

CONEYBEAR

(delighted at all that's new to him today)

I've never been in a gymnasium before!

OLIVE

(to Barfee)

What school do you go to?

BARFEE

Shut up.

RONA

[Optional ad-libs as spellers get seated "Take your seats, please. Put your things away" only if additional time needed for everyone to settle in. The object is to keep things moving.]

Ladies and Gentleman, all the children you see on stage are here because of their extraordinary ability and love of language—but only one of them can go on to compete in the National Spelling Bee! And this year, to celebrate our silver anniversary, our local sponsors, the Putnam Optometrists, are offering today's winner a two hundred dollar savings bond toward his or her future education.

(KIDS respond.)

RONA

But remember, to get here each child had to win—

CONEYBEAR

Oh but I —

RONA

or place— in their own district bee— so each of them is already a winner.

BARFEE

(may have echolalia problem)

Already a winner.

RONA

Hello, I'm Rona Lisa Peretti, and I'm pleased to be back for my 9th consecutive year as your host. Unfortunately, our usual word pronouncer, Superintendent Spriggs has [fallen ill]*, so please join me in welcoming back Vice Principal Douglas Panch from Lake Hemingway-Dos Passos Junior High. Vice Principal Panch is returning to us after a five-year hiatus — so thank you Douglas for stepping in on such short notice.

**[Ad lib note: "fallen ill" = occasional ad lib space. Illness is sometimes replaced with a topical or local reference. For example, when Dick Cheney's hunting accident was in the news — "has been injured in a hunting accident"; in an area of heavy traffic — "is stuck in traffic on Route x"; but the default is also fine.]*

(VICE PRINCIPAL PANCH enters.)

PANCH

Thank you Rona, and I would like to say as to the incident 5 years ago, I'm in a much better place now. It's amazing what a change of diet can do for a man. Thank you.

RONA

Wonderful.

PANCH

(has always been a bit smitten by Rona)

And may I add, Ms. Peretti here is not only one of Putnam County's top realtors, she's also a former spelling champion herself.

RONA

Third annual.

PANCH

"Syzygy."

RONA

"Syzygy. When the earth aligns with the moon and the sun."

PANCH

Beautiful. And now for the Pledge of Allegiance led by our comfort counselor,
(checks writing on the palm of his hand)

Mr. Mitchell M. Mahoney.

(MITCH MAHONEY, the COMFORT COUNSELOR, enters. He looks like he could be a bouncer at a gritty bar.)

RONA

Mr. Mahoney is doing his community service work with us here today.

(MITCH leads pledge of Allegiance.

Everyone speeds up as they say the pledge, trying to not be the last one speaking.

When everybody else has finished, PANCH is the only one speaking, somewhere in the middle of the Pledge.)

PANCH

Spellers, be seated. Thank you, Mitch.

RONA

And now for the official spelling bee rules.

#1a - The Rules