologically by pen—"

DAVID. This is not a definition bee, this is a spelling bee! I need to hear the word to spell it!

MR. L. I bet you know the word anyway, David. Don't you? Just by that little bit of definition?

DAVID. Yes, I do. It's ceraunograph.

MR. L. I knew it!

MRS. L. You're so smart, dear!

DAVID. That's not the point!

MRS. L. You've got this competition in the bag!

MR. L. Spelling bee championship, here we come!

DAVID. I didn't even SPELL THE WORD YET!

MRS. L. Oh. You're right. You didn't.

MR. L. But I bet you know how to spell it!

MRS. L. I know you can spell it!

DAVID. (*Quickly:*) C-E-R-A-U-N-O-G-R-A-P-H! Okay? Yes, I do know how to spell it.

MR. L. (*Looking in the dictionary:*) Let me check to see if it's right. You said C-E...C-E—what?

MRS. L. He said C-E-R, I think.

MR. L. Did you say C-E-R?

DAVID. It's right! You don't have to check it, it's right. Okay? This is why I don't like to study with you.

MRS. L. He got it right!

MR. L. That's my boy!

MRS. L. Shall we move on to the next word?

DAVID. (*Sighing:*) Fine.

(Lights down on Scene One as they continue to do words.)

Scene Two.

(Two different bedrooms. One side is Imagine's; her bedroom is full of movie posters and paraphanelia. The other side is Jeff's; it is cluttered with sports equipment and posters.)

(Lights up on IMAGINE sitting on her bed practicing words with DEBRA.)

DEBRA. Blatherskite.

IMAGINE. Umm...oh, I don't know, Debra. What is it?

DEBRA. Think about it.

IMAGINE. This is too hard! I can't do this! I'm not going to win the contest, I'm not going to do well in my AP classes in high school, then I'm not going to get into a good college, then I'm not going to get a good job and I'm going to be a failure for the rest of my life!

DEBRA. Imagine, do we have to go through this on every word?

IMAGINE. It's just...so hard... I have so much pressure! Having a famous mom, trying to be a regular middle-schooler under the glare of the spotlight, taking a ninth-grade level math class, playing center mid on my soccer team. I'm just so stressed out! It's too much for one thirteen-year-old to endure!

DEBRA. Spell the word, Imagine.

IMAGINE. What's the language of origin?

DEBRA. Stop stalling. Just spell the word.

IMAGINE. You know I *have* to ask for the language of origin!

DEBRA. I don't know.

IMAGINE. Oh, fine. What was it again?

DEBRA. Blatherskite.

IMAGINE. Blatherskite. B-L-A-T-H-E-R-S-K-I-T-E. Blatherskite?

DEBRA. You got it.

IMAGINE. Oh, thank goodness! If I had spelled that word wrong, I don't know what I would have done. I would have felt—

DEBRA. If you had spelled the word wrong, I would have told you how to spell it, and you would have learned it. That's all.

IMAGINE. But the humiliation I would have gone through!

DEBRA. Next word: blasphemously.

(STAR enters, cell phone in hand.)

STAR. Did someone say "famously"? That's my cue!

IMAGINE. No, blasphemously, mom. They're different.

STAR. Imagine, dear, how many times do I have to ask you not to call me "mom"? It makes me feel old.

(Her cell phone rings.)

STAR. Debra, would you answer it for me, please?

(STAR hands DEBRA her cell phone. DEBRA answers it.)

DEBRA. Hello? Star Pearson's phone. Hold on one moment. *(To STAR:)* It's for you.

STAR. Is it someone important?

DEBRA. It's your ex-husband.

STAR. I'll call him back.

DEBRA. *(To the phone:)* She's busy at the moment. She'll call you back.

STAR. So how's the studying going, honey?

IMAGINE. It's a disaster. A complete, utter, disaster. I don't want to go through with it. I can't go through with it.

STAR. Is it *that* bad? I don't want you making me look bad at the spelling bee. If you're out in the first round, it's "Star Pearson's kid is dumb" all over the next day's paper. And then do you know what happens?

IMAGINE. What?

STAR. I don't get movie roles. I don't get movie roles because I'm too old and not even a good mother, so I'm stuck doing cameos on sitcoms as the wacky grandmother. Do I look like a grandmother to you?

DEBRA. There's no such thing as bad publicity.

STAR. Debra, this is none of your business.

DEBRA. I just don't think you should put so much pressure on Imagine. She's stressed out enough as it is.

STAR. I suppose you're right. The last thing I need is for Imagine to have a nervous breakdown and wind up in rehab.

IMAGINE. Mom! Rehab is for people who do drugs!

DEBRA. Star, I don't think you're helping your daughter study. Is there a reason you came up?

STAR. Is it too much to ask to visit my daughter a few times a day? To have a laugh with her? To ask her about her day? To talk about boys? To bake cookies together and eat all the dough? Is that too much to ask, Debra?

DEBRA. You didn't ask her how her day was.

STAR. I was about to.

IMAGINE. Mom, you'd never eat cookies. And I'm diabetic, anyway.

STAR. I know, dear. Ooh! That's a good spelling word. Diabetic! How do you spell diabetic, Imagine?

IMAGINE. What's the language of origin?

DEBRA. That's far too easy for her at this point—

IMAGINE. But what if I get caught on a really easy one? What if I think it's so easy that I just spell it really quickly and make a stupid mistake? That would be *mortifying*. That would be the end of my life, just about. I wouldn't know what to do—

DEBRA. Just spell it, Imagine.

IMAGINE. D-I-A-B-E-T-I-C. Diabetic. But that's not the point! There's no pressure here! On Saturday there will be so much pressure: the hot lights, the other spellers, the announcer...who knows what kind of mistakes I'll make?

STAR. Imagine, you are the daughter of Star Pearson. You are a performer.

(Star's phone rings.)

Hold on one second.

(Answering the phone:) Star Pearson.

Yes, right.

I don't know, what was she wearing?

Are you serious?

Wow.

I have to get one. No, two. Maybe a half-dozen.

I'll get Debra to do it.

Right.

Okay. Ta-ta!

(Hangs up the phone.)

Sorry, that was a very important phone call. Now, what was I saying.

DEBRA. She's the daughter of Star Pearson. She's a performer.

STAR. Right. You are a Pearson, and we Pearsons do not crack under pressure. Performing is in our veins and you will perform!

IMAGINE. You're right, Star. It's the most important day of my life, but I'll live up to the challenge.

STAR. Now. You practice some more words with Debra. I have to go downstairs. My masseuse will be here any minute now.

(STAR exits. Lights down on IMAGINE and DEBRA as they practice more words. Lights up on JEFF and COACH BRICK.)

JEFF. Gargantuan. G-A-R-G-A-N-T-A-N? Gargantuan?

COACH BRICK. No, no, no!

JEFF. Darn!

(JEFF does ten pushups.)

I can't believe I missed that one!

COACH BRICK. You didn't have your game face on, kid. You weren't thinking like a champion!

JEFF. Maybe I need some fuel.

(JEFF *drinks Gatorade.*)

COACH BRICK. Remember when you were running the mile at the seventh grade track and field championships? And you were behind going into the last lap? And I yelled, "This is the most important race of your life, Jeff"?

JEFF. Yeah. I beat that kid at the very end.

COACH BRICK. And how did it feel?

JEFF. Great!

COACH BRICK. That's the way you're going to feel on Saturday. You just have to keep your game face on. Okay?

JEFF. Got it!

COACH BRICK. Give me ten.

(JEFF *does ten pushups.* GRANDPA MATTHEWS *enters.*)

GRANDPA. What's all this ruckus up here?

JEFF. Hey, Gramps! Just getting into shape for Saturday!

COACH BRICK. Getting him prepped to follow in his grandfather's footsteps!

GRANDPA. You know, back when I won the spelling bee, we had to walk there. I had to walk from Texas to the spelling bee in Washington. And it was snowing for part of the way. And very, very hot for another part of the way. And the words we spelled, most of them hadn't even been invented yet!

JEFF. I've been working really hard, Grandpa. The other kids are smart, but I'll be ready for them.

COACH BRICK. The best defense is a good offense!

GRANDPA. When I won the spelling bee, we couldn't ask any of your silly "language of origin" questions. And we only had five seconds to answer the question! And we didn't have microphones, of course, so sometimes we couldn't hear the word, but we spelled it anyway!

COACH BRICK. Now, Jeff, there's something I need to discuss with you. Man to man.

JEFF. Can Grandpa stay?

COACH BRICK. Yes.

GRANDPA. Back in my day, men didn't talk. We spelled.

JEFF. I know, Grandpa.

COACH BRICK. Jeff, we need to talk about your victory dance at the last competition. The judges said it was a little over the top.

JEFF. Over-the-top? All I did was some cartwheels, some pushups, a lap around the auditorium, and a backflip while shouting "I'm number one!"

COACH BRICK. And you can't give the loser sign to kids who spell their words wrong, either.

JEFF. But I beat them!

GRANDPA. Back in my day, we didn't celebrate. I had to turn around and walk straight back to Texas, carrying my trophy with me. My dad made me work on the farm the next morning. I had to work overtime to make up the hours I missed during the spelling bee. And it was during a hurricane!

COACH BRICK. Jeff, what have we said about poor sportsmanship? You'll get ejected if you don't watch it.

JEFF. I guess you're right. I'll be more careful.

COACH BRICK. Now, let's get back to studying!

JEFF. Grandpa, do you want to help me?

GRANDPA. All right.

COACH BRICK. (*Handing him a sheet of paper.*) Here's the list.

GRANDPA. All right...hmm...no, that wasn't a word when I was a kid. No, that one wasn't either. Nope. Nope.

(He scans the rest of the list.)

None of these were words when I was in school. They hadn't been invented yet.

COACH BRICK. *(Taking back the list:)* I'm sure some of them were... let's see. Armadillo? Armaments? Armistice? Arpeggio? These words have been around for hundreds of years!

GRANDPA. I never heard of these words. These words are too fancy. We spelled *real* words when I was in the bee.

JEFF. Well, these are the words on the list, so these are the words I need to know.

GRANDPA. All right, we'll try them. Armadillo? What's armadillo?

JEFF. Grandpa, you know what that is.

GRANDPA. Is that something you have to do on the Internet? I don't use the Internet. I'm too old-fashioned for that kind of thing.

COACH BRICK. It's an animal.

GRANDPA. Never heard of it.

JEFF. Armadillo. A-R-M-A-D-I-L-L-O. Armadillo.

COACH BRICK. 'Atta boy! Get down and give me ten.

JEFF. But I got it right!

COACH BRICK. All right, five.

(JEFF starts to do pushups. Lights down on his room.)

Scene Three.

(*Desiree's room. DESIREE sits painting her nails while ELOISE studies.*)

DESIREE. Eloise, could you turn those pages a little more quietly? You're bothering me.

ELOISE. I'm sorry, Miss Desiree.

DESIREE. It's all right, Eloise. I'm sure you didn't mean it...

ELOISE. Miss Desiree, you understand that I won't be able to spell these words for you on Saturday, right?

DESIREE. Oh, I know. But studying is so *boring*. Once you study them, you can figure out all the little tricks and the hard words. That will make it so much easier for me.

ELOISE. Of course, Miss Desiree. It's just—

DESIREE. What?

ELOISE. A lot of the trick is just studying the words. I could quiz you. I just think you're wasting your time with me studying.

DESIREE. I suppose so. I don't know why Mom can't just buy me the title. That would be so much less work.

ELOISE. I don't know, Miss Desiree.

DESIREE. My life is so hard. I'm missing a day of shopping to do this bee, you know.

ELOISE. I know, dear.

DESIREE. And then it's Sunday, and most of the good stores aren't open on Sundays. So I'm really missing two days of shopping.

ELOISE. Your poor thing. Why don't we try a few words.

DESIREE. I suppose so. If I *have* to.

ELOISE. Okay. Misanthrope.

DESIREE. Misanthrope. M-I-S-A-N-T-H-R-O-P-E. Misanthrope.

ELOISE. Excellent!

DESIREE. Fabulous. Oh, that was exhausting. Time to take a break.

(She picks up her nail polish.)

ELOISE. One more, Miss Desiree. How about pharmaceutical?

(MRS. WORTHINGTON enters. She has a small dog in her bag.)

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Oooh, pharmaceutical! Let me try!

DESIREE. Hi, mom.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Maybe Madame DuBois knows how to spell pharmaceutical. *(To the dog in the bag:)* Do you know how to spell pharmaceutical, DuBois? Do you? You're such a good girl! Such a good girl!

ELOISE. Ma'm, I don't think the dog can help Desiree spell.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Oh, I know. But she is the smartest dog! The smartest! She's just the smartest dog in the whole world! Eloise, are you helping Desiree study?

ELOISE. Of course, Mrs. Worthington.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Good. Madame DuBois and I are SO excited for the big event. Madame has a brand-new outfit for Saturday. She's going to be the prettiest girl! The most beautiful girl there!

DESIREE. Mom, have you figured out something about the lighting?

MRS. WORTHINGTON. The lighting? I asked Eloise to call.

ELOISE. They said there's no way to change the stage lighting in time for Saturday, Miss Desiree.

DESIREE. Ughh, that's such a pity. The lighting is *horrible* on that stage. Horrible. It completely washes out my complexion. It makes my skin look green. Isn't there something you can do about it, mother? Call in a favor?

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Eloise, did you mention who I am to the people on the phone?

ELOISE. Yes, Mrs. Worthington, they already know who you are. They know Desiree's in the bee. They also mentioned something else?

DESIREE. Is this about the warm-up rooms? I hope it's about changing the warm-up rooms, because the ones last time were *nasty*. The couches looked like they were from the 1990s. And they certainly weren't designer.

ELOISE. No, it's about Madame DuBois.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. What about my best girl? What about the prettiest girl in the whole world?

ELOISE. They don't want a dog in the auditorium, Mrs. Worthington.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Madame DuBois is *not* a dog! She is a little girl! The most adorable little girl in the whole world! Aren't you? Aren't you dear?

ELOISE. Well, they don't want the most adorable little girl in the whole world in the auditorium.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. (*Covering the dog's ears:*) Shhh! Don't say that in front of her, Eloise. You'll hurt the poor thing's feelings.

ELOISE. I'm sorry, Mrs. Worthington.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. I'll give them a call. I'm sure once I explain the situation, they'll think otherwise.

DESIREE. Mom, would you stop bothering us? Eloise is trying to study. I don't want her distracted.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Of course, dear. I'm on my way out. Now say good bye to Madame DuBois.

DESIREE. Bye, Madame DuBois.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Eloise!

ELOISE. What?

MRS. WORTHINGTON. I *said* say good bye to Madame DuBois! We don't want her feelings hurt!

ELOISE. Bye, Madame DuBois. Have a nice afternoon.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. (*Cooing to the dog as she exits:*) She didn't mean it, Madame. She didn't mean to hurt your feelings. No, she didn't. She didn't.

(*ELOISE continues to study as DESIREE paints her nails.*)

Scene Four.

(*The prep room before the spelling bee. SUNNY, DAVID, IMAGINE, JEFF, and ELOISE sit preparing for the bee. SUNNY, IMAGINE and DAVID are studying. JEFF is bouncing a basketball. DESIREE is putting on makeup in the mirror.*)

DAVID. Could you please stop bouncing that infernal ball?

JEFF. What? I can't hear you.

DAVID. I'm trying to study. Stop bouncing that ball!

JEFF. This helps me concentrate.

IMAGINE. Let the boy do what he needs to concentrate! You can't take that away from him! That's wrong, it's more than wrong, it's a travesty! It's a tragedy!

SUNNY. Give me a T, give me an R, give me an A—

DESIREE. Did anyone tell you that cheerleading is so five minutes ago? And that cheerleading skirt is seriously out.

DAVID. Anachronism. A-N-A-C-H-R-O-N-I-S-M. Anachronism.

JEFF. There's no point in studying now. All the prep is done, all the hours are put in. Now's the time to get your game face on and reap the benefits of all the training. Practicing is only going to wear you out at this point.

DAVID. You can go about your warm-up and I'll go about mine. Although my warm-up has already won me the National Geography Bee, the National Math Bee, the Young Poet Laureate contest, the Young Inventor's National Competition, and a national break-dance competition.

SUNNY. You won a break-dance competition?

DESIREE. (*Taking out her cell phone and dialing:*) Eloise, can I leave this area? I'm bored. Well, you come back here then? I don't care if you're not allowed to come back here. Come back anyway. Okay. Okay. Bye.

DAVID. No one is allowed back here, you know. They could be giving you illegal assistance.

DESIREE. How could anyone give illegal assistance at this point?

DAVID. We've already been searched. They could bring microphones, wires—

JEFF. Powerbars.

DAVID. There's plenty of technology out there to cheat in this day and age. I'm sure even *you* realize that.

SUNNY. Why would someone ever cheat on a spelling bee? That wouldn't be fair.

IMAGINE. But wouldn't it be so *thrilling* if someone did. Just imagine. We're all spelling, someone asks for the language of origin, when all of a sudden someone jumps onstage, does a dive and tackles the cheater. The cheater fights back, and tons of Secret Service agents rush the stage. But then, it turns out—

(*ELOISE enters secretly.*)

DESIREE. Ooh, Eloise!

ELOISE. Shh... I'm not supposed to be back here.

DESIREE. Did you bring something for me?

ELOISE. (*Taking some magazines out of her bag:*) Yes. Here.

DAVID. Hey! That is not permitted! New materials are not allowed backstage!

ELOISE. They're just fashion magazines.

DAVID. Doesn't matter. They're not allowed.

SUNNY. Just let her have her magazines.

DAVID. I'm going to have to report you—

DESIREE. Oh, forget it. I don't feel like reading anyway.

DAVID. And your mom isn't allowed backstage, either.

DESIREE. Oh, she's not my mom. She's my personal assistant.

JEFF. You have a personal assistant?

DESIREE. Well, she's my maid.

DAVID. Your maid isn't allowed back here either.

ELOISE. That's okay, I was just leaving.

DESIREE. I suppose that's a good idea. Good bye, Eloise.

ELOISE. Good luck!

(ELOISE *exits.*)

DESIREE. I don't need luck.

DAVID. You're right, luck will not help you at this point.

JEFF. (*Losing control of his basketball:*) Oops, heads up!

(*The ball hits* SUNNY.)

SUNNY. Ouch! My head!

JEFF. I'm sorry. But that's why you need to be quick on your feet! I have reflexes like a cat!

SUNNY. My brain! What if I lose brain cells over this?

DAVID. Maybe I should report you for having that ball back here.

JEFF. It's allowed. I need to warm up.

SUNNY. I need all the brain cells I can get for tonight!

DAVID. You can say that again.

IMAGINE. Maybe we should study together. We could band together, and pool our knowledge, and we could go down in history as the first group to win the spelling bee together—

DAVID, JEFF, and DESIREE. No!

SUNNY. It might work...

IMAGINE. It would be so thrilling!

JEFF. No way. It's every man for himself out there.

SUNNY. It's going to be hard for me not to cheer for everyone else! I'm used to rooting everyone on.

DESIREE. Could you all be quiet, please? I'm trying to study.

DAVID. You're not trying to study.

JEFF. You don't even have any notes.

IMAGINE. You're polishing your nails.

DESIREE. You're right, I was just tired of listening to you all talk.

SUNNY. I could cheer, instead.

DAVID. Please don't.

JEFF. Well, I think she's right. I need to get my game face on. No more talking up the competition.

IMAGINE. But it's so dramatic—

DESIREE. If you don't stop talking about drama I really *will* start to study.

DAVID. Wouldn't that be earth-shattering. I'm getting my notes.

(DAVID goes back to his studying. JEFF goes back to bouncing his ball and concentrating. DESIREE polishes her nails, and SUNNY cheers silently. IMAGINE does deep-breathing exercises.)

Scene Five.

(The spelling bee auditorium. MR. LICHTENSTEINBERGER and MRS. LICHTENSTEINBERGER sit in the front row; MR. L has a camera. He is already recording.)

MRS. L. I still don't understand why David insists that we get here so early.

MR. L. I don't understand why David insists that we start recording the competition before it even starts.

MRS. L. He likes to study the footage for next year.

MR. L. If he wins, he can't compete next year.

MRS. L. And let's hope he does win. Every national competition he wins is one less thing for him to study for.

(MR. SANDSTONE enters, with GREG.)

MR. SANDSTONE. Excuse me...is this where the parents and family of the spellers sit?

MR. L. Yes, it is.

MR. SANDSTONE. *(Taking a seat:)* Thank you. Greg, have a seat.

GREG. Why did we have to get here so early?

MR. SANDSTONE. It was important to Sunny that we got a good seat.

MRS. L. Oh, you're the cheerleader's family?

MR. SANDSTONE. Yes, did you read the article in the paper?

GREG. This is so embarrassing.

MR. L. Yes, we did. *(To GREG:)* Are you a competitive speller like your sister?

GREG. No.

MRS. L. Are you a cheerleader like your sister?

GREG. No!

MR. L. (*To MR. SANDSTONE:*) Does your daughter participate in other competitive academic events?

MR. SANDSTONE. Um... I don't think so. She does cheerleading.

MRS. L. Yes, we know that.

MR. L. We read the article.

MR. SANDSTONE. What does your child do?

MRS. L. He's won several national and regional academic titles, as well as a national breakdancing championship.

GREG. Wow, breakdancing? I guess that's pretty cool.

MR. L. Yes, he started breakdancing when he was very young.

MRS. L. He was three when he won the competition. It was in the four-and-under age category.

(*COACH BRICK enters.*)

COACH BRICK. Excuse me, is this where the spelling bee takes place?

MR. SANDSTONE. Yes, it is.

COACH BRICK. Have you folks seen an old man wandering around? He talks about the "old days" a lot?

MR. L. No.

COACH BRICK. Maybe he was here earlier.

MRS. L. That's unlikely. We've been here for seven hours.

COACH BRICK. Darn it. He insisted on walking here.

MR. SANDSTONE. Where do you live?

COACH BRICK. We're from Central Waytown. About twenty miles.

MR. L. Why in the world would he do that?

COACH BRICK. He's very nostalgic.

STAR. (*From offstage:*) Debra! Debra, where are you?

DEBRA. (*From offstage:*) I'm just on the other side of the building, ma'm.

(*STAR enters from one side of the stage, talking on her cell phone. DEBRA enters from the other side, talking on her cell phone.*)

STAR. I would appreciate it if you didn't leave me stranded in the middle of a strange building! You know how the paparazzi are!

DEBRA. (*Hanging up her cell phone:*) Star, I'm sure there are no paparazzi at—

STAR. (*Still talking on her cell phone:*) Debra! Do not hang up on me in the middle of a conversation! Do you know who I am?

DEBRA. We're in the same room. We're standing two feet apart. I could hear what you were saying.

STAR. Debra, I will not tolerate this rudeness from my personal assistant. If the paparazzi saw you treating me this way—

DEBRA. There are no paparazzi here, I can guarantee that. Why don't we have a seat?

STAR. (*Looking at the chairs:*) Ughh, plastic folding chairs? Isn't there something a little nicer for me? Don't they know who I am?

GREG. (*Quietly:*) I don't.

MR. SANDSTONE. Greg, shhh.

COACH BRICK. (*Whispering to GREG:*) I don't know who she is either, son.

(*ELOISE enters, looking worried.*)

ELOISE. Has a lady with a dog come in?

MR. L. No, definitely not. Dogs aren't allowed at the spelling bee.

ELOISE. Tell that to my boss. No one has seen her?

MRS. L. No.

ELOISE. Oh, thank goodness.

(ELOISE walks to a row of empty seats. She puts down a doggy bed, a bowl of water, and some chew toys.)

GREG. (*Whispering to MR. SANDSTONE:*) Dad, what is she doing?

MR. SANDSTONE. I wish I knew.

(MRS. WORTHINGTON enters, with her dog in her bag.)

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Eloise, I'm glad you're here. DuBois was worried that her beddy-weddy wouldn't be all set up for her. Weren't you worried, my best girl? Weren't you worried about your bed?

ELOISE. It's all set up, Mrs. Worthington.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Are we late? DuBois couldn't decide between two outfits. She wanted her pink princess costume, but I told her her Burberry sweater would be much more appropriate for the spelling bee. But of course DuBois wins. I just can't say no to the prettiest little girl in the world!

MR. L. Excuse me, but I think I should tell you that dogs aren't allowed in the spelling bee auditorium.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. And why not?

MRS. L. They're distracting to the spellers.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Well, DuBois is not a normal dog.

MR. L. I don't think the judges will like it if your dog goes to the bathroom in the middle of the spelling bee.

MRS. WORTHINGTON. If DuBois has to use the facilities, I'll take her to the ladies' room.

GREG. She pees in a toilet?

MRS. WORTHINGTON. Surely you wouldn't expect that a dog this cute would pee on the grass or a newspaper like a normal dog. DuBois is much more refined and civilized than that.

ELOISE. Here's the doggy toilet just in case, Mrs. Worthington.

(ELOISE produces a miniature toilet.)

MRS. WORTHINGTON. You know what, DuBois says she doesn't have to go, but I'm going to take her just in case. She always says she's fine and then five minutes later wants to run to the bathroom. Eloise, watch the chew toys and make sure they don't get stolen by another dog.

(MRS. WORTHINGTON *exits, holding her bag.*)

(*Star's phone rings. She answers it.*)

STAR. Hello? This is Star Pearson's phone.
Oh, hi Clarissa!
I know, we haven't seen each other in *ages*.
I know! Let's get facials together next week!
I love that place!

(MR. L *leans over and taps STAR on the shoulder.*)

MR. L. Excuse me?

STAR. (*To the phone:*) Hold on a minute, Clarissa. (*To DEBRA:*) Debra, would you find out what this man wants? (*STAR goes back to talking on the phone.*)

DEBRA. What is it, sir?

MR. L. She's not allowed to talk on a cell phone in here.

MRS. L. Cell phones could give an unfair advantage.

DEBRA. How?

MR. L. She could be calling a spelling bee on the East Coast and finding out what words they asked there.

MRS. L. And then beaming the words by text message to her child backstage.

MR. L. Cheating is strictly forbidden at this competition.

MRS. L. Cell phones give parents an unfair advantage.

DEBRA. I'll ask her to hang up.

(DEBRA *silently motions for STAR to hang up. STAR doesn't.*)

DEBRA. Star, they say that cell phones aren't allowed in this competition.

STAR. This is an important call. Business. (*Back into her phone:*) I love that new Ben and Jerry's flavor too!

(*STAR continues to talk on the phone. GRANDPA MATTHEWS enters. He is bundled up for a snowstorm even though it is warm outside.*)

COACH BRICK. Mr. Matthews! You made it! Come have a seat!

GRANDPA. Back in the old days, we didn't have seats. We sat on the floor. Which was covered with snow. And...nails. Snow and nails.

COACH BRICK. How was the walk?

GRANDPA. It was treacherous. The avalanche about forty miles back made the conditions very difficult.

COACH BRICK. But Mr. Matthews, you only live twenty miles away. And it's July.

GRANDPA. I took the long route. You young people these days are always trying to cut corners, always trying to find a shortcut.

COACH BRICK. You almost missed the spelling bee, though.

GRANDPA. Back in my day, I missed the spelling bee, but I still won. I was so intimidating that all the spellers forfeited when they heard I was in the competition. I won by default.

COACH BRICK. I didn't know that.

GRANDPA. Young people these days never listen to their elders.

(*MRS. WORTHINGTON enters. ELOISE motions her over.*)

ELOISE. (*Whispering:*) I think it's about to start!

(*MR. LANFORD enters. Everyone applauds.*)

MR. LANFORD. Good evening, ladies and gentleman, and welcome to the thirty-seventh annual Waytown County spelling bee!

GRANDPA. (*Whispering to COACH BRICK:*) I won the first thirty-five Waytown spelling bees.

MR. LANFORD. We've got an exciting evening ahead of us with the five regional champions competing to go on to the state competition! The winner of the state competition goes on to nationals. So, without further ado, I present to you our five regional champions!

(SUNNY, DAVID, IMAGINE, JEFF, and DESIREE enter and form a line across the stage.)

Please welcome Sunny Sandstone!

(SUNNY waves and does a cheerleader kick.)

David Lichten—Lichten—David Lich—

DAVID. *(Interrupting:)* Lichtensteinberger.

MR. LANFORD. Well, isn't that a mouthful! Hope you don't have to spell that one tonight!

MRS. L. *(Whispering to MR. L:)* They say that at every spelling bee.

MR. LANFORD. Please welcome Imagine Pearson!

(IMAGINE bows and blows imaginary kisses to the audience.)

STAR. *(Whispering to DEBRA:)* Debra, I don't think the lighting is good. She looks washed out!

DEBRA. Just let her spell, Star.

STAR. What if the paparazzi takes a picture of her?

MR. LANFORD. Please welcome Jeff Matthews!

(JEFF shoots an imaginary basketball, then scores an imaginary touchdown, then hits an imaginary home run.)

COACH BRICK. *(Whistling:)* All right, Jeff! Way to go, champ!

MR. LANFORD. And finally, please welcome Desiree Worthington!

(The dog barks.)

Is there a dog in here?

(Silence.)

ELOISE. No...that was me. I was cheering for Desiree. (ELOISE barks.) See? That's our...special cheer.

MR. LANFORD. Very well. Now, to kick of the thirty-seven annual Waytown county spelling bee... Round One!

Scene Six.

(The spelling bee. The spellers are still lined up across the stage; the audience is still seated.)

MR. LANFORD. Okay, let's begin Round 42.

MR. L. *(Whispering to MRS. L.)* The camcorder is out of batteries!

MRS. L. Well, do something about it! We can't miss this after taping 41 rounds!

(MR. L tiptoes to the side wall and plugs the camcorder into an outlet.)

MR. LANFORD. Miss Sandstone, are you ready?

SUNNY. Yes, Mr. Lanford! I sure am!

MR. LANFORD. Your word is abecedarius.

SUNNY. Great! Thanks, Mr. Lanford.

(Pause.)

MR. LANFORD. Are you going to spell it?

SUNNY. Oh, yeah! Can I have a definition, please?

MR. LANFORD. Certainly. A poem in which the lines or stanzas begin with the letters of the alphabet in a regular order.

SUNNY. I know a cheer like that!

MR. LANFORD. Spell the word, please, Miss Sandstone.

SUNNY. Okay. Give me an A, give me a—

MR. LANFORD. Miss Sandstone, this is your final warning. If you begin your spelling with “give me a” one more time, you will be out of the competition.

SUNNY. I’m sorry. Abecedarius. A-B-E-C-E-D-A-R-I-U-S. Abecedarius.

(Pause.)

MR. LANFORD. That’s correct.

(Polite applause, MR. SANDSTONE whistles.)

GREG. Yeah, Sunny!

MR. LANFORD. Mr. Lichtensteinberger, are you ready for your next word?

DAVID. Of course.

MR. LANFORD. Your word is pococurante.

DAVID. Surely you can come up with something slightly more difficult than that.

MR. LANFORD. Your commentary is not necessary, David. Please spell the word.

DAVID. *(With an obvious yawn.)* Pococurante. P-O-C-O-C-U-R-A-N-T-E. Pococurante.

MR. LANFORD. That is correct.

(Polite applause.)

MRS. L. *(Whispering to MR. L:)* Did you get that on tape?

MR. L. I hope so!

MR. LANFORD. Miss Pearson, are you ready for your next word?

IMAGINE. I guess so. I mean, when is anyone really ever ready to have their fate in someone else’s hands? To have their fate for the rest of their lives, and their children’s and grandchildren’s fate, all lying on a single word? I’ll never be ready for that.

MR. LANFORD. Your word, Miss Pearson, is kamikaze.

IMAGINE. I can't do it! My life is over! There's no way I can spell that word! I'm doomed!

MR. LANFORD. Do you wish to forfeit?

IMAGINE. Yes. No. I don't know.

MR. LANFORD. Which is it?

IMAGINE. What's the language of origin?

MR. LANFORD. The language of origin is Japanese.

IMAGINE. Japanese! Oh! I'm finished! If it was anything but Japanese I could do it, but it's over! I can't do it!

MR. LANFORD. Please either spell the word or forfeit, Miss Pearson.

IMAGINE. Okay. What's the language of origin again?

MR. LANFORD. Japanese.

IMAGINE. Right, okay. Kamikaze. K-A-M-I-C-A-Z-E. Kamikaze.

MR. LANFORD. I'm sorry, that's incorrect.

(The audience gasps. All heads turn to IMAGINE, waiting for a reaction.)

IMAGINE. *(Shrugging:)* Oh, well. Whatever. I didn't care that much anyway.

MR. LANFORD. Miss Pearson, you may take a seat.

(IMAGINE crosses to sit with STAR and DEBRA.)

STAR. Don't you know who I am?

DEBRA. Star, your cell phone is ringing.

STAR. Don't answer it! This is more important!

(STAR hugs IMAGINE as she sits down.)

MR. LANFORD. Remember, we are still in Round 42 until Mr. Matthews and Miss Worthington spell their words. Mr. Matthews, are you ready?

JEFF. Shoot.

MR. LANFORD. Your word is antediluvian.

JEFF. Got it.

(He stretches and jogs in place to "warm up.")

Pass me the definition.

MR. LANFORD. The definition is "made, evolved, or developed a long time ago."

JEFF. Okay.

(Stretches and jumps to warm up more.)

Can you kick me a sentence?

MR. LANFORD. My grandmother's automobile is *antediluvian*.

JEFF. Okay. It's game time. Antediluvian. A-N-T-I-D-I-L-U-V-I-A-N. Antediluvian.

MR. LANFORD. I'm sorry, that's incorrect.

(Another gasp from the crowd.)

JEFF. Aww, man. I choked. How about a do-over? A D.O.? A muligan?

MR. LANFORD. No, I'm sorry. Please take your seat.

(JEFF takes his seat with COACH BRICK and GRANDPA MATTHEWS. COACH BRICK pats him on the back.)

GRANDPA. Back in my day, the words were a lot easier. I better start walking home now if I want to make it home in time for Thanksgiving.

(GRANDPA MATTHEWS gets up and exits.)

MR. LANFORD. Miss Worthington, are you ready to spell?

(Pause. DESIREE is not paying attention.)

MR. LANFORD. Miss Worthington?

(DESIREE is still not paying attention. She is looking at her nails. ELOISE takes Mrs. Worthington's cell phone and dials. Desiree's phone rings. She answers it.)

DESIREE. Hello?

ELOISE. Desiree!

DESIREE. Oh, it's you, Eloise. What do you want?

ELOISE. Desiree! They're waiting for you to spell your word!

(DESIREE looks up and sees MR. LANFORD glaring at her. She hangs up the phone.)

DESIREE. Sorry about that. I got bored. What's my word again?

MR. LANFORD. I didn't tell you yet.

DESIREE. My maid just called me and said—

MR. LANFORD. Yes, we all know your maid just called you.

DESIREE. So what's my word?

MR. LANFORD. Prospicience. Your word is prospicience.

DESIREE. Oh. Can I have a different one?

MR. LANFORD. No, you cannot have a different one.

DESIREE. Okay. Well, can you, like, use it in a sentence?

MR. LANFORD. The graduates looked toward their futures with prospicience.

DESIREE. Can you give me a normal sentence? Like about something normal?

MR. LANFORD. I'm sorry, Miss Worthington, that's your sentence.

DESIREE. Okay. Umm, can I call my maid?

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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