



A junior high school gym is set up to host the county spelling finals. Winners from local elementary and middle schools begin to arrive and check in with the bee's long-time hostess – and former champion – Rona Lisa Peretti (*The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*). Audience volunteers are also welcomed to the stage. A glitch: Speller Olive Ostrovsky does not have her entrance fee; she hopes her father will get there soon to straighten it out. Vice Principal Douglas Panch of Lake Hemingway-Dos Passos Junior High is announced as the day's word pronouncer – he's a last minute substitute for an ailing superintendent. Panch has a dubious track record at the bee but will try to do better this time. The rules are explained. When a speller misses a word, a bell will ring – ding – and the speller must immediately leave the stage, escorted by the bee's comfort counselor, Mitch Mahoney (*The Spelling Rules/My Favorite Moment of the Bee I*).

Ten-year old Logainne Schwarzgrubeniene, whose two dads have helped her train for the event, gets through "strabismus" despite a potentially incapacitating lisp. Leaf Coneybear, second runner up in his own bee, surprises himself and his family in the audience by spelling his word correctly. Olive interrupts her own spelling (*My Friend the Dictionary*) to protect the chair she saved for her dad. Soon spellers begin to fail (*The First Goodbye*). Chip Tolentino, last year's Putnam champion, leads spellers in grumbling about the inconsistent word level, a point brought home when Marcy Park, Catholic school representative nails "phylactery" and the very next speller gets "telephone" (*Pandemonium*). Leaf gets another word he's never heard of (*I'm Not That Smart*) and amazes himself by finding the correct spelling. But no one has a technique as remarkable as that of the boy with the rare mucus membrane disorder, William Bafree, who spells his words out with his foot (*Magic Foot*).

As spellers continue to fall, Chip is distracted by Leaf's sister in the audience. Losing concentration, Chip backtracks to spell a word correctly – in violation of the rules, which state that you cannot adjust letters once spoken (*Pandemonium Reprise/My*

Favorite Moment of the Bee 2). Comfort counselor Mitch Mahoney marvels at the odd anthropology of the event and tries to teach future eliminated spellers to exit with some dignity (*Prayer of the Comfort Counselor*).

At the snack break, Chip is made to help with the PTA Bake Sale. Humiliated, he begins throwing snacks into the audience (*My Unfortunate Erection/Chip's Lament*). He also throws peanuts at the highly allergic William Barfee. Olive comes to William's aid, but unaccustomed to sympathy, he initially responds with hostility.

Spoiler Alert: If you don't want to know who wins the bee, PLEASE READ NO FURTHER.

Really, the only thing to do is to continue spelling, but "Schwarzy" first takes a moment to thank her dads (*Woe is Me*). Round after round of spelling continues in fast motion. These last five are fierce and furious spellers; no one's getting anything wrong. Park doesn't even hesitate, Barfee's foot is unfailing, and Coneybear is realizing the impossible: that he might, after all, be smart, until "ding" Leaf missed on yeoman, all-too-reasonable leaving out the "e." The bell's echo sends him off, in his own mind, undefeated (*I'm Not That Smart Reprise*).

The final four, Miss Park looks unbeatable. After all, Rona tells us, she speaks five languages. But Marcy's had enough. Sick of being presented as the perfect student, she launches into a protest (*I Speak Six Languages*), which at once shows off her skills and bemoans their tyranny in her life. Only Jesus' unexpected entrance gives her permission to liberate herself from perfection.

Down to three and Schwarzy wants it bad. But Panch is tired of all the questions and loses his temper at her thorough questioning. One of Schwarzy's dads runs onstage, ostensible to comfort his distraught daughter, but really to plant sabotage – target is Barfee's magic foot. Meanwhile Olive's father leaves a message with Rona: he's stuck at work and will have to discuss the entrance fee later. Olive struggles to keep spelling (*The I Love You Song*). On Barfee's turn, the foot sabotage half works – he encounters a sticky substance that derails his technique – but he rallies and finds he can spell without the foot.

It's anyone's bee. Only "ding," not Schwarzy's. She's defeated by her own thorough thinking, overcomplicating a simple work (*Woe is Me Reprise*). Down to two: Olive and Barfee (*My Favorite Moment of the Bee 3/Second*). As they go head to head, they find joy in their sense of competence and connection. And Barfee has a new unsettling experience: worrying about someone else. Still, only one can take home the two hundred dollar savings bond – and in the end...we can't tell you, because it would ruin the surprise!

Presented as One Act with no intermission.