Spelling Bees: Hot! Spelling: Not?

The National Spelling Bee is going prime time on ABC for the first time in its history. eSpindle.org presents facts and figures, trivia and quotes about spelling, the English language, literacy and spelling education.

Sebastopol, CA (PRWEB) May 29, 2006 -- For the first time in its 79 year long history, the National Spelling Bee will be broadcast in prime time on ABC (June 1st, 8-10 p.m. EDT). After popular movies like Spellbound, Bee Season and Akeelah and the Bee, and the successful Broadway musical The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, this is just another indication that Spelling Bees are "hot."

This popularity is in stark contrast to both public opinion and public education, as both frequently portray spelling education as old-fashioned and unnecessary.

"I had several school administrators tell me that spelling education was outdated, because students were using Microsoft Word for their writing assignments," says Rosevita Warda, founder and president of an innovative non-profit website dedicated to spelling and vocabulary tutoring, www.eSpindle.org.

When education policy abandoned rote, authoritarian teaching styles, memory based learning tasks (like learning how to spell) were rejected as rigid and unnecessary. Sadly, the current emphasis on creative learning has created the impression that simple memory tasks, like spelling, are no longer important.

Researchers and employers disagree. "Reading and writing are interactive and complementary processes; in the real world, they function together. Both readers and writers must know word meanings and spelling," writes K. Bromley in the 2002 publication Stretching Students' Vocabulary.

While many teachers, parents and students disregard spelling tasks as annoying and somewhat "dorky," there are grave real world consequences to this opinion. Not being able to write correctly and confidently is a big handicap in the real world. In a report called "Reality Check" Public Agenda and Education Week asked parents, college professors, and employers (in the U.S.) to rate the skills of high school graduates. Asked if these young people had the skills to succeed in the working world, 66 percent of parents said yes, but only half as many employers agreed.

Similarly, 61 percent of parents said high school graduates had the skills to succeed in college, versus just 46 percent of professors. Not surprisingly, employers and professors were most concerned about basic verbal skills.

Surveys comparing trends in how resumes are evaluated by Fortune 500 companies show that in recent years more emphasis was placed on grammar and spelling. In fact, when choosing a candidate, spelling skills had a larger impact than their grade average or previous work experience.

An alarming 76% of all high school graduates are not able to write correctly (Visit http://www.espindle.org/literacy_facts.html for a more extensive listing of literacy facts). Partly in response to this writing crisis, the SAT now includes a hand-written essay.
Solid spelling knowledge is used as an indicator of a superior education and intelligence, while those without such skills are stigmatized. Many studies have documented the link between a broad vocabulary and professional, financial, even interpersonal success. However, literacy skills have been continuously declining, and the literacy gap in the nation is widening.

"Literacy can be thought of as a currency in our society," states the National Assessment of Adult Literacy. Americans with low language skills are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, or become incarcerated. They are much less likely to vote or become actively involved in their communities. They often have difficulty organizing and expressing complex thoughts, and lose their voice in society.

According to estimates, 13% of the English language is irregular in nature (For fun facts regarding our language's irregularities visit http://www.espindle.org/fun_facts.html).

In addition, science has clearly shown that we don't learn spelling via rules but through Mental Orthographic Images (MOI) -- the brain's way of determining what "looks right." Please refer to eSpindle's white paper on Research Based Tutoring of English Spelling for more research details (http://www.espindle.org/whitepaper.pdf).

It is commonly agreed that spelling word lists are boring, ineffective, time-intensive, painstaking and burdensome.

"This by itself does not mean that memorizing words and their spelling convention through practice can be abandoned," says Warda, who founded eSpindle Learning in early 2004. "It simply means that we need to advance to a smarter, more focused way of getting the necessary results."

Nearly 5% of the National Spelling Bee contestants have used eSpindle's efficient and effective concept to prepare for the event, which is extraordinary considering that this brand-new learning tool has only been live on the web for eight months now. eSpindle Learning also maintains a lively Spelling Bee forum, that allows members to meet online, share tips and form friendships.

To find a collection of quotes about language, words, and learning, to assist you in your coverage of this event, go to: http://www.espindle.org/literacy_quotes.html

About eSpindle Learning:

www.eSpindle.org, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, has created the largest, most versatile English vocabulary and spelling tutoring program available today, earning the Parents' Choice Award in spring of 2006.

Being web-based allows members to benefit from a 100,000 word database, complete with audio, definitions and sample sentences. eSpindle, which would require 18 installation CDs to load on a computer, was described as "a spelling universe" by the Parents' Choice Foundation.

"As a parent and as someone who had to learn English as a foreign language, I set out to create a program that would effectively teach the writing, sound and meaning of words in easy, personalized sessions," says Warda. "I wanted it to be comprehensive so it could guide students through their entire learning career, and to be useful for learners of all ages and skill levels."
True to its non-profit mission, every new membership is matched by eSpindle Learning with a scholarship for a disadvantaged student. eSpindle Learning also actively solicits partnerships with schools, non-profits and corporate partners to further education.

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