

Student Matinee Series Study Guide

25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY



25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE

Music & Lyrics by WILLIAM FINN
Book by RACHEL SHEINKIN
Conceived by REBECCA FELDMAN
Additional Material by JAY REISS

Directed by DEAN PAUL GIBSON
Featuring GAVIN CRAWFORD

Recommended for Grades 9 to 12

APRIL 20 TO MAY 9, 2010

Student Matinee Dates:

Thursday, April 22
Wednesday, April 28
Thursday, May 6
Wednesday, May 12

“H-I-L-A-R-I-O-U-S” Musical Comedy

When a group of young spellers compete for top prize at the annual spelling bee, the tension mounts as the contestants cope with fanatical parents, dastardly sabotage attempts, teenage crushes and the horrors of puberty! The New York Times called this musical “irresistible and entirely lovable and riotously funny.” You’ll be “cachinnating” all the way down to your “sesamoids.” Each performance features special guest spellers, so the madness is different every time.

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The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee

Book by WILLIAM FINN AND RACHEL SHEINKIN

Student Matinee Study Guide - prepared by Dom Saliani

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Background information on

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee

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**“No child is fully educated
or adequately prepared to live
in an increasingly technological world
without understanding the meaning and beauty
transmitted by the arts.”**

- J.P. Getty Trust

Who is William Finn?

- ✚ William Alan Finn was born on February 28 1952, in Boston, Massachusetts. He studied music at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts.
- ✚ William Finn wrote the music and lyrics for *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.
- ✚ He currently lives and works as a highly respected and award-winning composer and writer in New York.
- ✚ His semi-autobiographical work, *A New Brain*, was honoured with the Lincoln Center/Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Musical. It is based on his own experiences following his brain tumor surgery. The work explores the role of music in his life and during his recovery after the surgery.

Want to know more about William Finn?

Listen to the American Theatre Wing interview with [William Finn](#) which aired on December 1, 2006.

Other works written or composed by William Finn

Stage Works as Composer/Lyricist

1979	<i>In Trousers</i>
1981	<i>March of the Falsettos</i>
1983	<i>America Kicks Up Its Heels</i>
1989	<i>Romance in Hard Times</i>
1990	<i>Falsettoland</i>
1990	<i>Falsettos</i>
1998	<i>Painting You</i> as part of <i>Love's Fire</i>
2005	<i>A New Brain</i>
2005	<i>The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee</i>

Other Scores and Lyrics for the Stage

1977	<i>Benny Leonard and the Brooklyn Bridge</i> (score)
1987	<i>Tango Apasionado</i> (lyrics)
1989	<i>Dangerous Games</i> (lyrics with Michael Starobin)
1989	<i>The Winter's Tale</i> (score)
2001	<i>Muscle</i> (score)

Musical Reviews

2000	<i>Infinite Joy</i>
2003	<i>Elegies: A Song Cycle</i>
2006	<i>Make Me a Song</i>

What William Finn has said about the musical

Favorite song in ... *Spelling Bee*:

The "I Love You Song," because it moves me the most, and musically it's the most transporting.

Most important lesson to teach musical writing students:

Not to be victims. Not to give up. Talent is only 50% of whether you'll be successful or not. If you don't want it more than anything, don't do it, because you're wasting everyone's time.

Surprise discovery while working on the musical:

That a song I wouldn't normally have thought was finished worked perfectly in this show - it was such a collaborative score (which I don't usually write). I was surprised that a song that was effective was not always the type of song that I would usually write. And I was glad to see that I could write a score using those muscles.

From a broadway.com interview

How the idea for the musical came about:

It was when Wendy Wasserstein went downtown to see her weekend nanny in a show called C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E, done by Rebecca Feldman's company, an improvisational group called The Farm ... Her idea was an improv spelling bee. She directed it. They did a video of it, and Wendy Wasserstein sent me the video. It needed more music, among other things... I watched it, and called up Rebecca Feldman, and invited her for a weekend, and she came, and we talked, and among other things it became clear that what was needed was a book writer. I suggested Rachel Sheinkin.

Begin Your keepsake “*The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* Scrapbook”

On page 33 of this guide, you will find details that will help you complete a keepsake record of your learning experiences before, during and after viewing Theatre Calgary's performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.

In preparation for this activity, you should read the assignment on page 33 now and begin to work on and accumulate the responses, artifacts and activities to include in your scrapbook or journal.

Who is Rachel Sheinkin?

- ✚ Rachel Sheinkin was born in Brooklyn, New York and was raised in Rockland County.
- ✚ She is the book writer of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.
- ✚ In 2001, she attended a class at N.Y.U.'s School of Musical Theater which was being taught by William Finn.
- ✚ In 2005, she was recognized with a Tony and Drama Desk Award for best book of a musical for *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* which was an adaptation of Rebecca Feldman's *CR-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E*.
- ✚ William Finn has described Rachel Sheinkin, in her presence, as being "Perverse, but very talented."
- ✚ She is currently an adjunct faculty member with the New York University's Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program.

Other works written by Rachel Sheinkin

2000	<i>The Doctor of Last Resort</i>
2004	<i>The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee</i>
2005	<i>Blood Drive (one-act play)</i>
2006	<i>Striking 12</i>
2007	<i>Serenade</i>
2007	<i>Sleeping Beauty Wakes</i>
2009	<i>Little House on the Prairie (musical)</i>

Who is Rebecca Feldman?

- ✚ The musical, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* is based on a production (entitled *C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E*) conceived by Rebecca Feldman.
- ✚ Feldman has been active in the New York area directing and performing in such venues the New York Fringe Festival, Atlantic Theater Studios, Adobe Theatre, New Dramatists, and the Present Company Theatorium.
- ✚ Rebecca Feldman not only wrote, but also directed and performed in *C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E*, the original work that *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* is based upon.
- ✚ In July 2004, she directed the Barrington Stage Company's world premiere of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* in Sheffield, Massachusetts.

Rave Reviews for *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*

It's spelled W-O-N-D-E-R-F-U-L.
- The Wall Street Journal

Gold stars all around!
- New York Times

This is one of the most entertaining and unusual musicals out there right now, dealing with the complications and awakening desires that come with being 12 years old and on the brink of becoming a teenager.

The world is open to these contestants, and one of them is going to step down from the stage a winner, but is that really the most important thing in their lives right now?

- Phoebe Wickliffe

And what a show it is. *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* has everything a rollicking musical should have: wit and grace, heart and soul, charm and a bit of a bite.

- Ed Siegel, *The Boston Globe*

... anyone who is now or has ever been a self-conscious, slightly neurotic child will love this show. ... it is everything you've heard it was ... sweet, charming, and surprisingly touching.

And, most of all, fun.

- Louise Kennedy, *The Boston Globe*

Funniest thing on seven consonants.
- The Washington Post

"How do you make a musical out of a spelling bee?" my 10-year-old daughter and theatre companion asked me before show time.

I was as curious as she was but it didn't take us long to find out.

Evidently, you take a successful non-musical play about a spelling bee, *C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E* ...; add to it a brilliant albeit bizarre composer and lyricist, ... and a witty book writer ... ; stir in an incredible cast of nine quirky characters, mix well and serve it up fresh each performance with four different volunteer audience participant spellers. The result is hysterical. When I wasn't outright laughing, I couldn't wipe the smile off of my face during most of the performance.

- Linda Ostrow Schlesinger,
ArtsMemphis

Our theatre will be transformed into a school gym for this new Broadway musical. It's a hysterical premise with some delicious music. What a terrific opportunity to remember our youth, while treating our adult selves to some naughtiness.

- Dennis Garnhum, Theatre Calgary

Interesting facts about *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*

- ✚ The musical is based on *C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E*, a play written by Rebecca Feldman. It was first performed by The Farm, an improvisational comedy troupe from New York. Sarah Saltzberg, one of the actors, was a weekend nanny for playwright Wendy Wasserstein. It was Wasserstein who encouraged William Finn to see the show. Finn convinced Rachel Shenkin to write the book, and they, with Feldman, adapted the play into a musical.
- ✚ *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* began its popular Broadway run at the Circle-in-the-Square Theatre on April 15, 2005. It closed Jan. 20, 2008.
- ✚ The musical opened to great reviews and was nominated for 6 Tony Awards. It won two Tonys - for Best Book of a Musical and for the Best Performance by a Featured Actor in a Musical. The musical was also honoured with 6 Drama Desk Award nominations of which it won three. It was also honoured with two World Theatre Awards.
- ✚ The Broadway cast recording was nominated for a Grammy Award.
- ✚ What makes this work so different from other musicals is that during every performance, members of the audience are chosen to join the six contestants on stage in the spelling bee. The volunteer audience members are coached before the performance and during the performance by the actors.
- ✚ Whenever possible, local celebrities are chosen to participate. Much of the interaction with the audience participants is ad-libbed.
- ✚ Two notables among the many who have participated in the Spelling Bee are civil rights activist and presidential candidate, Al Sharpton (2005) and Julie Andrews (2007).
- ✚ *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* is one of several new Broadway musicals that are challenging tradition by having a relatively small cast, a shorter running time and no intermission.

Winning Words from past Scripps National Spelling Bee competitions

The following list contains the winning words that made the spellers champions:

1999: logorrhea	2004: autochthonous
2000: demarche	2005: appoggiatura
2001: succedaneum	2006: Ursprache
2002: prospicience	2008: guerdon
2003: pococurante	

Who's Who in the musical

The nine major kid and adult roles are played by nine adult actors.

These actors also double up to perform 12 other minor roles.

As well as the nine actors, three or four volunteers will be called up from the audience and participate as spellers in the Spelling Bee.

THE ADULTS

Rona Lisa Peretti: the moderator.

She was a Spelling Bee Champ in her youth.

Vice Principal Douglas Panch: the judge.

He is in love with Rona Lisa Peretti, but she wants nothing to do with him.

Mitch Mahoney: the Comfort Counselor.

A former felon. "He looks like he could be a bouncer at a gritty bar." He hands out juice boxes and advice to the losers.

Minor Adult Characters

Carl Grubenierre: One of Loggaine's fathers. He will do anything to have his daughter win.

Dan Schwartz: Loggaine's other father. He too is anxious to have his daughter win the competition.

Mrs. Coneybear: Leaf's Mom. She is overprotective and doubts that her son can do well in the Bee.

Mr. and Mrs. Ostrovsky: Olive's parents. They appear in Olive's imagination to offer love and support.

Jesus: appears to Marcy

THE CONTESTANTS

William Barfée: (pronounced Bar FEY not BARF ee) He was a finalist in last year's competition but was disqualified because of an allergic reaction to peanuts. He likes Olive.

Olive Ostrovsky: Her best friend is the dictionary. Her mother is in an ashram in India and her father is always working late.

Leaf Coneybear: The second runner-up in his district. He comes from a family of former hippies who are convinced that he is not that smart.

Marcy Park: an overachiever and a consistent winner of spelling bees. She only sleeps 3 hours per night, speaks 6 languages, plays numerous musical instruments, and plays on hockey and rugby teams.

Loggaine Schwartz and Grubenierre: The youngest competitor. She is being raised by two gay men.

Chip Tolentino: He is the defending Putnam County Spelling Bee champion. His passage through puberty is a source of embarrassment for him.

Leaf's Brothers and Sisters: Marigold, Brooke, Pinecone, Landscape, Raisin, and Paul. They too have no confidence in his abilities.

Setting of the Musical

Time: Present Day

Place: A high school gym set up for a spelling bee.

Overview of the Musical

For this production the Theatre Calgary stage will be transformed into a school gymnasium and the audience will find themselves taking on the role of spectators at a spelling bee.

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee follows the struggles and frustrations of six whacky elementary and middle school students and their equally weird parents as they participate in a local spelling competition. This is a coming of age story so the competitors find themselves not only developing a sense of identity but also having to deal with issues relating to puberty.

During the performance, the audience is treated to what appears to be an actual spelling bee in real time. There is a great deal of humorous improvisation especially surrounding the four volunteer spellers chosen from the audience. In other words, each performance is unique.

To maintain the suspense and ensure your enjoyment of the plot as it unfolds, this overview will not reveal who wins the competition. What can be said, however, is that each of the contestants is a winner in his or her own way.

Enjoy!!

The Rules of the Spelling Bee

“A speller may ask questions about the word's pronunciation or definition, use in a sentence, and language of origin.”

“If you start to spell a word you may start over, but the sequences of letters already spoken may not be changed.”

“If you misspell a word we will ring the bell and the comfort counselor Mitch Mahoney will escort you off stage!”

“We continue spelling until someone misses a word – at that point, the final speller must spell the next word correctly in order to win the bee.”

Musical Numbers in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*

Below is a list of the musical numbers in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. All the lyrics for these songs can be found at these two sites. They are hyperlinked, so just click on one of the icons:



The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	<i>Company</i>
Spelling Rules/My Favorite Moment of the Bee	<i>Ms. Peretti and Company</i>
My Friend, the Dictionary	<i>Olive and Company</i>
First Goodbye	<i>Mr. Panch and spellers</i>
Pandemonium	<i>Mr. Panch, spellers and Mitch</i>
I'm Not That Smart	<i>Leaf, spellers and Mr. Panch</i>
Second Goodbye	<i>Panch and spellers</i>
Magic Foot	<i>William, Ms. Peretti and Company</i>
Pandemonium (Reprise)/	<i>Ms. Peretti and Company</i>
My Favorite Moment of the Bee (Reprise)	
Prayer of the Comfort Counselor	<i>Mitch, Mr. Panch and spellers</i>
My Unfortunate Erection (Chip's Lament)	<i>Chip</i>
Woe Is Me	<i>Logainne, Carl, Dan and Company</i>
I'm Not That Smart (Reprise)	<i>Leaf</i>
I Speak Six Languages	<i>Marcy, Ms. Peretti and girls</i>
The I Love You Song	<i>Olive, her parents, and Mr. Panch</i>
Woe Is Me (Reprise)	<i>Logainne, William and Olive</i>
My Favorite Moment of the Bee (Reprise)/Second	<i>Ms. Peretti, Mr. Panch, William,</i>
	<i>Olive and Company</i>
Finale	<i>Ms. Peretti and Company</i>
The Last Goodbye	<i>Company</i>

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee on YouTube

YouTube is a popular website which features short clips from professional and amateur film-makers.

Here is a [search page](#) that will give you a listing of the many clips that also deal with *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.

You can also watch a scene from the Broadway production at New York's [Circle in the Square](#) theatre. Go to the bottom of this webpage to access the video.

If you prefer Googlevideo, here is a [page](#) that features more videos related to *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* .

Films that feature spelling bees

[Spellbound](#) (2002) - documentary film which features 8 teen contestants competing in the 1999 National Spelling Bee. Directed by Jeffrey Blitz.

[Akeelah and the Bee](#) (2006) - feature film about a young girl from Los Angeles and her attempts to make it to the National Spelling Bee. Directed by Doug Atchison. Starring Angela Bassett and Laurence Fishburne.

[The Girl Who Spelled Freedom](#) (1986) - feature film about a young girl, a recent immigrant from Cambodia, succeeds in becoming a spelling bee champion.

Websites on spelling and spelling bees

The Official [Akeelah and the Bee](#) website - contains interactive on-line spelling games.

The Merriam Webster's [Spell It](#) website – an excellent spelling bee resource. This site contains 1150 words, divided into sections by language of origin. Each word is hyperlinked to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary with a very helpful audio pronunciation function.

Student Activities

Before the Curtain Rises

**Activities to consider before
attending the Theatre Calgary
performance of
*The 25th Annual Putnam County
Spelling Bee***

Note to teachers:

It is not necessary for students to complete all of the following activities.

Consider only those activities that you believe meet the needs and interests of your students.

It is also recommended that, whenever possible, choices be offered and that students engage in group inquiry to complete the activities.

1. Identify genre

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee shares a variety of aspects found in a number of theatrical and literary genres.

Below are brief descriptions of a few of these genres.

Before you see the play, you may wish to use on-line or print resources to find out more about the characteristics of these genres:

Comedy	a work, often humorous, in which the action is resolved in a happy or satisfying manner.
Romantic Comedy	a comedy (see above) whose plot revolves around the theme of love. Usually, lovers undergo difficulties, overcome obstacles and are eventually reunited in the end.
Musical	combines dramatic dialogue with music, song and dance. These elements are essential in that the plot is furthered, characters are revealed and emotions are expressed through the music, singing and dance.
Improvisational Theatre (Improv)	requires that the actors be spontaneous in that they get suggestions, requests and cues from the audience. Frequently, there is a core script that the actors work from but a significant amount of the dialogue and action is inspired by the audience

As you watch *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, determine which aspects of the musical apply to the various genres.

2. Vocabulary Development – Difficult words in the dialogue

Some of the vocabulary used in this production can be quite challenging. The following two activities are designed to help you become more familiar with the difficult - if not impossible words - used in the play.

This first activity deals with the words found in the dialogue. The second vocabulary activity focuses on examples of words that may be used in the competition.

Match the words from the musical in Column A with their appropriate definitions in Column B.

You may use online or print resources to check the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Write the letter of the correct definition in the middle column.

An excellent comprehensive online dictionary can be found at:

<http://www.onelook.com/>

Check your answers on page 34.

Column A

1. fraught —
2. ague —
3. automaton —
4. ideate —
5. animosity —
6. bar mitzvah —
7. ergo —
8. calamity —
9. segue —
10. anathema —
11. parochial —
12. incumbent —
13. protuberance —
14. exuberance —
15. confection —
16. adroit —
17. anemone —
18. smidgeon —
19. lactose intolerant —
20. tympani —
21. odious —
22. fecund —
23. indigenous —
24. notoriety —
25. podiatry —

Column B

- a. candy
- b. a bulge, knob, or swelling
- c. fertile; fruitful
- d. hostility, unfriendliness, hatred
- e. disaster
- f. flowering herb, also known as the windflower
- g. wildly enthusiastic or joyful
- h. filled; involving
- i. hateful; disgusting
- j. therefore
- k. fever or shaking chills
- l. small amount; trace
- m. skilled; nimble
- n. care of foot disorders
- o. one currently holding a position, role, or office
- p. native
- q. a person who acts in an unintelligent routine way
- r. set of kettledrums
- s. to think or form an idea
- t. a coming of age ritual for 13 year old Jewish boys
- u. inability to consume milk products
- v. someone or something that is loathed or hated
- w. shame or disrepute
- x. relating to a parish
- y. smooth transition

3. Vocabulary Development – Difficult words in the contest

Below are words that may be used in the spelling bee. Every performance is different and these are strictly examples – words can change or be added in performance. The definitions in **red** are taken from the script. The definitions in black come mostly from the [Merriam-Webster's](#) online dictionary. The words are hyperlinked so that you can access alternate meanings and pronunciations.

syzygy	When the earth aligns with the moon and the sun.
strabismus	the inability of one eye to obtain binocular vision with the other because of an imbalance of the eyeballs
capybara	a tailless largely aquatic South American rodent often exceeding 4 feet in length
boanthropy	the delusion that one has become an ox
lugubrious	extremely sad and droopy
phylactery	either of two small square leather boxes containing religious texts traditionally worn by Jewish men during morning weekday prayers.
omphaloskepsis	contemplation of one's navel as an aid to meditation
staphylococcus	any of a genus of spherical bacteria that ... include causative agents of various diseases
antediluvian	of or relating to the period before the flood described in the Bible
halitosis	a condition of having fetid breath
schematic	a schematic drawing or diagram
cystitis	an inflammation of the urinary bladder
acouchi	a South American rodent ... resembling an agouti
flagellate	to drive or punish as if by whipping
hasenpfeffer	a highly spiced rabbit stew
gaimaqam	a lieutenant or deputy in the Ottoman Empire
tittup	lively movement or behaviour; to move restlessly
indicant	something that serves to indicate
vulpine	of, relating to, or resembling a fox
hallux	the innermost digit (as the big toe) of a hind or lower limb
palaver	a long parley usually between persons of different cultures or levels of sophistication
tilapia	any of numerous African freshwater cichlid fishes ...often raised for food
weevil	any of a superfamily of beetles ... that are destructive ... to nuts, fruit, and grain or to living plants
peregrine	having a tendency to wander
chinchilla	small South American rodent ... that are the size of large squirrels ... and are extensively bred in captivity for their fur
antihistamine	compound that counteracts histamine in the body and that are used for treating allergic reactions (as hay fever) and cold symptoms
camouflage	the disguising especially of military equipment or installations with paint, nets, or foliage
sluice	artificial passage for water with a valve or gate for stopping and regulating flow
chimerical	unreal; imaginary
crepuscule	twilight
vug	a small unfilled cavity in a lode or in rock
coryza	an acute inflammatory contagious disease involving the upper respiratory tract
zoonosis	a disease communicable from animals to humans under natural conditions
fabaceae	legume
chromatophore	a pigment-bearing cell; ... causing colour changes by expanding or contracting
astrobleme	an impact structure; crater
elanguescence	the soul's gradual loss of its powers
weltanschauung	a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint

Activity

In groups of four, split up the 38 words between you. Using any of the tips mentioned below, memorize the spellings of your words. Be prepared to participate in a spelling bee during which you will only be required to spell the words you memorized. During the class competition, be sure to follow the spelling rules listed on page 10 of this study guide.

Advice

Check the Wikihow site for [advice on how to memorize words](#). There they detail how to use the following strategies to master the spelling of difficult new words:

- ✚ Make up creative ways to memorize the words.
- ✚ Study daily up until the competition.
- ✚ Pick an area to study.
- ✚ During regular chores/activities, think about the words.
- ✚ Relax before the competition.

Use the LOOK THINK COVER WRITE CHECK method

- ✚ really LOOK at your word. Break it up into smaller sections.
- ✚ really THINK about the words and consider what parts of it might cause you difficulty. Think of ways to overcome the difficulties.
- ✚ COVER up the word, close your eyes and visualize the word in your mind
- ✚ to test whether you can spell the word correctly, WRITE it down from memory
- ✚ now CHECK if you are correct. If you made an error, begin the process again

Reflection on Learning

Once you have completed the spelling bee competition, complete the following reflection on learning activity:

- ✚ What technique(s) did you use to memorize your words? Describe in detail.
- ✚ How did the memorization and the competition go? What would you do differently if you had to do it again?
- ✚ To what extent do you think it is important to be able to memorize things such as spellings, dates, formulas, word meanings, quotations, etc.? Explain.

4. Spell Checkers

Below is an often quoted poem which pokes fun at the notion that students can depend on the Spell Check function on their computers.

Read the poem several times before attempting the activities which follow:

A Spelling Pome

Eye have a spelling chequer,
It came with my Pea Sea.
It plane lee marks four my revue
Miss Steaks I can knot sea.

Eye strike the quays and type a whirred
And weight four it two say
Weather eye am write oar wrong
It tells me straight a weigh.

Eye ran this poem threw it,
Your shore real glad two no.
Its vary polished in its weigh.
My chequer tolled me sew.

A chequer is a bless thing,
It freeze yew lodes of thyme.
It helps me right all stiles of righting,
And aides me when eye rime.

Each frays come posed up on my screen
Eye trussed too be a joule.
The chequer pours o'er every word
Two cheque sum spelling rule.

- ✚ In one or two sentences, summarize what the main idea of the poem is.
- ✚ Write an additional verse in the same style as the original.
- ✚ Rewrite the poem, making all the necessary spelling corrections.

5. Predict the dramatic context based on the dialogue:

Below are several quotations that are part of the dialogue in this play.

In groups, make predictions regarding the *dramatic context* during which each of the speeches is delivered. In other words, imagine what

- has just happened or is about to happen that would motivate the character to speak these particular words
- the emotion with which the lines are spoken
- the reaction of the person being spoken to, once the lines are delivered.

Quotes from the play	Predicted dramatic contexts
Schwarzy: Kids are mean, kids'll talk. I see all my 'friends' roll their eyes, so incredibly petty. Because my dads are my dads, and alright enough already.	
Chip: Wait a second, didn't the guy with the head lice just get Mexican?	
Chip and Coneybear: Life is random/ And unfair. Life is pandemonium	
Panch: You can either take your turn now or forfeit.	
Mitch: You can't comfort these damn kids. They don't know that the good don't always win, so there's nothing you can say to cheer them up when they lose.	
Marcy: And does it say that I only sleep three hours a night, and I hide in the bathroom cabinet, and I'm not allowed to cry?	
Jesus: Is that your prayer, Marcy, for a more difficult word?	
Carl: And isn't having a magic foot an unfair advantage?	
Barfee: Mom, I did it without the foot!	
Olive: Thank you! I can't believe it! Thank you!	

As you watch the performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, pay careful attention to when the above lines are actually spoken.

To what extent were your predictions of the dramatic contexts correct?

Was there anything that really surprised you about the actual situations during which the above lines were spoken?

6. Work with tone to project meaning

It goes without saying that how actors say something can often determine what the audience will think and feel about the characters and the situation.

Take for example the following brief dialogue between two of the characters: Panch, one of the spelling bee judges, and Chip, last year's bee champion.

The following dialogue can be delivered in a variety of ways to project a different interpretation of the characters.

In pairs, prepare to present the dialogue so as to project a combination of the following interpretations. The student reading Panch will choose either a or b and the student reading Chip's role will choose either c or d.

- a. Panch likes Chip and, deep down inside, would like him to succeed.
- b. Panch is indifferent to Chip and is intent on sticking to the rules.
- c. Chip is too confident and cocky. This causes him to make a mistake.
- d. Chip is nervous and off balance for some reason. This causes his mistake.

Panch:	Chip. Chip. Chip.
Chip:	Sorry – is it my turn to spell?
Panch:	Yes!
Chip:	Um, can you maybe skip me now and ask me two in a row later?
Panch:	Why would you want to do that?
Chip:	I'd rather not say.
Panch:	You can either take your turn now or forfeit.
Chip:	I'll take my turn now.
Panch:	TITTUP
Chip:	Definition please.
Panch:	It means "lively movement or behaviour", or "to move restlessly." It refers to the sound of horses hooves. tittup, tittup, tittup.
Chip:	Tittup. T...I...T...U Oh wait. Two ts. You heard both, right? T-I-T-T-U-P. Tittup.
Panch:	I'm sorry, the correct spelling is T-I-T-T-U-P. Tittup.
Chip:	That's exactly what I said.
Panch:	But first you said "T...I...T...U - Oh wait. Two ts...
Chip:	No, but I wasn't sure if you had heard both ts. I obviously know how to spell it. ... That's not fair. I got it right. I can't go out on a word I spelled right.

Do not tell the class in advance which interpretation you were projecting. After you have presented, have the class guess which of the interpretations you were attempting.

7. Review the reviewers

By the time you are scheduled to attend *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* at Theatre Calgary, the local papers and magazines will have printed reviews of the musical.

You should also be able to find reviews of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* performances that have taken place in other cities.

Find and read at least two of these reviews.

You could start by accessing the "[spelling bee the musical](#)" website and checking out the Press Room link. There you will find a number of reviews for the 2008 National Tour production of the musical.

What did the reviewers think of the performance?

How do the reviews differ?

What did the reviewers like or dislike about the production?

What important information did you learn about the musical and the characters by reading the reviews?

Based on the reviews, what are you looking forward to seeing in the performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* at Theatre Calgary?

8. Prepare for the "Meet the Actors" Session

After each student education performance, many of the actors make themselves available for a question and answer session with students.

From what you know of the musical, which actors would you like most to talk with?

With a partner, generate at least three questions that you would like to ask the actors.

The questions can deal with any of the following:

- when and how they got into musical theatre
- their favorite roles in past performances
- what they do to prepare for their roles in the performance
- their interpretation of the work or the role they play
- special challenges of their roles
- any other aspect of singing, dancing or acting in this musical that you are interested in

9. Prepare to attend the performance: Theatre Etiquette

Theatre etiquette – what is appropriate and not appropriate to do when you are in the theatre - is an important matter to consider before attending a play with your classmates.

In groups, generate a list of as many theatre etiquette rules as you can. Make sure to include reasons for the rules. An example is provided in the box below.

Rule	Reasons
<i>a. Don't take pictures during the performance.</i>	<i>The actors are live. They must do rather difficult work. Noise or flashes from cameras can distract them and could make them stumble over lines.</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

If you are having problems generating your own list of rules, create reasons for the following rules listed at: <http://www.drdaveanddee.com/theater.html>

1. To avoid being late, plan to arrive 30 minutes early.
2. Turn off cell phones, pagers, watch alarms, and other electronic devices.
3. Do not talk, whisper, sing, or hum during the performance.
4. Do not eat and drink during the performance.
5. Unwrap cough suppressants during applause, laughing, or loud musical numbers.
6. Keep feet on the floor, not on the seat or balcony in front of you.
7. At the end of the performance during curtain call, don't rush for the exits.
8. Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause, but not whistling or shouting.
9. Do not use cameras or videotape during the performance.



Student Activities

While the Curtain Is Up

Questions to consider as you watch the play

Consider elements of plot:

- ✚ The musical, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* is quite humorous in many places.

Which scenes do you think were the most humorous?
Describe what was funny in these scenes.

- ✚ The use of music, song and dance is a convention of musical theatre and essential in telling the story. However, some audience members find it hard to accept the unrealistic convention of having people break out into song during the middle of a dramatic dialogue.

To what extent did you have difficulty accepting the convention?

How important was the singing and dancing in the performance?
In other words, what would have been lost if there were no singing and dancing?

- ✚ What did you think of the way the performance ended?
What did you like or dislike about this ending?

Were you surprised by the winner? If so, who do you think should have won?

- ✚ Much of the interaction on the stage involves improvisation.
What did you think of these scenes?
What purposes are served through the improv elements of the performance?
What would have been lost if there had been no improv or audience participation?

- ✚ What purposes are served by having each of the characters describe what happens to them in the future as a result of their participation in the spelling bee?

Consider elements of character:

- ✚ In musicals, both song and dance are used to reveal or develop character.

Identify three scenes where the lyrics of songs and style of dance revealed or emphasized aspects of character not previously revealed through the dialogue.

You should also identify what the lyrics revealed in terms of character traits.

- ✚ Did any of the characters in the musical remind you of people you know? In what ways?

Be specific in terms of describing the behaviour or character traits, but please be advised that it would be a very good idea **NOT** to identify the people that you know by using their names.

- ✚ Most of the characters in this musical are very young children. Casting the adult actors to play the characters, therefore, poses a variety of challenges for the director.

Generally speaking, what are these challenges?
What kinds of things must the director consider?

What did you think and how did you feel when you first saw the adult actors playing the children appear on the Theatre Calgary stage?
Were you pleased or disappointed by the casting choices? Explain.

- ✚ Identify the specific and the underlying reasons why Barfee, Olive, Chip, Coneybear and Marcy want to win the spelling bee.

What does this say about their character?

In what ways do the spelling bee contestants benefit or grow as a result of being involved in the competition?

- ✚ All of the contestants in the bee are very unique individuals to say the least. What enables them to be themselves and not give in to peer pressure?

- ✚ Create a brief character sketch of Panch or Rona. What do the minor characters contribute to the play?

Be sure to identify important character traits, values, beliefs, attitudes, dominant emotions, strengths, weaknesses, etc.

- ✚ Which of the minor characters do you wish were more fully developed or explored? Why?

Consider elements of setting and mood:

- ✚ Staging this musical is extremely challenging to set designers. The stage area needs to be convincingly transformed into a school gym.
In your opinion, did the set designers succeed?
What were your first impressions of the set?

What did the set and props contribute to the overall effect of the musical?

- ✚ Identify specifically when and how sound, music and lighting effects were used effectively during the performance.

What specific moods, atmosphere or effects did the use of sound, music and lighting help to create at various times in the performance?

- ✚ What did you think of the costumes used in the Theatre Calgary performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*?

What did the costumes reveal or emphasize about the personality of the various major characters in the play.

Consider elements of theme:

Below are quotations which focus on some of the important themes and ideas in this play.

Choose any two of the quotations to focus on.

Put them into your own words but *do not* translate word for word.

In your rewording, avoid indicating how you feel about what is being said.

Then in brief paragraphs, consider the extent to which you agree or disagree with the idea being expressed in each quotation.

Be sure to explain why you hold this position.

Once you have viewed the performance of *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, identify what the play suggests about the important ideas dealt with in the quotations you have considered.

<p>"Why do you have to be a nonconformist like everybody else?" - James Thurber</p>	<p>Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right! - Henry Ford</p>
<p>When the game is over it is really just beginning. - Jerry Kramer</p>	<p>Excellence is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. - John W. Gardner</p>
<p>You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you. - Dale Carnegie</p>	<p>My mother drew a distinction between achievement and success. She said that achievement is the knowledge that you have studied and worked hard and done the best that is in you. Success is being praised by others. That is nice but not as important or satisfying. Always aim for achievement and forget about success. - Helen Hayes</p>
<p>The secret in education lies in respecting the student. - Ralph Waldo Emerson</p>	<p>The greatest education in the world is watching the masters at work. - Michael Jackson</p>
<p>Failure is an event, never a person. - William D. Brown</p>	<p>In great attempts it is glorious even to fail. - Cassius Longinus (213–273 AD)</p>
<p>I'm proof that great things can happen to ordinary people if they work hard and never give up. - Orel Herhiser</p>	<p>We can do anything we want to do if we stick to it long enough. - Helen Keller</p>
<p>Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city. - George Burns (1896 - 1996)</p>	<p>Our doubts are traitors, And make us lose the good we oft might win By fearing to attempt. - William Shakespeare</p>

- ✚ The hit Broadway musical, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* has succeeded in delighting audiences all over the world.

Besides the obvious humour and entertainment value of the characters and songs, what ideas or themes make this work so appealing to so many audiences?

- ✚ This work deals with a number of important themes. These include:

competition	importance of family
pride	perseverance
peer pressure	family pressure
maturity	failure and success
love	

Create three statements that Barfee and Olive would agree with at the end of the story about any of the above themes.

- ✚ One of the major ideas in the play suggests that all of the competitors in the spelling bee are winners. What does the musical say about the nature of success? In other words, how can one lose a competition but still be a winner?

To what extent do you agree with this idea?

- ✚ Some works are written to express significant insights about people and about life. Such serious works invite us to continue thinking about the ideas well after we have read or seen the work performed.

Other works are created to teach moral lessons or to warn us about certain behaviours or attitudes. These *didactic* works tell us about how we should live our lives and about what is right and wrong in terms of behaviour and attitudes.

In what ways does *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* accomplish both purposes?

What, in your opinion, is the MAJOR purpose of this work?
Is it primarily to reveal significant truths or to teach?

Justify your opinion by referring to specific details from the play.

Student Activities

After the Curtain Falls

Choose any of the following activities to complete after viewing the Theatre Calgary performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.

1. Reflect on pre-performance activities

What pre-performance information and activities best prepared you for the performance?

What else could you have done or wished you had done to have better prepared you for your viewing of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*?

2. Cast a feature film version of the play

Assume a feature film version of the musical is being made and that you have been given the job of finding a cast for it.

What well known actors would you choose to play the roles of the major characters?

To justify your casting choices, you should refer to other similar roles handled by each of the actors.

Which, if any, of the actors used in the Theatre Calgary production would you cast in your movie? Why?

3. Create a Spelling Bee rematch

Assume that a year has passed since the events related at the end of the musical and that the major characters have been reunited to compete in the spelling bee.

Write a scene in which the action and dialogue reflect the changes that the characters have gone through since they last competed.

Feel free to create new characters for the main characters to interact with.

4. Write a different ending for the musical

How satisfied were you with the ending of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*? Were you happy with the choice of winner for the competition?

Assume that you have been given the task of creating an alternate ending for the story.

Write a new scene that serves to take the ending into a direction that you are happier with or that you find more interesting or humorous.

5. Film Study

Find and view the feature documentary film *Spellbound*.

What similarities did you notice between the characters in the film and in the musical?

What did you enjoy more – watching the film or attending the Theatre Calgary performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*? Explain.

6. Write a Review

Write a review of the performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* that you have just seen.

Read several newspaper or magazine reviews to get a better idea of the style and structure of a typical drama reviews.

A good central source for reviews can be found at:

<http://www.curtainup.com/goingall.html>

Make sure that you do not follow any one review too closely.

Your review should reflect your personal take and evaluation of the performance.

7. Write a letter to the Director

Write a letter to the director commenting on what you enjoyed or did not enjoy about the production.

Focus on how elements such as casting choices, use of lighting, sound and music, costuming and acting contributed to your enjoyment of the production.

8. Reflective Writing on the Musical Theatre Experience

Many people are uncomfortable with the stage convention of musicals in which characters break out into song and dance in the middle of a dialogue.

Nevertheless, musicals continue to be extremely popular with audiences all over the world.

Name as many popular musicals as you can.

Consider the reasons why so many people enjoy dramatic works that feature song and dance?

Do you agree with these people? In other words, to what extent did you enjoy the experience of attending a live theatre performance of a musical?

Based on this experience, are you looking forward to attending another musical in the near future?
Explain.

9. Representing character, conflict and theme

Create a poster by finding (or creating) a series of graphics, photos or illustrations, and words that you think serve, in significant ways, to illustrate or bring to life the characters, the situations, the themes or messages of the play.

Complete your poster on a regular sized sheet of unlined paper (8.5 by 11 inches).

On the back side of the sheet, briefly explain why you chose the graphics you did. In other words, what do each of your visuals represent?

Please note that the explanation of the graphics on the back of your poster is not an essay or a formal piece of writing.

Since the purpose of this writing is to provide you with the opportunity of explaining your choice of visuals, you may even complete this in point form.

10. Create a Keepsake Scrapbook

As a permanent keepsake and record of your experiences with the Theatre Calgary performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, create a scrapbook/journal which includes artifacts, assignments, and reflections.

Artifacts could include items such as theatre reviews from local newspapers, your ticket stub and program.

You should also include all the assignments and activities that you completed in preparation for your visit to Theatre Calgary as well as the “After the Curtain Falls” activities.

Here are some other ideas that you may wish to consider for inclusion:

- journal entry commenting on your opinion of the actors playing the various roles
- a published review of the play
- photographs taken before and after the performance (Remember that you are not allowed to take pictures during the performance.)
- drawings or sketches of the set
- questions you would like to ask the actors or director
- journal entry dealing with your thoughts and impressions of being a part of a live theatre audience
- graphics found on the internet relating to *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* and its creators, William Finn and Rachel Sheinkin. Be sure to credit sources.
- colourful cover and a detailed table of contents
- anything else that you think will make your scrapbook/journal worth going back to several years from now

Once your scrapbook/journal is complete, you may choose to share it with the staff at Theatre Calgary. (Don't worry, they will return it.)

To do so, you should contact Ryan Bump and he will ensure that it gets shown to the right people.

Ryan Bump can be reached at 294-7440 ext.1391 or by email at:

rbump@theatrecalgary.com

Answers to Vocabulary Development Exercise on page 17

Column A

1. fraught
2. ague
3. automaton
4. ideate
5. animosity
6. bar mitzvah
7. ergo
8. calamity
9. segue
10. anathema
11. parochial
12. incumbent
13. protuberance
14. exuberance
15. confection
16. adroit
17. anemone
18. smidgeon
19. lactose intolerant
20. tympani
21. odious
22. fecund
23. indigenous
24. notoriety
25. podiatry

Column B

- h. filled; involving
- k. fever or shaking chills
- q. a person who acts in an unintelligent routine way
- s. to think or form an idea
- d. hostility, unfriendliness, hatred
- t. a coming of age ritual for 13 year old Jewish boys
- j. therefore
- e. disaster
- y. smooth transition
- v. someone or something that is loathed or hated
- x. relating to a parish
- o. one currently holding a position, role, or office
- b. a bulge, knob, or swelling
- g. wildly enthusiastic or joyful
- a. candy
- m. skilled; nimble
- f. flowering herb, also known as the windflower
- l. small amount; trace
- u. inability to consume milk products
- r. set of kettledrums
- i. hateful; disgusting
- c. fertile; fruitful
- p. native
- w. shame or disrepute
- n. care of foot disorders