

# 2014 SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE

## FINALISTS



### Speller No. 13, Timothy Lau

Los Angeles Spelling Bee Collaborative, Los Angeles, California  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Calle Mayor Middle School  
Hometown: Torrance, California

Timothy loves sports, and while he enjoys playing golf and basketball, he loves watching baseball, especially the Los Angeles Dodgers. Someday, he would like to meet his role model, Dodgers first baseman Adrian Gonzalez. Timothy is also musically inclined: he takes piano lessons and plays for the children's choir at his church. In the future, Timothy would like to study health science and become a doctor. He loves California rolls and Asian food, and one of his dreams is to go to Hawaii to relax and eat all the good food available on the islands. Timothy is fulfilling a longtime dream by qualifying for the national finals this year; he's been watching and hoping to someday compete since he was six years old!



### Speller No. 20, Neha Konakalla

KPIX-TV & KCBS Radio AM & FM, San Francisco, California  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Sam H. Lawson Middle School  
Hometown: Cupertino, California

Neha loves to write and recently won a Daughters of the American Revolution history essay contest. She has been to Washington, D.C., before and has seen many of the monuments in the capital city, but she hopes to visit the Lincoln Memorial for the first time on this trip. When not spelling or reading adventure novels, Neha can be found playing badminton, practicing karate or taking singing lessons. The best part of making it to the Scripps National Spelling Bee for Neha has been to see all of her hard work and dedication pay off and to achieve her hard-earned goal. This is her second year at the national finals, having previously competed in 2013.



### Speller No. 34, Lillian Allingham

Delaware Spelling Bee Collaborative, Wilmington, Delaware  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Sanford School  
Hometown: Wilmington, Delaware

Lillian is an active member of her school's theater company and recently starred in their rendition of Annie. While she prefers musical theater and singing, she also enjoys instrumental music, playing the clarinet and piano in the school band. Because of her theatrical side, she's become quite good at mimicking accents and imitating movie characters and famous people, and she loves breaking out her impressions to make friends and family laugh. When not acting or singing, she enjoys playing volleyball and tennis or hanging out with her dogs, an English bulldog named Gidget and a mini-dachshund named Frankie. Lillian previously competed in the 2013 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

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### Speller No. 38, Jacob Williamson

*The Daily News*, Bonita Springs, Florida  
Age 18, 8th grade  
School: Home School  
Hometown: Cape Coral, Florida

As a member of the Fort Myers Coin Club, Jacob considers himself to be an avid numismatist -- a student of currency -- and has collected coins since he was four years old. Because of this, of all the historical sites to see in Washington, D.C., he is most excited to visit the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing, where he can watch currency being created. At home, he has a dog, Snickers, and two fancy goldfish. In his free time, Jacob most enjoys playing fantasy sports, especially fantasy football.



### Speller No. 43, Mary Horton

*Orlando Sentinel Communications*, Orlando, Florida  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Home School  
Hometown: West Melbourne, Florida

Mary has been a bit of wanderer: In her 13 short years, she and her family have lived in four states, eight houses, and three different climates. Though currently living in Florida, her favorite place to be is Virginia in autumn, and she misses the mountains and cold, snowy winters of some of her other homes. She is also a budding photographer, and she considers the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool to be one of the most photogenic spots in Washington, D.C. Hopefully, she can take her photography to Europe, where she can capture images of France's art, architecture and landscapes. In her free time, she enjoys hanging out with friends and family and watching TV shows from the 1950s and '60s. Mary comes from a spelling family. Her brother Jonathan and sister Deborah have both competed at the Scripps National Spelling Bee, with her brother tying for 6th place in 2006. Mary herself previously competed in 2013.



### Speller No. 49, Sumedh Garimella

Georgia Association of Educators, Tucker, Georgia  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Richard Hull Middle School  
Hometown: Duluth, Georgia

Sumedh has eclectic taste in music: He plays the piano and double bass but listens to hip-hop and rap. In addition, he collects random knowledge and is part of his school's championship-winning quiz bowl team. As a math aficionado, Sumedh participates in Mathcounts and can recite pi up to 75 digits. In his free time, he can be found reading -- his favorite book is the classic *Animal Farm* -- or playing Xbox. One day, he would like to visit Dubai to catch a glimpse of the highest building in the world, the Burj Dubai, and explore all the beautiful, modern, urban architecture in the desert city.

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### **Speller No. 55, Christine Alex**

Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, Illinois  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: Whitney Young Magnet High School  
Hometown: Chicago, Illinois

Christine is a dedicated numismatist, someone who collects and studies currency. She also enjoys reading comics, and has been known to create her own, writing and illustrating them herself. In school, she is a member of the National Junior Honor Society, Science Olympiad, and the math team. Chemistry is her best subject, and she regularly competes in science competitions like You Be The Chemist, but she's also a budding Francophone, earning second place in the Le Grand Concours, a national French exam.



### **Speller No. 57, Meghana Kamineni**

Commonwealth Edison, Chicago, Illinois  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Homer Junior High School  
Hometown: Lockport, Illinois

Meghana is a mathematician at heart, recently scoring a perfect score in math on the SAT and regularly participating in numerous math-related exams and competitions. But numbers aren't her only passion: she received a first place rating for her solo flute performance at the Illinois Grade School Music Association Solo and Ensemble Festival in February. Before every spelling bee, Meghana likes to snack on oranges to relax, as the fruit seems to have a calming effect on her. She really looks up to her mother, without whom getting involved with activities and competitions would be impossible. Meghana previously competed in the 2013 Scripps National Spelling Bee.



### **Speller No. 58, Alia Abiad**

Commonwealth Edison, Chicago, Illinois  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: McClure Junior High School  
Hometown: Western Springs, Illinois

Alia loves to travel and has been to Washington, D.C., several times; but this time she's looking forward to sharing the sights and sounds with many of her classmates and friends, who will also be in the nation's capital on a school trip. When not traveling, she spends time practicing the violin and plays in the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras. While studying for spellings bees, she likes to listen to educational podcasts and radio shows such as This American Life and Radiolab. If she could meet anyone in the world, she would choose Pope Francis because she finds him incredibly inspiring and thinks he has made a positive impact on the world. Alia previously competed in the 2013 Scripps National Spelling Bee, tying for 19th place.

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### **Speller No. 60, Lucas Urbanski**

*Northwest Herald*, Crystal Lake, Illinois  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Immanuel Lutheran School  
Hometown: Crystal Lake, Illinois

The best way to break the ice with Lucas is to ask to see some of his yo-yo tricks -- yo-yoing is by far his favorite activity. Another thing he'll show you is his ability to bend his arm backward at the elbow. When not practicing with a yo-yo, he can be found playing basketball or volleyball or reading. Someday, he would like to meet J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series (his favorite books) to talk about her inspiration for the stories and characters. Even though his favorite food is burritos, he feels that having a healthy breakfast of oatmeal before every spelling bee helps him prepare to compete at his best. And it seems to work, too, because Lucas has competed in the past three Scripps National Spelling Bees, tying for 19th place in 2013.



### **Speller No. 61, Yasir Hasnain**

Macon-Piatt Regional Office of Education, Decatur, Illinois  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Maroa-Forsyth Middle School  
Hometown: Forsyth, Illinois

Yasir is a seasoned traveler who has already been to four continents -- North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa -- and hopes to add the other three soon, starting with Australia. All of this travel has given him knowledge of international affairs, and he would love to meet the leaders of the world's most influential countries. Other people he would like to meet include Rick Riordan and J.K. Rowling, the authors of his two favorite series. Yasir enjoys playing both the piano and saxophone. Math is his best subject, and he can recite pi up to 108 digits. This year he competed at both the Illinois State Mathcounts competition and the state level of the National Geographic Bee. One day, he hopes to use his skills to get into Harvard University to study medicine. This is Yasir's 4th consecutive trip to the Scripps National Spelling Bee.



### **Speller No. 74, Alekhya Ankaraju**

Williams Comfort Air, Carmel, Indiana  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Carmel Middle School  
Hometown: Carmel, Indiana

Alekhya enjoys writing stories, and she tries to live up to the standard set by comic book greats Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. One day, she hopes to be able to create something as revolutionary as The Avengers stories were when they came out in the 1960s. When not writing, Alekhya reads as many books as possible, especially anything in The Immortal Instruments series. As a lover of science fiction and fantasy, she has a special place in her heart for The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings and would love to be able to travel to New Zealand to see where they were filmed. In addition to her literary interests, Alekhya is an accomplished singer and a talented musician, playing both traditional Indian classical violin and Western classical violin.

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### **Speller No. 87, Tajaun Gibbison**

*Jamaica Gleaner*, Kingston, Jamaica  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Knox College  
Hometown: Mandeville, Jamaica

As a resident of Jamaica, Tajaun knows something about beautiful beaches. So when he gets excited about someday going to a place like Tahiti for its pristine, adventure-filled beaches, you know those islands must be impressive. In his free time, he enjoys playing soccer and cricket or snacking on his favorite dish, ackee and salted cod. While in Washington, D.C., he hopes to visit the Smithsonian Museums to view exotic art from all parts of the globe. When he grows up, Tajaun hopes to attend to Oxford University in England to study medicine.



### **Speller No. 90, Vanya Shivashankar**

*The Olathe News*, Olathe, Kansas  
Age 15, 7th grade  
School: California Trail Middle School  
Hometown: Olathe, Kansas

Vanya is an international adventurer who has been to seven countries so far and even went paragliding in Interlaken, Switzerland, in 2011. When she was in Scotland last year, she went skeet shooting for the first time -- she was surprisingly good and had a great time. Someday, she wants to travel to the Leaning Tower of Pisa to get one of those classic photographs that makes it look like she's holding it up herself. She loves singing and acting, and being on stage in front of a live audience is one of her favorite activities. Though she loves all animals, dogs and pandas are her absolute favorites. Vanya's older sister Kavya is the 2009 Scripps National Spelling Bee champion and Vanya considers herself lucky to have such a supportive role model who embodies moral values and perseverance. Speaking of perseverance, Vanya has competed in three previous national finals, in 2010 and 2012, and in 2013 when she tied for 5th place.



### **Speller No. 92, Paul Keaton**

Scripps Howard First Amendment Center, Lexington, Kentucky  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: Christ Central School  
Hometown: Pikeville, Kentucky

History is Paul's favorite subject, and he spends much of his free time reading historical biographies. He is looking forward to the day when he will get to visit London to take in all the history in that great city. While in Washington, D.C., Paul would love to visit the White House, one important site he has never seen in real life. He always keeps a close eye on the stock market and after high school, hopes to attend the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania to study business and economics. Through dedication and hard work, he hopes to someday be as successful as Donald Trump, whom he would love to ask for any career advice. Paul's older sister Emily is a five-year veteran of the Scripps National Spelling Bee, having competed each year from 2009 through 2013 and finishing her spelling career as a Semifinalist.

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### **Speller No. 115, Neha Seshadri**

*The Detroit News*, Detroit, Michigan  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Northville Christian School  
Hometown: Novi, Michigan

Swimming is Neha's favorite sport, and she recently represented the state of Michigan in the Central Zone Swimming Championship. Singing relaxes her and helps calm her mind, but she also enjoys playing chess, dancing and baking pastries. Neha has an interest in the spiritual, and she learned how to read palms from her grandfather. There are a lot of places she'd like to visit, but because of their natural beauty and scientific importance, the Galápagos Islands are at the top of her list. Her greatest role model is none other than the Scripps National Spelling Bee's very own Paige Kimble, whom Neha met at the 2013 national finals when she tied for 12th place.



### **Speller No. 123, Hannah Jackson**

Saginaw Valley State University, Saginaw, Michigan  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Saginaw Arts & Sciences Academy  
Hometown: Midland, Michigan

Hannah is a natural athlete, practicing figure skating and running with track and cross country teams. She has hiked the High Sierras in Yosemite National Park twice, climbing to heights of more than 11,000 feet. She also enjoys theater and has acted in two productions, *Wonderland* and *Aladdin, Jr.*, with a local company. The president of her local chapter of the National Junior Honor Society, Hannah was proud to be a member of the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers Science Quiz Bowl national champion team. Before spelling bees, she avoids carbohydrates and sugar, and she always dons her lucky cherry necklace and headband. Hannah previously competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in both 2012 and 2013.



### **Speller No. 127, Mark Kivimaki**

Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: Valley View Middle School  
Hometown: Edina, Minnesota

Mark is fascinated by linguistics, and he speaks fluent French and intermediate-level Finnish. He is also interested in history, physics and psychology, and he wants to go into either linguistics or math when he grows up. After school, he participates in cross country and track, as well as a number of academic extracurriculars. He enjoys competing in the National Geographic Bee program, he was a Minnesota state runner-up in Academic Triathlon, and he was on a world champion Knowledge Master Open team. If he could go anywhere in the world, he would visit Iceland to explore the rich history and, more importantly, see active volcanoes. His role model is steel mogul and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who came into the world a poor Scottish immigrant and left it as one of the richest men in U.S. history.

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### **Speller No. 132, Faaris Khan**

*Columbia Daily Tribune*, Columbia, Missouri  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Gentry Middle School  
Hometown: Columbia, Missouri

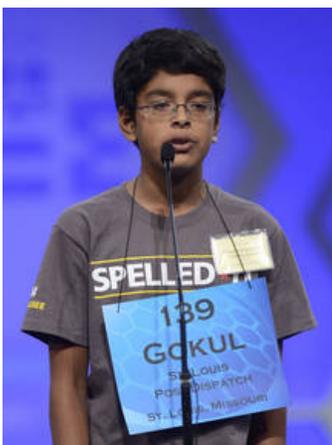
At his school, Faaris is on the track and field team, but he stays active in other ways, as well. He enjoys playing basketball and has a black belt in taekwondo. Other likes include computers, pizza and watching movies, and his favorite film is *World War Z*. He has won his school's National Geographic Bee four times, and advanced to the state level of the competition twice. He is also very interested in the mechanics of airplanes, and would like to live in Florida when he grows up. Faaris previously competed in the 2011 and 2013 Scripps National Spelling Bees.



### **Speller No. 135, Jade Samanta**

Three Rivers Community College, Poplar Bluff, Missouri  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Trinity Lutheran School  
Hometown: Cape Girardeau, Missouri

Jade expresses his creativity through drawing, origami, and playing guitar and piano. When he grows up, he wants to go into neuroscience, hoping to attend Duke University to study medicine. Because he wants to make significant contributions to science, it's natural that his greatest role model is Albert Einstein, whose work has taught Jade a lot about dedication and perseverance. Even though science is his best subject, Jade also has a keen interest in ancient history. He wants to visit the Smithsonian museums to learn more about our world, and someday he wants to travel to Egypt to learn about how people lived thousands of years ago. Jade competed in the 2013 Scripps National Spelling Bee.



### **Speller No. 139, Gokul Venkatachalam**

*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, St. Louis, Missouri  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: Parkway West Middle School  
Hometown: Chesterfield, Missouri

One of Gokul's hobbies is photography, so it's no surprise that he hopes he can someday visit Hawaii to take in the gorgeous scenery and capture it with his camera. He also spends time watching basketball, and he looks up to Miami Heat forward LeBron James. *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio is his favorite book, and he likes both rap and alternative music, from artists like Eminem and Imagine Dragons. Gokul also enjoys action movies, especially the hilarious *21 Jumpstreet*. Gokul tied for 10th place in the 2012 Scripps National Spelling Bee and tied for 19th place in 2013.

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### **Speller No. 146, Sanjana Malla**

*The Record and Herald News*, Hackensack, New Jersey  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Fieldstone Middle School  
Hometown: Haverstraw, New York

Sanjana plays both the violin and the keyboard, and she is also a talented dancer, practicing Indian classical dance whenever she can. In her down time, she enjoys drawing and skiing. She hopes to one day travel to Europe to see as many of the amazing landmarks and historic sites as she can. Sanjana would most like to meet First Lady Michelle Obama, who works hard in her prestigious role to support her country. Sanjana previously competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2012, when she tied for 22nd place. When Sanjana won her regional spelling bee in 2012, "Cake Boss" Buddy Valastro brought in a huge cake that was featured in a segment for his TLC television show.



### **Speller No. 152, Lydia Loverin**

*Times Union*, Albany, New York  
Age 15, 6th grade  
School: Mountain Road School  
Hometown: Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Lydia is a prolific writer who has won first place at the Berkshire Athenaeum's annual Children's Short Story Writing contest three years in a row. Her role model is Neil Gaiman because he is a successful fantasy author who also helps students discover their own writing styles. In her free time, Lydia takes piano lessons and acts in various performances by the Berkshire Theater Group. Her interest in acting combined with a love of fantasy and science fiction has encouraged her to explore the pop-culture worlds of steampunk and cosplay. She is also active in 4-H, participating in clubs such as the Humane Heroes and conducting presentations on sustainable resources. Before every spelling bee, she has a cup of hot tea to calm the nerves and never forgets to don her good luck charm, a necklace with a small elephant pendant.



### **Speller No. 154, Sriram Hathwar**

Corning Rotary Club, Corning, New York  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Alternative School for Math and Science  
Hometown: Painted Post, New York

When not studying spelling, Sriram plays the oboe, piano and chess to keep his mind stimulated. He also enjoys more active pursuits including badminton, tennis, basketball and ice skating. Reading also brings him pleasure, and he encourages others to read by volunteering at his local library. A seasoned traveler, Sriram has been all over the world, but he still has Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland, France and South Africa on his travel bucket list. Because he has been to the Scripps National Spelling Bee four times already, Sriram once produced a TEDx talk about his experiences in the Bee. He previously competed in the Bee in 2008, 2009, 2011 when he tied for 6th place, and 2013 when he placed 3rd.

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### **Speller No. 159, Sai Vishudhi Chandrasekhar**

*Daily News*, New York, New York  
Age 15, 7th grade  
School: Hunter College High School  
Hometown: Flushing, New York

Sai Vishudhi is a humorist whose favorite "newspaper" is *The Onion* and who once won a Gold Key in humor from the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. When not working on jokes, she focuses on writing and directing plays. She also figure skates, swims and sings in her free time. Someday, she would like to visit Athens, Greece, to see the Parthenon and all the other historic sites. Helen Keller has always inspired Sai Vishudhi because of her perseverance and drive to overcome her physical disabilities to become a successful author and activist. Sai Vishudhi previously competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2013.



### **Speller No. 164, Alaina Kenny**

*The Post-Standard*, Syracuse, New York  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Onondaga Hill Middle School  
Hometown: Syracuse, New York

Alaina is a talented athlete who has already earned four varsity letters in track and field events and logged more than 1,200 miles of running in the last year. She also plays the flute in her school's flute ensemble and concert band, and piano in her school's jazz ensemble. In her free time, she enjoys reading, especially *Divergent* or *Catching Fire*, and singing with the Harmonizers, a school choral group. Over the past few years, she's learned all about France through her French classes and can't wait to visit Paris to try out her language skills. In fact, French is Alaina's best subject in school, and last year she placed first in Central New York and tenth nationally in *Le Grand Concours*, a national French contest. Though she knows that she'd like to study medicine to become a neonatologist -- a pediatrician who specializes in newborn care -- she's not yet sure where she wants to go to school; ask her again in a few years.



### **Speller No. 165, Dylan O'Connor**

*Watertown Daily Times*, Watertown, New York  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: Alexandria Central School  
Hometown: Alexandria Bay, New York

Dylan, a bit of an Anglophile, loves watching *Doctor Who* and has a special place in his wardrobe for bow ties, because "bow ties are cool." One day, he would love to visit London to see some of the places "the Doctor" visits on his adventures. Until then, he spends his free time playing Pok?mon and studying the sciences. He also loves percussion and plays in a local steel drum band. Before every spelling bee, Dylan heads to a local deli, Jreck Subs, and orders a salami sub on wheat with Swiss cheese, Russian dressing and pickles, with a side of cheesy ranch fries. That must be a winning combination, because Dylan also earned spots in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2012 and in 2013.

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### Speller No. 183, Harry Harman

Ohio University's Scripps College of Communication, Athens, Ohio  
Age 15, 7th grade  
School: East Muskingum Middle School  
Hometown: New Concord, Ohio

Harry has an affinity for music and, in addition to possessing perfect pitch, he composes songs and plays both the saxophone and the piano. His love of music is even reflected in his favorite movie *Forrest Gump*, an Academy Award nominee for Best Original Score. When not playing music, Harry can be found participating in both musical theater and the Boy Scouts of America. Harry's other passion is sports: he loves watching SportsCenter and rooting for any team from Pittsburgh. In fact, his favorite athlete, Mario Lemieux, is a former Pittsburgh Penguin.



### Speller No. 184, Max Danner

Ohio University's Scripps College of Communication, Athens, Ohio  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Oakstone Academy  
Hometown: Lewis Center, Ohio

With only three letters in his first name, it makes sense that Max made a concerted effort to learn how to spell one of the longest words around: "pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis." When he isn't spending time spelling unusually long words, he can be found reading graphic novels, playing Minecraft and practicing the piano. He's also a writer, and several of his Halloween writing contest stories have been published by *The Columbus Dispatch*. A burgeoning Anglophile, Max's favorite musician is English artist Peter Gabriel, and the place he'd most like to visit is London, to take in the city's rich history as well as to learn more about his British ancestors.



### Speller No. 187, Joseph Cusi Delamerced

WCPO, Cincinnati, Ohio  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: The Summit Country Day School  
Hometown: Cincinnati, Ohio

Before every spelling bee, Joseph eats a hearty meal of bacon, eggs and rice. He is an avid writer and competes in the Power of the Pen competition every year. His family is from the Philippines, and when Typhoon Haiyan hit the country in late 2013, he helped raise relief funds through his school's service club. Joseph is a two-time gold medalist in the National Etymology Exam and regularly competes in the National Junior Classical League Latin Convention. This summer, he is visiting Russia, and he's very excited to see the famous Russian White Nights. Joseph comes from a spelling family. Both his sister, Anna, and brother, Tino, are past competitors in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Joseph himself has competed in the bee twice, first in 2011 and tying for 12th place in 2013.

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### **Speller No. 188, Ashwin Veeramani**

Northeast Ohio Media Group, Cleveland, Ohio  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Incarnate Word Academy  
Hometown: North Royalton, Ohio

With a diverse portfolio of interests, Ashwin is fascinated by everything from international commerce to biomedical engineering research to investing and the stock market. In his free time, Ashwin plays golf and the piano. At school, he is involved in the Spanish and Latin clubs. It seems only natural then that his favorite movie is *The Dead Poet's Society*, which popularized the Latin phrase "carpe diem." Ashwin previously competed in the Bee in 2013, tying for 33rd place. His sister Anamika is the 2010 Scripps National Spelling Bee champion.



### **Speller No. 207, Aparajita Rao**

WITF: Public Media for Central Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: St. Joan of Arc School  
Hometown: Hummelstown, Pennsylvania

Aparajita is a creative soul who spends time drawing, developing cartoons and doing illustrations for animations. She is even creating a comic based around her spelling bee experiences. One of her favorite things to do is voice acting, and she prides herself on being able to mimic accents and voices of all kinds. When she grows up, she wants to go into concept art and character development. In addition to English, Aparajita speaks Hindi, Spanish and French, and is learning German and Tamil (which many of her family members speak). Aparajita previously competed in the 2013 Scripps National Spelling Bee.



### **Speller No. 226, Benjamin Kulas**

Crossings Nashville Action Partnership, Antioch, Tennessee  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Middle Tennessee Home Education Association  
Hometown: Nashville, Tennessee

A cyber security enthusiast, Benjamin was part of a team that competed in Carnegie Mellon University's picoCTF "Toaster Wars." He loves reading "all the time and about anything," and his favorite book is Terry Pratchett's *The Colour of Magic*. He also has an interest in giving back to the community - much like the one person he'd most like to meet, Alfred Nobel, founder of the Nobel Prize. For the last two years, Benjamin helped raise money for Safe Haven Family Homeless Shelter's "Hike for the Homeless." Benjamin also competed in the 2011 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

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### Speller No. 231, Maria Kaltchenko

*The Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, Tennessee  
Age 15, 7th grade  
School: Tupelo Middle School  
Hometown: Tupelo, Mississippi

Maria likes to read, cook, swim, play the violin in her school orchestra, and run cross country. She also loves to travel, and the Tuscany region of Italy tops her list of new places she'd like to visit. Both of Maria's parents were born and raised in Russia, and she considers her mother Svetlana her most important role model. "She motivates me to do my best, she tells me to pursue my dreams relentlessly, and she has supported me in all my endeavors," says Maria. She would like to study medicine one day at Johns Hopkins University. Maria won first place in the Mississippi Letters About Literature writing competition, placed second in the 2014 chapter Mathcounts competition, and earned top regional honors in the 2014 Mississippi Council of Teachers of Mathematics tournament. She is participating in her first Scripps National Spelling Bee and is most looking forward to visiting the United States Capitol while in D.C. She's also looking forward to meeting her fellow spellers, because "only a spelling bee champion can understand the indescribable feelings of joy, relief and exhilaration of winning a spelling bee."

### Speller No. 232, Kate Miller

*Abilene Reporter-News*, Abilene, Texas  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Big Country Home Educators  
Hometown: Abilene, Texas



Film analysis, knitting Rodentia, and "crafting irreverent travesties of pop songs" top Kate's list of hobbies. She is also a Girl Scout and has won the Bronze and Silver Awards -- in 2010 and 2013, respectively. An aspiring writer, Kate imagines what it would be like to spend a day with the Brontë sisters and even wrote a short story that was produced for an episode of the television program Green Screen Adventures. Kate previously competed in Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2012 and 2013. With six more dictionaries in her private collection than in her local library, it's no surprise she is making her third appearance at the Bee.

### Speller No. 235, Lokesh Nagineni

*The Dallas Morning News*, Dallas, Texas  
Age 17, 8th grade  
School: Lamar Middle School  
Hometown: Flower Mound, Texas



Lokesh plays piano and soccer, is a member of his local swim team, and has earned his black belt in karate. He is interested in mythology and studying the human brain, and would ultimately like to study neuroscience at Duke University. Lokesh is visiting Washington, D.C., for the first time, and has his sights set on visiting the Library of Congress during his stay. Lokesh is fluent in Telugu and Spanish and lists his grandfather as his most important role model.

## 2014 SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE FINALISTS



### **Speller No. 237, Ansun Sujoe**

Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: Bethesda Christian School  
Hometown: Fort Worth, Texas

Ansun is so musically gifted that he not only plays piano, guitar and bassoon, he also has perfect pitch. In other words, he can instantaneously identify or sing any given musical note without a reference pitch. Ansun also enjoys playing chess, solving complex math problems and programming robots. In his spare time, he ministers to seniors in nearby nursing homes. Ansun is making his second trip to the Scripps National Spelling Bee; he also participated in 2013.



### **Speller No. 238, Shobha Dasari**

Houston Public Media, Houston, Texas  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: Pearland Junior High West  
Hometown: Pearland, Texas

Shobha enjoys arts and crafts as well as dancing Bharata Natyam, a classical Indian dance form. At school, her best subject is science and she would ultimately like to pursue a career in medicine or medical research. To prepare for her career, she would like to attend Johns Hopkins University and is hoping to visit the campus during her time in the D.C. area. Someday, Shobha would love to visit Europe and indulge her interest in the languages and cultures of Germany and France. She was a national runner-up in the 2013 South Asian Spelling Bee. In her 2013 debut at the Scripps National Spelling Bee, she advanced to the Semifinals and finished in a tie for 19th place.



### **Speller No. 239, Syamantak Payra**

Houston Public Media, Houston, Texas  
Age 16, 8th grade  
School: Westbrook Intermediate School  
Hometown: Friendswood, Texas

Syamantak is an accomplished violinist, playing in his school's chamber orchestra and earning a superior plus rating the last three consecutive years at the Gold Cup Music Competition organized by the Texas Federation of Music Clubs. He placed ninth at the 2014 chapter Mathcounts competition and scored in the top one percent in the American Mathematics Competition last November. Syamantak enjoys creative writing and has published more than a dozen poems and essays in various anthologies, magazines and books. He is competing in his second Scripps National Spelling Bee after advancing to the Championship Finals and tying for seventh place in 2013.

## 2014 SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE FINALISTS



### **Speller No. 247, Muriel Cotman**

*Victoria Advocate*, Victoria, Texas  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: The Acorn School  
Hometown: Cuero, Texas

Muriel sings in the church choir and plays piano, but her favorite music to listen to is a bit of a surprise: she's a fan of oldies, especially her favorite group, The Beatles. Muriel's love of words shows no sign of fading in her post-Bee life -- she hopes to be a writer and study English literature in college. Her mom quizzes her to help prepare for a spelling bee, but Muriel also wears her bee necklace at each competition for good luck. She has earned Bronze and Silver Awards from the Girl Scouts of America, as well as several medals from the Private School Interscholastic Association.



### **Speller No. 255, Samuel Pereles**

*The News-Virginian* and *The Daily Progress*, Charlottesville, Virginia  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: Kate Collins Middle School  
Hometown: Waynesboro, Virginia

Samuel is usually busy performing on the stage and the field -- he received scholarships for tap dancing and also plays on a traveling soccer team. When not dancing or cheering on his favorite basketball player, LeBron James, Samuel plays the French horn and spends time with his miniature dachshund, Truffles. In the future, Samuel would like to study biomedical engineering at Harvard University, as well as visit Tanzania to see the Serengeti National Park and Mount Kilimanjaro. Samuel previously competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2013.



### **Speller No. 260, Ankita Vadiala**

*Prince William Today*, Manassas, Virginia  
Age 15, 7th grade  
School: Stonewall Middle School  
Hometown: Manassas, Virginia

Ankita's interest in zoology and love of nature has given her a special connection with animals -- many times she feels like she can understand their thoughts and emotions! Ankita is a Disney enthusiast who loves the song "Let It Go" from *Frozen*, and takes vocal lessons to improve her own singing. Telugu is her first language, and spicy Indian vegetarian food is her top choice for a meal. Though her best subject is creative writing, Ankita is open to a career in biology or cardiology and hopes to attend Harvard University.

## 2014 SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE FINALISTS



### **Speller No. 262, Jae Canetti**

*Fairfax County Times*, Reston, Virginia

Age 15, 6th grade

School: Hunters Woods Elementary School for the Arts and Sciences

Hometown: Fairfax, Virginia

Jae is an enormous baseball fan. He plays Little League, and he and his father travel around the country to see minor league baseball games. They have been to 11 games so far, as well as to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. During his travels, he also collects baseball hats and currently has more than 70. Interestingly, the word *sabermetrics* -- the statistical study of baseball -- was one of his words in two of his last five county spelling bees. In addition to baseball, Jae is dedicated to his academics; he is a Davidson Institute Young Scholar and recently received high honors at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Talented Youth. Jae previously competed in the 2012 and 2013 Scripps National Spelling Bees, tying for 22nd place in 2012.



### **Speller No. 263, Tejas Muthusamy**

*Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Richmond, Virginia

Age 14, 5th grade

School: Rivers Edge Elementary School

Hometown: Glen Allen, Virginia

Tejas is learning Bharata Natyam, a type of South Indian classical dance, but he's just as likely to rock out to "Roar," by Katy Perry! Tejas also stays active as a member of a competitive swim team. Olympic champion Michael Phelps is his role model, and Tejas uses Phelps' example of humility and determination as inspiration to do his best. Recently, Tejas has started learning how to cook and can already prepare both chutney and raita. A wordsmith in more ways than just spelling, this year he was one of only 16 in the nation to earn a perfect score in two consecutive meets in the Gold division of the WordMasters Challenge, an analogy and verbal reasoning competition. When he travels, Tejas collects refrigerator magnets from each destination -- he has close to 40 magnets so far.



### **Speller No. 264, Shayley Martin**

*The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, Virginia

Age 16, 8th grade

School: Floyd County High School

Hometown: Riner, Virginia

Shayley is not afraid to try unfamiliar foods, and she often makes trips to ethnic food markets to pick up new delicacies -- like durian or mysterious giant fish heads! She also grows her own produce and raises chickens for eggs, then blogs about the meals she creates. Shayley is the first person to win her area's spelling bee four times: she hopes to translate this obvious love for words into a writing career and is already at work on her first novel. Shayley is a leader in her youth group and helps to write plays that are performed at her church. She owns four cats: Pork Chop, Twilight, Anastasia, and Sillybandz; and one dog, Tater. Shayley has competed in every Scripps National Spelling Bee since 2011, and tied for 33rd place in 2013.

**2014 SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE**  
**FINALISTS**



**Speller No. 270, T?a Freedman-Susskind**

Town Hall Seattle, Seattle, Washington  
Age 16, 7th grade  
School: Lakeside Middle School  
Hometown: Redmond, Washington

T?a's family is a widespread bunch -- she has a relative on every continent except Antarctica. She's interested in environmental science, and counts Nobel Prize winner Rosalyn Sussman Yalow as her favorite historical figure because of her scientific discoveries and fortitude in the face of discrimination. T?a's creative writing talent has been on display in the magazines Stone Soup, Muse and Creative Kids, and last year she placed 2nd in the Washington State River of Words poetry contest. She has two hermit crabs, Eyeball and J, and a parakeet, Leafy. She would love to visit Jerusalem for its interesting history, and Tel Aviv because it is a major hub of scientific activity.



**THE 2014 SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE**  
**CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS**

THURSDAY, MAY 26  
8:00 P.M.  
LIVE ON ESPN