

(CHIP)

IT WILL RUIN YOUR COMPLEXION.
ALL BECAUSE OF MY UNFORTUNATE
ERECTION.
OH GOD

BARFEE

See you next year.

(CHIP throws package of peanut M&Ms at Barfee.)

What are you nuts!

(sees what it is)

Nuts! You threw the yellow ones!

Will someone pick up the p-? I can't be near the peanuts!

(OLIVE comes and picks up the package. Gives it back to Chip.)

You could be disqualified for that - if you hadn't already been eliminated!

(RONA separates the kids.)

CHIP

You know something, Barf: I may have lost, but you are the biggest loser here.

(walks away)

BARFEE

Oh yeah? Well, that is a common misperception.

(CHIP holds up and shakes a bag or two of peanut M&M's to threaten Barfee.)

RONA grabs Chip and pulls him offstage.

CHIP and BARFEE shout ad-libs at each other as Chip exits [eg: Barfee - "This is a bully-free zone" from the original set, by Beowulf Boritt, that had that sign visible on stage]

OLIVE

Sorry about that - William, right? I'm Olive.

BARFEE

I know your name. Look, I do not need pity from a person named after a vegetable.

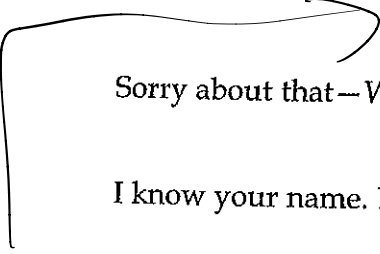
OLIVE

It's a fruit.

BARFEE

Well it's a disgusting fruit, and I can't keep them down.

START



OLIVE

(this really is hurtful enough that she'll give up and walk away)

Oh.

BARFEE

I guess it's okay for a name though.

OLIVE

Did you know that if you switch the first two vowels in "Olive" it becomes "I love"?

BARFEE

(thinks about it)

Did you know that if you switch the first two vowels in "William" it becomes "William"?

OLIVE

Yeah but you can switch the next two—then it's "will aim."

BARFEE

Are these really the kind of things you think about?

OLIVE

Um. Yeah?

BARFEE

Okay.

I'm more of a science guy myself.

OLIVE

Well you're also a really great speller.

BARFEE

Yeah? Thanks.

(OLIVE goes to join the others. After they have parted)

"Olive." "I love." —That's so retarded.

END



#10 —Woe Is Me

(Adults re-enter.)

RONA

Ladies and gentlemen our final spellers. Let's give them a hand.
We have, home-schooled from the Basin, Leaf Coneybear.

SCHWARZY

And use in a sentence please?

PANCH

"Sally's mother told her it was her *cystitis* that made her special."

SCHWARZY

Cystitis. I think I studied this one with my dads.

(CARL DAD is drilling Schwarzy - CARL played by Coneybear, DAN by Mitch.

It's a very fast drill - he keeps them coming and she spells extremely quickly.)

CARL DAD

Segue.

SCHWARZY

S-E-G-U-E

CARL DAD

Good. Siphon.

SCHWARZY

S-I-P-H-O-N

CARL DAD

Good. Cystitis.

SCHWARZY

S-

CARL DAD

No. Think.

SCHWARZY

C-

CARL DAD

Good.

SCHWARZY

I-

CARL DAD

No! Logainne - are you concentrating?

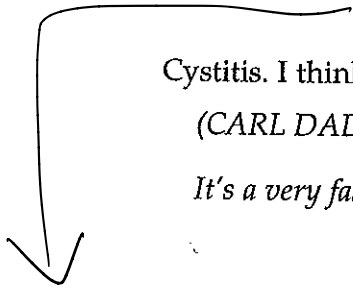
SCHWARZY

Yes -

DAN DAD

Maybe it's time for a break?

START



CARL DAD

Dan, we're in the middle of a word here

DAN DAD

You know she doesn't spell well when her blood-sugar is low, Carl.

CARL DAD

We gotta build up her stamina - The bee could last three hours.

DAN DAD

Don't you talk to me about stamina, Carl!

CARL DAD

Daddy conference. Now.

SCHWARZY

No, dads, let me get this one first, please!

PANCH

We need a spelling, please, Logainne.

SCHWARZY

(struggling through her sad memory)

Cystitis. C-Y-S-T-I-T-I-S. Cystitis.

PANCH

That is correct. Mr. Coneybear.

RONA

Mr. Coneybear makes his own clothes.

(LEAF is very proud that this has been announced. This whole experience is just terribly amusing to him.)

PANCH

ACOUCHI

CONEYBEAR

A-what?

PANCH

Listen to the whole word, please. Acouchi.

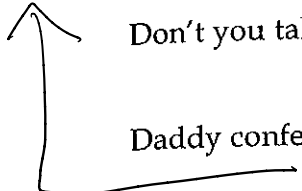
CONEYBEAR

At a spelling bee!??

What's it mean?

PANCH

"A South American rodent of the genus Myoprocta, resembling an agouti"



END

PANCH

Miss Park, your word is QAIMAQAM.

PARK

Qaimaqam. A lieutenant or deputy in the Ottoman Empire. A rare exception to the Q-U rule. From the Turkish. Q-A-I-M-A-Q-A-M. Qaimaqam.

PANCH

That's remarkable.

PARK

And correct.

RONA

Miss Park is all business.

MARCY

(genuinely surprised to hear this is thought of her)

I am not.

PANCH

Mr. Tolentino.

CHIP [Generally Voiceover]

(caught up in his fantasy)

Marigold ...

Marigold Coneybear...

That's a really lovely sweater, Marigold...

PANCH

Chip. Chip. Chip!

CHIP

Sorry - is it my turn to spell?

PANCH

Yes!

RONA

A rare break in concentration from Mr. Tolentino

CHIP

Um, can you maybe skip me now and ask me two in a row later?

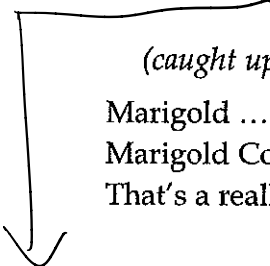
PANCH

Why would you want to do that?

CHIP

I'd rather not say?

START



PANCH

You can either take your turn now or forfeit.

CHIP

I'll take my turn now.

RONA

Another excellent decision by the incumbent.

PANCH

TITTUP

CHIP

What?

PANCH

The word is: TITTUP.

CHIP

Definition please.

PANCH

It means "lively movement or behavior", or "to move restlessly." It refers to the sound of horses hooves - tittup, tittup, tittup.

CHIP

Tittup. T...I...

(reluctantly, but he knows it)

T...U—Oh wait. Two t's. You heard both, right? Backing up, T-I-T-T-U-P. Tittup.

(Ding)

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 t's...

CHIP

No, but, I wasn't sure if you heard both t's. I obviously know how to spell it...

#6 - Pandemonium (Reprise)

PANCH

(can overlap above)

"If you start to spell a word you may start over..."

ALL

...but the sequences of letters already spoken may not be changed"

CHIP

(can overlap above)

That's not fair. I got it right. I can't get out on a word I spelled right.

MITCH

LIFE IS RANDOM AND UNFAIR

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

CHIP

I said two t's. I won last year.

MITCH

THAT'S THE REASON WE DESPAIR

MITCH & SPELLERS

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

(All freeze but MITCH.)

MITCH

You can't comfort these damn kids. They don't yet know that the good don't always win, so there's nothing you can say to cheer them up when they lose. I want to tell them disappointment doesn't last—but from what I've seen disappointment lasts like hell. I want to tell them words don't matter; but from what I've seen words can get you killed. I just want to beat them up a little, so they understand that pain has degrees, and this is nothing—this is nothing, you little freaks. But that would violate my parole. So I do what I can. I give them a hug and a juice box. I'm here to give comfort.

(bringing all back to life)

Let's go.

CHIP

Miss Peretti, can I have one more chance? Please?

(MITCH looks to RONA; RONA looks to PANCH; PANCH looks at the bell—and rings it.

Ding)

MITCH

Let's go kid.

END

|

|

RONA

That is very impressive – especially the piano.

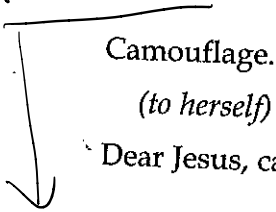
("especially the piano" meaning "not the table" that in Dan Knechtges and James Lapine's staging MARCY has karate-chopped in half at end of song)

PANCH

Miss Park the word is CAMOUFLAGE.

MARCY

START



Camouflage.

(to herself)

Dear Jesus, can't you come up with a harder word than that?

JESUS

(from offstage)

Of course I can, my child

#13 - Jesus

ALL

AAAAAHHHHHHH!

(JESUS appears, played by actor playing Chip.

MARCY is absolutely astounded to see him – none of her parochial education has prepared her for this.)

MARCY

Jesus?

JESUS

Marcy?

MARCY

Hi!

(depending on casting, we sometimes replace with: Wow – Jesus – I knew you were Asian!)

JESUS

Hi.

MARCY

How are you?

JESUS

I'm good. Is that your prayer, Marcy, for a more difficult word?

MARCY

Well yeah it was but now that you're here can I ask for something better?

JESUS

I'm here for you now Marcy. *C'est pour toi que je suis ici.*

MARCY

(convinced, she decides to take this seriously and ask something she really would like to know)

Jesus... I was wondering what would happen if I didn't win today.

JESUS

What do you think would happen?

MARCY

I don't know, but what I mean is, would you be disappointed with me if I lost?

JESUS

Of course not—but Marcy? I also won't be disappointed with you if you win.

(Beat as SHE looks confused)

MARCY

You're saying it's up to me then?

JESUS

Yes, and also, this isn't the kind of thing I care very much about.

ALL

AAAAAHHHHHHH!

MARCY

Camouflage. C-A-M. . . O-U

(still deciding)

F-L. . . A. . . J

(and as soon as she dares miss the first letter, she takes more and more joy in getting it wrong) . . .

Z!! . . .H!!! Camaflajzh!

(Ding)

MARCY

GIRLS

I BLEW THAT WORD.

I BLEW THAT WORD

PRAISE JESUS!

LIFE HAS SUCH POSSIBILITY

SHE BLEW THAT WORD

PRAISE JESUS!

END

RONA

Miss Logainne Schwartzandgrubenierre is head of the Gay-Straight Alliance at her elementary school.

PANCH

STRABISMUS

SCHWARZY

Strabismus. May I please have the definition of that word?

PANCH

"The inability of one eye to obtain binocular vision with the other because of an imbalance of the muscles of the eyeball."

SCHWARZY

And use in a sentence please?

PANCH

"In the schoolyard Billy protested that he wasn't cockeyed. 'I suffer from *strabismus*,' he said, whereupon the bullies beat him harder."

(As PANCH looks to RONA for approval, SCHWARZY is tracing the word on her arm with her finger.)

RONA

Notice how she writes on her forearm. This is her way to see the word before she speaks it out loud.

SCHWARZY

Strabismus. S-T-R-A-B-I-S-M-U-S. Strabismus.

PANCH

That is correct.
Mr. Coneybear.

RONA

Mr. Coneybear was second runner up in the Putnam Basin district.

(Phone rings. A flashback to the moment when he found out he's in. Actors rise as they assume roles.)

SCHWARZY as LEAF'S MOM

Brook, will you tell Leaf he has a phone call, please?

MARCY as LEAF'S SISTER

Leaf! Phone!

CONEYBEAR

Thanks! I got it!

Hello, Leaf speaking. Uh, huh. Uh, huh. Uh, huh.

You're kidding? I'm gonna represent the Basin in the bee? Wow, I can't believe it.

START

PANCH

In the schoolyard Billy protested that he wasn't cockeyed. "I suffer from strabismus," he said, whereupon the bullies beat him harder.

as Panch looks to Rona for approval, Schwarzzy is writing the word on her arm

RONA

Notice how she writes on her forearm. This is her way to see the word before she speaks it out loud.

SCHWARZY

Strabismus. S-T-R-A-B-I-S-M-U-S. Strabismus.

PANCH

That is correct.
Mr. Coneybear

RONA

Mr. Coneybear was second runner up in the Putnam Basin district

...Phone rings. A flashback to the moment when he found out he's in

SCHWARZY as LEAF'S MOM

Brook, will you tell Leaf he has a phone call?

MARCY as LEAF'S SISTER

Leaf! Phone!

CONEYBEAR

Thanks! I got it!

Hello, Leaf speaking. Uh, huh. Uh, huh. Uh, huh.

You're kidding? I'm gonna represent the Basin in the bee? Wow, I can't believe it.

As he calls his family members, kids rise taking on these roles—audience volunteer is also pulled up to be "Paul"

CONEYBEAR

Mom, Dad, Marigold, Brook, Pinecone, Raisin, Landscape, Paul, - you're not going to believe this!

BARFEE as DAD: What's up Leaf?

LEAF: I made the county finals in the spelling bee!

family laughs

SCHWARZY AS MOM: Oh sweetheart, no, you came in third honey

LEAF: I know! but they just called and said the person who came in first has to go to their bat mitzvah, and the person who came in second... has to attend the bat mitzvah, so they want me to do it!

SCHWARZY AS MOM: You understand the other kids will have all won their district bees?

family laughs

LEAF: Yeah but well but

PANCH

(calling Leaf's attention back)

Capybara

CONEYBEAR

What?

PANCH

Your word is Capybara.

CONEYBEAR

Is that a word?

PANCH

That's a word, yes.

CONEYBEAR

No way- what does it mean?

PANCH

"a tailless largely aquatic South American rodent often exceeding four feet in length"

CONEYBEAR

Awesome. What else can I ask?

PANCH

You're allowed to ask for the word's language of origin or to have the word used in a sentence...

CONEYBEAR

Oh- can you use it in a sentence?

PANCH

Yes. "Don't look now Pedro but I think that tailless four-and a half foot rodent swimming next to you may be a *capybara*."

CONEYBEAR

Wow, that didn't help at all!

PANCH

Are you ready to spell the word Mr. Coneybear?

CONEYBEAR

No, but it was fun to come here-
(to family in aud) hi guys-my whole family's here which is really...
(trance suddenly takes him) C-A-P-Y-B-A-R-A Capybara.

PANCH

That is correct.

CONEYBEAR

It is?
I can't believe it.

PANCH

Neither can I.

CONEYBEAR

It's unbelievable, I just said the first letters that came into my head, and that "y" was really...

ALL

Shhh.

PANCH

Miss Ostrovsky

RONA

Miss Ostrovsky came in second in her school's Halloween contest

OLIVE

I was road-kill.

(CONEYBEAR)

BUT JUST NOT MINE,
SINCE I O-PINE
I THINK—I KNOW—I'M SMART

Apple juice please.

#11b - Coneybear Goodbye

(CONEYBEAR shakes Mitch's hand and exits. Other spellers pay him tribute as he leaves in triumph.)

PANCH

Mr. Barfee.

BARFEE

(given up by this point)

Whatever.

RONA

Mr. Barfee has a sea anemone circus in his basement.

BARFEE

My fake mom Sheila thinks my hobbies are weird, but my real mom Joan says the science will one day payoff. And also I will grow up to be incredibly handsome.

PANCH

ANTIHISTAMINE

BARFEE

Luck of the draw. One moment please.
A-N-T-I-H-I-S-T-A-M-I-N-E.
Antihistamine Mr. Pancheee.

PANCH

Doug Panch.

BARFEE

Will Barfee.

PANCH

Miss Park.

RONA

Miss Park speaks five languages.

MARCY

(SHE's had it with these comments)

No I don't.

START
↓

Don't you? **RONA**

No. **MARCY**

Well it also says that you won your school's handwriting competition. **RONA**

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? **MARCY**

(checking list)
No, it doesn't say that. **RONA**

Well, it should. ~~And it should say...~~ **MARCY**

#12 - I Speak Six Languages

MARCY
I SPEAK SIX LANGUAGES.
EVERY LANGUAGE EASY
EASY AS THE RECIPE FOR MAKING JELLO.
I SPEAK SIX LANGUAGES
AND I CAN SAY HELLO
IN AT LEAST SEVEN MORE.

RONA
Ah. Six.

It does say you're an athlete.

RONA

MARCY
TO EXCEL IN ATHLETICS IS NOT DIFFICULT IF ONE HAS THE
TEMPERAMENT.
APPARENTLY I HAVE THE TEMPERAMENT.
YES I SCORE SOME GOALS.
SO UNFAZED AM I,
AS MY LIFE UNSCROLLS
UNAMAZED AM I
I DON'T LIKE TO BRAG
AND I WON'T CAUSE I DON'T HAVE TO BUT
I SPEAK SIX LANGUAGES.

cont. →

RONA

That is very impressive – especially the piano.

("especially the piano" meaning "not the table" that in Dan Knechtges and James Lapine's staging MARCY has karate-chopped in half at end of song)

PANCH

Miss Park the word is CAMOUFLAGE.

MARCY

Camouflage.

(to herself)

Dear Jesus, can't you come up with a harder word than that?

JESUS

(from offstage)

Of course I can, my child

#13 - Jesus

ALL

AAAAAHHHHHHH!

(JESUS appears, played by actor playing Chip.

MARCY is absolutely astounded to see him – none of her parochial education has prepared her for this.)

MARCY

Jesus?

JESUS

Marcy?

MARCY

Hi!

(depending on casting, we sometimes replace with: Wow – Jesus – I knew you were Asian!)

JESUS

Hi.

MARCY

How are you?

JESUS

I'm good. Is that your prayer, Marcy, for a more difficult word?

MARCY

Well yeah it was but now that you're here can I ask for something better?

JESUS

I'm here for you now Marcy. *C'est pour toi que je suis ici.*

MARCY

(convinced, she decides to take this seriously and ask something she really would like to know)

Jesus... I was wondering what would happen if I didn't win today.

JESUS

What do you think would happen?

MARCY

I don't know, but what I mean is, would you be disappointed with me if I lost?

JESUS

Of course not—but Marcy? I also won't be disappointed with you if you win.

(Beat as SHE looks confused)

MARCY

You're saying it's up to me then?

JESUS

Yes, and also, this isn't the kind of thing I care very much about.

ALL

AAAAAHHHHHHH!

MARCY

Camouflage. C-A-M. . . O-U

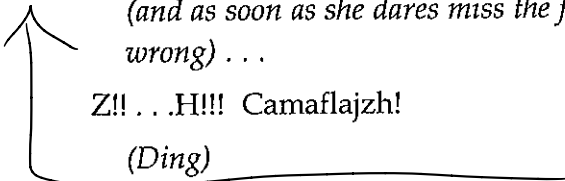
(still deciding)

F-L. . . A. . . J

(and as soon as she dares miss the first letter, she takes more and more joy in getting it wrong) . . .

Z!! . . .H!!! Camaflajzh!

(Ding)



END

MARCY

GIRLS

I BLEW THAT WORD.

I BLEW THAT WORD

PRAISE JESUS!

LIFE HAS SUCH POSSIBILITY

SHE BLEW THAT WORD

PRAISE JESUS!

ALL

...but the sequences of letters already spoken may not be changed"

CHIP

(can overlap above)

That's not fair. I got it right. I can't get out on a word I spelled right.

MITCH

LIFE IS RANDOM AND UNFAIR

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

CHIP

I said two t's. I won last year.

MITCH

THAT'S THE REASON WE DESPAIR

MITCH & SPELLERS

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

START *(All freeze but MITCH.)*

MITCH

You can't comfort these damn kids. They don't yet know that the good don't always win, so there's nothing you can say to cheer them up when they lose. I want to tell them disappointment doesn't last—but from what I've seen disappointment lasts like hell. I want to tell them words don't matter; but from what I've seen words can get you killed. I just want to beat them up a little, so they understand that pain has degrees, and this is nothing—this is nothing, you little freaks. But that would violate my parole. So I do what I can. I give them a hug and a juice box. I'm here to give comfort.

(bringing all back to life)

Let's go.

END

CHIP

Miss Peretti, can I have one more chance? Please?

(MITCH looks to RONA; RONA looks to PANCH; PANCH looks at the bell – and rings it.

Ding)

MITCH

Let's go kid.

(RONA)

And I need to speak with Miss Olive Ostrovsky.

(OLIVE crosses to RONA as the volunteers are coming on stage.)

OLIVE

I'm Olive.

RONA

(pulls her gently aside)

Miss Ostrovsky. It seems we haven't received your entrance fee.

OLIVE

Entrance fee?

RONA

Did the school not tell you about the twenty-five dollar entrance fee?
Is your mom here maybe? Or your dad?

OLIVE

My dad had to go into work. He's gonna try to come later.

RONA

Who brought you to the bee, dear?

OLIVE

The bus.

RONA

All right. We'll talk about the entrance fee later. Take your seat.

(indicates that she should sit back down)

CHIP

(to the "new girl," taking her under his wing)

Hey, Marcy? Don't be nervous. Just watch what I do.

MARCY

Don't worry, I'm not nervous.

SCHWARZY

(to Coneybear)

Have you ever been in an underground gymnasium before?

(Line changes with theater configuration - eg: Have you ever been in a gymnasium with chandeliers before?)

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

cont →

[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.

END

(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.]*

(CHIP)

IT WILL RUIN YOUR COMPLEXION.
ALL BECAUSE OF MY UNFORTUNATE
ERECTION.
OH GOD

BARFEE

See you next year.

(CHIP throws package of peanut M&Ms at Barfee.)

What are you nuts!

(sees what it is)

Nuts! You threw the yellow ones!

Will someone pick up the p-? I can't be near the peanuts!

(OLIVE comes and picks up the package. Gives it back to Chip.)

You could be disqualified for that - if you hadn't already been eliminated!

(RONA separates the kids.)

CHIP

You know something, Barf: I may have lost, but you are the biggest loser here.

(walks away)

BARFEE

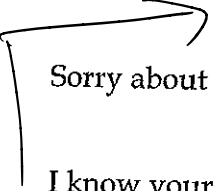
Oh yeah? Well, that is a common misperception.

(CHIP holds up and shakes a bag or two of peanut M&M's to threaten Barfee.)

RONA grabs Chip and pulls him offstage.

CHIP and BARFEE shout ad-libs at each other as Chip exits [eg: Barfee - "This is a bully-free zone" from the original set, by Beowulf Boritt, that had that sign visible on stage]

START



OLIVE

Sorry about that - William, right? I'm Olive.

BARFEE

I know your name. Look, I do not need pity from a person named after a vegetable.

OLIVE

It's a fruit.

BARFEE

Well it's a disgusting fruit, and I can't keep them down.

OLIVE

(this really is hurtful enough that she'll give up and walk away)

Oh.

BARFEE

I guess it's okay for a name though.

OLIVE

Did you know that if you switch the first two vowels in "Olive" it becomes "I love"?

BARFEE

(thinks about it)

Did you know that if you switch the first two vowels in "William" it becomes "William"?

OLIVE

Yeah but you can switch the next two—then it's "will aim."

BARFEE

Are these really the kind of things you think about?

OLIVE

Um. Yeah?

BARFEE

Okay.

I'm more of a science guy myself.

OLIVE

Well you're also a really great speller.

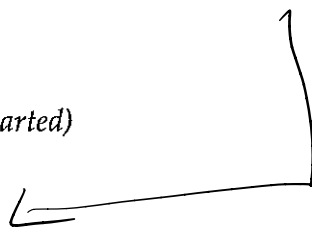
BARFEE

Yeah? Thanks.

(OLIVE goes to join the others. After they have parted)

"Olive." "I love." —That's so retarded.

END



#10 —Woe Is Me

(Adults re-enter.)

RONA

Ladies and gentlemen our final spellers. Let's give them a hand.
We have, home-schooled from the Basin, Leaf Coneybear.

SCHWARZY AS MOM: Oh sweetheart, no, you came in third honey

LEAF: I know! but they just called and said the person who came in first has to go to their bat mitzvah, and the person who came in second... has to attend the bat mitzvah, so they want me to do it!

SCHWARZY AS MOM: You understand the other kids will have all won their district bees?

family laughs

LEAF: Yeah but well but

PANCH
(calling Leaf's attention back)

Capybara

CONEYBEAR

What?

PANCH

Your word is Capybara.

CONEYBEAR

Is that a word?

PANCH

That's a word, yes.

CONEYBEAR

No way- what does it mean?

PANCH

"a tailless largely aquatic South American rodent often exceeding four feet in length"

CONEYBEAR

Awesome. What else can I ask?

PANCH

You're allowed to ask for the word's language of origin or to have the word used in a sentence...

CONEYBEAR

Oh- can you use it in a sentence?

PANCH

Yes. "Don't look now Pedro but I think that tailless four-and a half foot rodent swimming next to you may be a *capybara*."

CONEYBEAR

Wow, that didn't help at all!

PANCH

Are you ready to spell the word Mr. Concybear?

CONEYBEAR

No, but it was fun to come here-
(to family in aud) hi guys-my whole family's here which is really...
(trance suddenly takes him) C-A-P-Y-B-A-R-A Capybara.

PANCH

That is correct.

CONEYBEAR

It is?
I can't believe it.

PANCH

Neither can I.

CONEYBEAR

It's unbelievable, I just said the first letters that came into my head, and that "y" was really...

ALL

Shhh.

PANCH

Miss Ostrovsky

RONA

Miss Ostrovsky came in second in her school's Halloween contest

OLIVE

I was road-kill.

PANCH

Miss Park, your word is QAIMAQAM.

PARK

Qaimaqam. A lieutenant or deputy in the Ottoman Empire. A rare exception to the Q-U rule. From the Turkish. Q-A-I-M-A-Q-A-M. Qaimaqam.

PANCH

That's remarkable.

PARK

And correct.

RONA

Miss Park is all business.

MARCY

(genuinely surprised to hear this is thought of her)

I am not.

PANCH

Mr. Tolentino.

CHIP [Generally Voiceover]

(caught up in his fantasy)

Marigold ...

Marigold Coneybear...

That's a really lovely sweater, Marigold...

PANCH

Chip. Chip. Chip!

CHIP

Sorry - is it my turn to spell?

PANCH

Yes!

RONA

A rare break in concentration from Mr. Tolentino

CHIP

Um, can you maybe skip me now and ask me two in a row later?

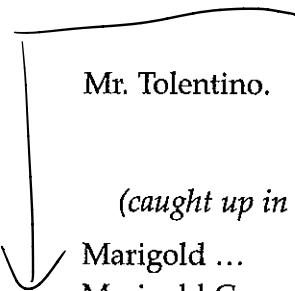
PANCH

Why would you want to do that?

CHIP

I'd rather not say?

START



PANCH

You can either take your turn now or forfeit.

CHIP

I'll take my turn now.

RONA

Another excellent decision by the incumbent.

PANCH

TITTUP

CHIP

What?

PANCH

The word is: TITTUP.

CHIP

Definition please.

PANCH

It means "lively movement or behavior", or "to move restlessly." It refers to the sound of horses hooves - tittup, tittup, tittup.

CHIP

Tittup. T...I...

(reluctantly, but he knows it)

T...U—Oh wait. Two t's. You heard both, right? Backing up, T-I-T-T-U-P. Tittup.

(Ding)

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 t's...

CHIP

No, but, I wasn't sure if you heard both t's. I obviously know how to spell it...

#6 - Pandemonium (Reprise)

PANCH

(can overlap above)

"If you start to spell a word you may start over..."

ALL

...but the sequences of letters already spoken may not be changed"

CHIP

(can overlap above)

That's not fair. I got it right. I can't get out on a word I spelled right.

MITCH

LIFE IS RANDOM AND UNFAIR

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

CHIP

I said two t's. I won last year.

MITCH

THAT'S THE REASON WE DESPAIR

MITCH & SPELLERS

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

(All freeze but MITCH.)

MITCH

You can't comfort these damn kids. They don't yet know that the good don't always win, so there's nothing you can say to cheer them up when they lose. I want to tell them disappointment doesn't last—but from what I've seen disappointment lasts like hell. I want to tell them words don't matter; but from what I've seen words can get you killed. I just want to beat them up a little, so they understand that pain has degrees, and this is nothing—this is nothing, you little freaks. But that would violate my parole. So I do what I can. I give them a hug and a juice box. I'm here to give comfort.

(bringing all back to life)

Let's go.

CHIP

Miss Peretti, can I have one more chance? Please?

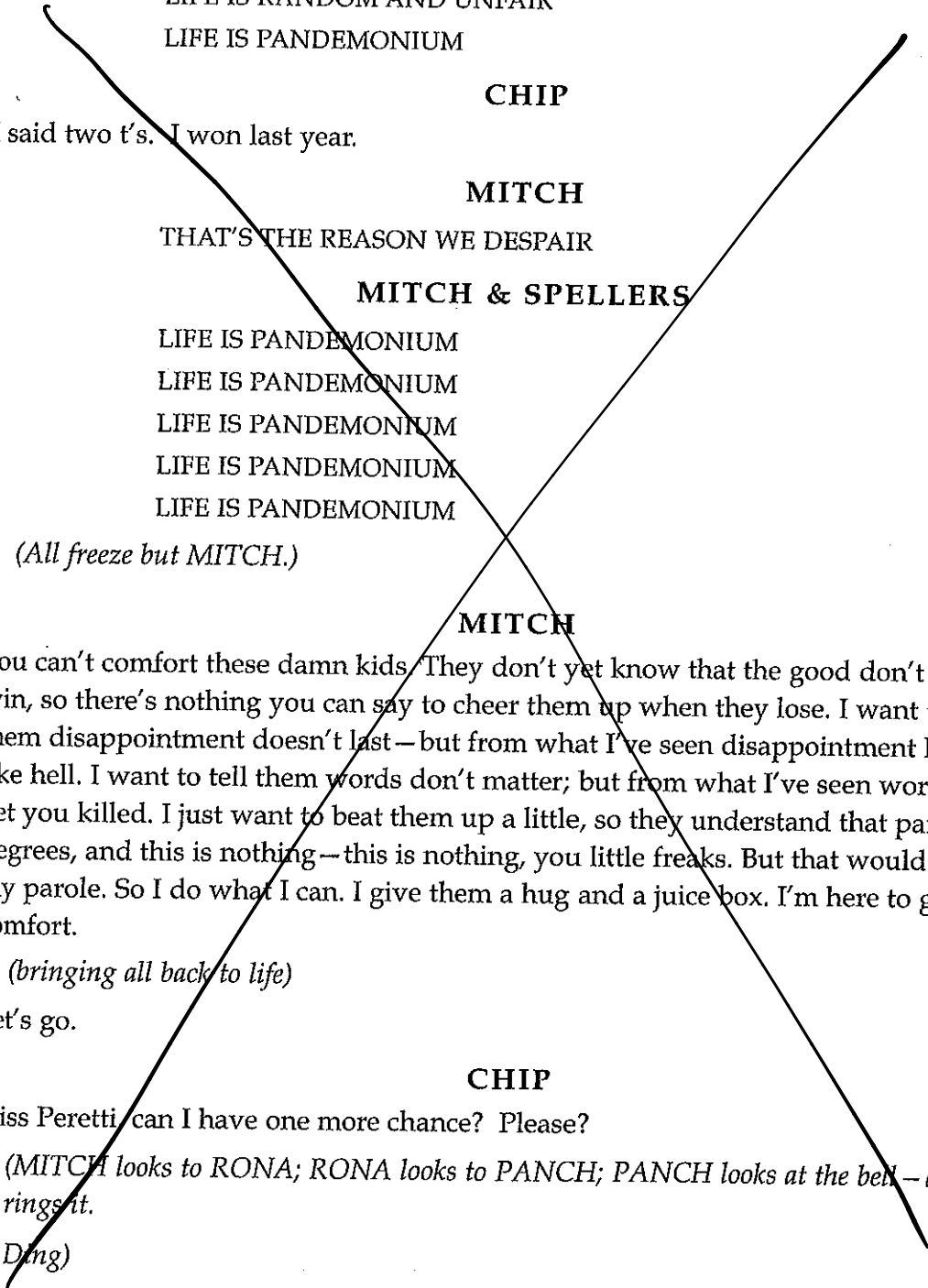
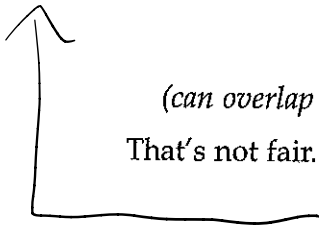
(MITCH looks to RONA; RONA looks to PANCH; PANCH looks at the bell—and rings it.

Ding)

MITCH

Let's go kid.

END



START ⁶ -

(RONA)

And I need to speak with Miss Olive Ostrovsky.
(OLIVE crosses to RONA as the volunteers are coming on stage.)

OLIVE

I'm Olive.

RONA

(pulls her gently aside)
Miss Ostrovsky. It seems we haven't received your entrance fee.

OLIVE

Entrance fee?

RONA

Did the school not tell you about the twenty-five dollar entrance fee?
Is your mom here maybe? Or your dad?

OLIVE

My dad had to go into work. He's gonna try to come later.

RONA

Who brought you to the bee, dear?

OLIVE

The bus.

RONA

All right. We'll talk about the entrance fee later. Take your seat.
(indicates that she should sit back down)

CHIP

(to the "new girl," taking her under his wing)
Hey, Marcy? Don't be nervous. Just watch what I do.

MARCY

Don't worry, I'm not nervous.

SCHWARZY

(to Coneybear)
Have you ever been in an underground gymnasium before?
(Line changes with theater configuration - eg: Have you ever been in a gymnasium with chandeliers before?)

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

Cont →

[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.

← END

**[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.]*

CHIP

DON'T NECESSARILY

BARFEE

NO THEY DON'T

CHIP & OTHERS

LIFE IS RANDOM AND UNFAIR

CHIP

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

YES IT IS

OH YEAH

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

OTHER SPELLERS

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS PANDEMONIUM

LIFE IS

PANDE, PANDE

PANDE, PANDE

PANDEMONIUM!

CHIP

YES IT IS!

OTHER SPELLERS

YEAH!

(At end of song, everyone is perfectly back in place on bleachers, just as before the song.)

PANCH

Miss Schwartzandgrubenierre.

(SCHWARZY crosses to mic.)

RONA

Miss Schwartzandgrubenierre has proposed a constitutional amendment lowering the voting age to ~~ten~~.

PANCH

CYSTITIS

SCHWARZY

Thithtitith? May I please have the definition of that word?

PANCH

"An inflammation of the urinary bladder"

START →

SCHWARZY

And use in a sentence please?

PANCH

"Sally's mother told her it was her *cystitis* that made her special."

SCHWARZY

Cystitis. I think I studied this one with my dads.

(CARL DAD is drilling Schwarzy - CARL played by Coneybear, DAN by Mitch.

It's a very fast drill - he keeps them coming and she spells extremely quickly.)

CARL DAD

Segue.

SCHWARZY

S-E-G-U-E

CARL DAD

Good. Siphon.

SCHWARZY

S-I-P-H-O-N

CARL DAD

Good. Cystitis.

SCHWARZY

S-

CARL DAD

No. Think.

SCHWARZY

C-

CARL DAD

Good.

SCHWARZY

I-

CARL DAD

No! Logainne - are you concentrating?

SCHWARZY

Yes -

DAN DAD

Maybe it's time for a break?

CARL DAD

Dan, we're in the middle of a word here

DAN DAD

You know she doesn't spell well when her blood-sugar is low, Carl.

CARL DAD

We gotta build up her stamina - The bee could last three hours.

DAN DAD

Don't you talk to me about stamina, Carl!

CARL DAD

Daddy conference. Now.

SCHWARZY

No, dads, let me get this one first, please!

PANCH

We need a spelling, please, Logainne.

SCHWARZY

(struggling through her sad memory)

Cystitis. C-Y-S-T-I-T-I-S. Cystitis.

PANCH

That is correct. Mr. Coneybear.

RONA

Mr. Coneybear makes his own clothes.

(LEAF is very proud that this has been announced. This whole experience is just terribly amusing to him.)

PANCH

ACOUCHI

CONEYBEAR

A-what?

PANCH

Listen to the whole word, please. Acouchi.

CONEYBEAR

At a spelling bee!??

What's it mean?

PANCH

"A South American rodent of the genus Myoprocta, resembling an agouti"

↑
END

PANCH

That is correct.
Miss Schwarzandgrubeniere.

BARFEE

(to woman he's selected in audience)

Mom, I did it without the foot!

SCHWARZY

(cleans up coke)

I'd just like to say, Carl Dad - I can do this on my own.

PANCH

VUG.

#15 - Woe Is Me (Reprise)

SCHWARZY

Vug? That's the whole word? Vug?

PANCH

Vug.

SCHWARZY

(as she writes word on her arm)

Language of origin?

PANCH

Cornish dialect, a Latin derivative.

SCHWARZY

Cornish. That's like English with Dutch influence.

(continues writing on arm)

Vug. V-u-g-g-h-e. Vugghe.

(Ding)

PANCH

I'm sorry, the correct answer is V-U-G. Vug.

SCHWARZY

So simple?

PANCH

So simple.

SCHWARZY

END

I'm so sorry, dads. I overcomplicated.

I HOPE YOU STILL LOVE ME, AMERICA.

AMERICA, I GAVE IT MY BEST TRY.

IF YOU STILL DON'T LOVE ME AMERICA

I UNDERSTAND WHY.

YOU HATE LOSERS.

SO DO I.

I'M A LOSER SO GOODBYE.

MITCH

GOODBYE

SCHWARZY

GOODBYE

MITCH

GOODBYE

SCHWARZY

GOODBYE

MITCH

GOODBYE

MITCH & SCHWARZY

GOODBYE.

(SHE collapses into MITCH who gently escorts her off.

The doors slam behind them.)

RONA

How exciting!

#15a - How Exciting

PANCH

Will the final two spellers please step forward.

- Now the rules state that 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.

#15b - Rona Moment #3