Speller No. 9, Melodie Loya
The Daily Star, Oneonta, New York
Age 12, 6th grade
School: Sidney Area LEAH
Hometown: Bainbridge, New York, USA

Since Melodie began reading at the age of four, she has had a fascination with words. As proof, her walls are decorated with 3x5 notecards with the words she has misspelled on them! Melodie likes to write, and she won the PBS Kids Writers Contest when she was in 3rd grade. Over the years, Melodie has enjoyed participating in a science program called "Girl Power" that is hosted by Kopernik Observatory & Science Center. Some of Melodie's hobbies include baking, crafts, origami and reading. She keeps a list of challenging dessert words, and she likes to bake the desserts!

Speller No. 25, Sohum Sukhatankar
Dallas Sports Commission, Dallas, Texas
Age 11, 5th grade
School: Sloan Creek Intermediate School
Hometown: Allen, Texas, Collin

Sohum loves soccer and is a fan of Lionel Messi. Sohum enjoys reading and checks out a dozen books from the library every other week. His favorite author is Rick Riordan. In addition, he loves math, solving puzzles and traveling. Sohum has visited the Bahamas, Canada, Mexico, Belize, India, Bahrain, and Honduras, and he will visit Europe in the summer. He is putting his language skills to use for a nonprofit organization, translating books into English. Sohum hopes to become a surgeon so that he may help extend and save lives, and he aims to donate some of his services to the poor and needy in developing countries.

Speller No. 27, Rohan Sachdev
PAGE of Wake County, Raleigh, North Carolina
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Carnage Magnet Middle School
Hometown: Cary, North Carolina, United States

Rohan is a very motivated tennis player, and he considers the sport his true passion. Rohan travels all over the United States to play in the southern and national-level tournaments. He plays every match with focus, grit and perseverance. He is the number one tennis player in the state of North Carolina for 8th graders. Rohan aspires to be like tennis icon Roger Federer, who is his role model. Rohan tied for 39th place in the 2015 Scripps National Spelling Bee, and his brother Rahul competed in 2016.

Speller No. 36, Erin Howard
Adventure Travel, Birmingham, Alabama
Age 12, 6th grade
School: Mountain Gap P-8 School
Hometown: Huntsville, Alabama, United States

Erin loves all kinds of art. She plays both the trombone and the piano, draws and sketches, and writes short stories. In addition, she reads books from several different genres voraciously, but her favorites are science fiction and fantasy. Erin and her friends enjoy playing Undertale, an adventure role-playing game, and listening (or rather, shout-singing along) to the soundtrack of Hamilton: An American Musical. She loves to watch Doctor Who, the longest-running sci-fi TV show ever, and her favorite Doctor is the 12th one. She would like to attend Harvard University and become a pediatrician. Erin tied for 22nd place in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 37, Varad Mulay
The Oakland Press, Pontiac, Michigan
Age 13, 8th grade
School: Novi Middle School
Hometown: Novi, Michigan, USA

Varad's favorite movies are those in the Mission: Impossible series, and his favorite book series is the Lorien Legacies series. He loves swimming and practices for almost eight hours a week. Varad enjoys playing cello and singing Indian classical music. At school, he is mainly interested in social studies. Varad aspires to be a business consultant. He enjoys watching and keeping up with politics.

Speller No. 43, Helena Thompson
Harnett County Spelling Bee Collaborative, Lillington, North Carolina
Age 12, 7th grade
School: Highland Middle School
Hometown: Sanford, North Carolina, United States

Helena was born in Missouri, but she has spent most of her life in a lot of different states. When she gets older, she wants to either be a figure skater, a manga artist or a butler. She gets a lot of support about these things from her friends, family and her cat, Savannah. Helena is a huge fan of anime and manga, and she is learning to play the piano.

Speller No. 65, Samhita Kumar
The Sacramento Bee, Sacramento, California
Age 11, 6th grade
School: Winston Churchill Middle School
Hometown: Gold River, California, United States

Samhita enjoys a number of extracurricular activities and participates in speech, debate and quiz bowl tournaments. She plays tennis and learns Carnatic music (a form of Indian classical music). She is also a member of a First Lego League robotics team, the Thunderbots. Samhita devours books and has a particular fondness for the Harry Potter series and The School for Good and Evil series. Although she wanted to be a popcorn seller when she was in 1st grade, Samhita has now decided to pursue a career in a STEM field.

Speller No. 75, Mira Dedhia
Commonwealth Edison, Chicago, Illinois
Age 14, 8th grade
School: McClure Junior High School
Hometown: Western Springs, Illinois, United States

Mira is excited to return to the Scripps National Spelling Bee this year! She loves spelling and participating in spelling bees. In addition to spelling, she has participated in extracurriculars such as math club and lacrosse. Her favorite subject is math. Mira has played piano for almost seven years, and she enjoys learning a variety of new songs, including classical as well as modern and pop music. She is currently learning some songs by Coldplay and John Legend. Mira competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2016, and her mother, Lekshmi Nair, competed in 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Speller No. 99, Brendan Pawlicki
The Macomb Daily, Macomb, Michigan
Age 10, 5th grade
School: St. Lawrence Catholic School
Hometown: Shelby Township, Michigan, USA

Brendan enjoys playing the trumpet with his older bandmates. He likes and listens to all types of music. Brendan also loves playing basketball, and his team won their school division (they were the Catholic Youth Organization champions). Brendan loves to play and watch ice hockey. He can quote players, jersey numbers and pertinent statistics for all NHL teams.

Speller No. 109, Paul Hamrick
Monterey County Office of Education, Salinas, California
Age 13, 7th grade
School: Home school
Hometown: Monterey, California, USA

Paul lives in Monterey, California, with his parents and two younger brothers. He is homeschooled. Paul likes to read adventure and mathematics books. He enjoys math, history, spelling, reading, and games, and he plays the piano, trumpet, and the French horn. Paul enjoys traveling with his family and playing games like Monopoly, Life, and Magic: The Gathering with his brothers.

Speller No. 114, Shrinidhi Gopal
East Bay Times , Walnut Creek, California
Age 13, 8th grade
School: Gale Ranch Middle School
Hometown: San Ramon, California, USA

Shrinidhi loves spelling and geography and puts lot of effort into learning new words/facts every day. In her free time, she likes to read books such as the Kiki Strike series and classics such as Anne of Green Gables and The Swiss Family Robinson. Shrinidhi also enjoys playing the piano and practicing Carnatic vocal music. She eventually wants to pursue a career in medicine.

Speller No. 128, Owen Kovalik
Akron Beacon Journal, Akron, Ohio
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Medina Christian Academy
Hometown: Medina, Ohio, USA

Owen enjoys reading fantasy novels, following current events, and playing classical music on piano and violin. His favorite musicians are violinist Joshua Bell and pianist Mitsuko Uchida. Latin is his favorite school subject, and he is particularly interested in the history of the Roman Empire. Owen likes to play four square with his classmates. He is also fond of playing Mario video games. Whenever he has a reason to celebrate, Owen likes to eat at his favorite gourmet burger restaurant. Owen has competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee twice previously, tying for 22nd place in 2015 and in 2016.

Speller No. 136, Grant Taylor
Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, Lubbock, Texas
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Lubbock Christian School
Hometown: Lubbock, Texas, United States

Grant enjoys all forms of learning. He likes playing the piano and the trumpet, and he is one of a few with true perfect pitch. He has performed in the All Region Junior High Symphonic Band the past two years. He thrives in academics, excelling in science, math, Latin and history. He has even toyed somewhat with computer programming. Grant's all-time favorite thing to learn about is the history of video games. He will spend hours researching and then applying that knowledge. He hopes to one day be able to combine his musical and academic gifts, computer savvy, and love of all things video game-related to develop something new and unique. Grant competed in the 2015 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 143, Tejas Muthusamy
Richmond Times-Dispatch, Richmond, Virginia
Age 14, 8th grade
School: George H. Moody Middle School
Hometown: Glen Allen, Virginia, United States

Tejas loves learning about governments and cultures of various countries around the world. He aspires to use this knowledge to become a diplomat or a politician. Outside of politics and geography, Tejas enjoys studying English and history in school. Tejas also loves reading, and his favorite author is Ayn Rand due to her unique perspective. His favorite book is Animal Farm, and his favorite movie is Remember the Titans. Tejas has competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee three times previously: in 2014 he tied for 8th place, in 2015 he tied for 7th place, and he tied for 22nd place in 2016.

Speller No. 163, Nikhil Lahiri
Corning Rotary Club, Corning, New York
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Alternative School for Math and Science
Hometown: Painted Post, New York, USA

Nikhil has multiple interests in athletics, music and scholastics. He represents his school in Mathcounts, and he enjoys competitions such as the geography bee, spelling bee, and Future City Competitions. He plays the piano, oboe, and guitar and participates in school chorus. He is a probationary tae kwon do black belt and enjoys running local races. He also participates in competitive tennis and swimming. In his free time, Nikhil loves playing video games, hanging out with his brothers and enjoying the beautiful outdoors of upstate New York.

Speller No. 167, Sreeniketh Vogoti
The Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville, Florida
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Fruit Cove Middle School
Hometown: Saint Johns, Florida, United States of America

Sreeniketh is fascinated with languages, and he is currently learning Spanish and Esperanto. In his spare time, Sreeniketh explores an assortment of topics, from philosophy to psychology, history to calculus. Tennis, chess and music are a few avocations he often finds himself indulging in for leisure. Sreeniketh plays the clarinet in his school band, and was selected for his county's honor band. Sreeniketh is enthusiastic about both math and science due to their logical, straightforward nature. He aspires to study at an Ivy League college such as Princeton University. Sreeniketh participated in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee (tied for 7th).

Speller No. 176, Maggie Sheridan
Ohio University's Scripps College of Communication, Athens, Ohio
Age 13, 7th grade
School: Lexington Junior High School
Hometown: Mansfield, Ohio, USA

Maggie is a triplet with her two sisters, Katie and Kristie. She loves spelling and learning new words. She is an avid football fan, and her favorite college team is the Ohio State Buckeyes. She admires coach Urban Meyer because he puts together such a talented team year after year. She also likes the Cleveland Indians and the Cleveland Cavaliers. Maggie's favorite subject in school is math. In the future, she is considering a career in writing and hopes to travel the world.

Speller No. 180, Daniel Chen
Quest Literacy Consortium, Diamond Bar, California
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Loving Savior Lutheran School
Hometown: Chino Hills, California, USA

Daniel has played the violin for four years, and he plays during church worship. He enjoys math and playing video games. He recently reached Platinum 5 in the game League of Legends. Daniel also likes to play soccer and basketball. He would like to thank God for all of his talents. Daniel competed in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 187, Saketh Sundar
Howard County Library, Columbia, Maryland
Age 11, 6th grade
School: Mayfield Woods Middle School
Hometown: Elkridge, Maryland, United States of America

Saketh has been good at math from a young age and attends an accelerated gifted and talented math program. This year Saketh received an award for high honors from the Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University. Saketh plays the violin and is part of his school's orchestra. He is part of the student government association at his school, and he is also involved in news team, film, coding and debate clubs. Saketh likes watching football, especially his favorite team, the Baltimore Ravens. Justin Tucker is his favorite player because he is very accurate. Saketh wants to be a gastroenterologist when he grows up because he wants to cure people with stomach disorders. Saketh participated in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 189, Rutvik Gandhasri
KPIX-TV & KCBS Radio AM & FM, San Francisco, California
Age 13, 8th grade
School: Chaboya Middle School
Hometown: San Jose, California, United States

Rutvik is very interested in Lego toys, robotics and Lego robotics. He built a table-mopping robot that cleans tables by driving until it detects the edge, then backing away. It then turns around and continues to the other edge, traveling in a snake-like pattern until it reaches the end of the table. It cleans the table of small debris like eraser shavings and paper scraps using the mop attached behind it. Rutvik admires basketball player Kevin Laue because he worked hard despite being bullied for only having one arm. Rutvik's name means "scholar of the Vedas," and he also shares his name with a town in Sweden. Rutvik competed in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee (6th place).

Speller No. 191, Alice Liu
St. Louis Post-Dispatch, St. Louis, Missouri
Age 10, 5th grade
School: Wild Horse Elementary School
Hometown: Chesterfield, Missouri, United States of America

Alice is rarely without a smile on her face. She not only enjoys spelling but also is talented with math. Alice was a state champion and represented Missouri at a national math contest in 2016, and she hopes to participate this year, too. During her free time, she likes to read, play basketball, dance and swim. Alice also loves to play piano and violin. When she gets the chance, she enjoys going on vacations, especially to beaches. She aspires to become a hematologist and help cure kids with leukemia and blood-related diseases.

Speller No. 200, Raksheet Kota
Houston Public Media, Houston, Texas
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Beckendorff Junior High School
Hometown: Katy, Texas, USA

Raksheet is deeply involved in many school activities, including Mathcounts, American Mathematics Competitions, Science Bowl and Science Olympiad. Raksheet and his twin sister, Rakshita, started a math and science club at their elementary school to prepare students for educational competitions. Some of his favorite movies are the Batman trilogy and the Mission: Impossible movies. He also enjoys playing tennis and video games.

Speller No. 205, Siyona Mishra
Orlando Sentinel Communications, Orlando, Florida
Age 13, 8th grade
School: Orlando Science Middle High School
Hometown: Orlando, Florida, USA

Siyona loves spelling and learning different languages. In her free time, she loves to play badminton, listen to music, play piano and read books. Sometimes, she also likes to solve jigsaw puzzles and build structures with Lego bricks. Siyona competes for Math and Science Olympiad. In Mathcounts, her team won the regional competition and placed fifth in the state competition. She will be competing for National Science Olympiad in May 2017, and she also competed for the National History Bee and the United States Geography Olympiad in Chicago in 2016. Siyona wishes to attend Johns Hopkins University to pursue a medical degree. She participated in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2015, tying for 9th place.

Speller No. 207, Tara Singh
Louisville Spelling Bee Collaborative, Louisville, Kentucky
Age 12, 7th grade
School: Louisville Classical Academy
Hometown: Louisville, Kentucky, U.S.A

Tara first qualified for the Scripps National Spelling Bee when she was seven years old and was the youngest speller at the 2013 Scripps National Spelling Bee. She competed in the 2013, 2015, and 2016 (placed 22nd) Scripps National Spelling Bees. In her free time, Tara is an avid reader and writer of fantasy fiction. She also loves to write stories in Latin, a language she has been studying since she was seven years old. She has earned honors in the Scribo! International Latin Composition in 2015 and 2016. Her short story, "Iter Ad Cretam" (Journey to Crete), was selected for publication in 2016. Tara has also earned a gold medal in the National Etymology Exam and multiple gold medals in the National Mythology Exam.

Speller No. 210, Naysa Modi
The News-Star, Monroe, Louisiana
Age 11, 6th grade
School: River Oaks School
Hometown: Monroe, Louisiana, United States

Naysa enjoys being in the limelight! She has performed stand-up comedy, shayaris (Hindi and Urdu poetry), dancing, and, of course, spelling. Naysa is also very physically active. She is a blue belt in tae kwon do, and is part of her school's track team. She has also been a voracious reader since kindergarten. By 2nd grade, Naysa had read many book series, including the entire Harry Potter Series. She is working to get accepted into Harvard University so she can study medical science there. Naysa dreams of becoming a brain surgeon and experimenting with switching human brains. She admires Emma Watson and gymnast Simone Biles for their dedication to their work. Naysa previously participated in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2015 (tied for 50th place) and 2016 (tied for 46th place).

Speller No. 214, Ashrita Gandhari
The Daily Item, Lynn, Massachusetts
Age 10, 4th grade
School: Franklin Elementary School
Hometown: North Andover, Massachusetts, USA

Ashrita found an interest in reading books when she was four years old. Her favorite books are Hush, Lara's Gift, The Mighty Miss Malone and Counting by 7s. Her favorite author is Jacqueline Woodson, who is the official poet laureate of the United States. Being a voracious reader, spelling was second nature for Ashrita, who began her spelling bee journey as a kindergartner when she first participated in South Asian Spelling Bee. Outside of academics, she is part of her school's writing program. Playing the piano is her passion, and she has been learning since she was six years old. She is also learning Bollywood dancing. Ashrita really likes to swim and enjoys playing soccer, tennis and badminton. Her idol is tennis star Serena Williams. Ashrita would like to be an exobiologist and explore the life chances on other planets such as Mars. In her spare time, she likes to cook and watch movies, including her favorite movie, The Jungle Book.

Speller No. 227, Enya Hubers
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada (Central Ontario & Greater Toronto), Burlington, Ontario, Canad
Age 11, 6th grade
School: Home school
Hometown: Burlington , Ontario, Canada

Enya plays piano and cello, and she sings with a choir. She stays active with speed skating and participating in triathlons. To keep herself even busier, she also has a paper route. Enya is passionate about science and wants to be a veterinarian, physician or biomedical engineer when she grows up. She has composed songs for the piano and cello, including "Calm and Perilous River" and "Musical Instruments Gone Wild." Enya is also an animal lover and has a white cat named Charlotte with heterochromia: one green eye and one blue eye.

Speller No. 235, Rohan Rajeev
The Oklahoman, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Oklahoma Christian School
Hometown: Edmond, Oklahoma, United States of America

Rohan wants to thank Jesus Christ for giving him this platform and opportunity. Rohan has been competing in spelling bees since the age of eight. Outside of spelling, he enjoys playing the piano, particularly pieces by Beethoven, and competing in chess tournaments. He also loves to play soccer at a local league. Watching soccer is one the many things Rohan enjoys doing in his free time, and Arsenal is his favorite soccer club. He also loves to watch NBA games, especially when his favorite team, the Oklahoma City Thunder, is playing. Rohan hopes to study neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University and become a neurologist.

Speller No. 245, Jashun Paluru
Administrator Assistance, Brookston, Indiana
Age 12, 7th grade
School: Battle Ground Middle School
Hometown: West Lafayette, Indiana, United States

Jashun is a part of his school's Mathcounts team, and he will be competing in his state Mathcounts competition again this year. He is a member of the Boy Scouts of America and is a First Class scout. Jashun reveres camping, and it is one of his favorite pastimes. He likes watching movies, and his favorite movie is Star Wars. He loves going to India and would love to go again this year. Jashun also loves playing video games with his friends. He plays the French horn in a jazz band, even though the French horn is not a jazz instrument. He would like to become a neurosurgeon, a biomedical engineer or an aeronautical engineer. Jashun placed 10th in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 254, Shourav Dasari
Houston Public Media, Houston, Texas
Age 14, 8th grade
School: McCullough Junior High School
Hometown: Spring, Texas, USA

Shourav has been participating in spelling bees since he was in 2nd grade. He enjoys playing tennis in his free time, as well as watching football or basketball. His favorite basketball player is James Harden. Shourav enjoys playing the violin for his school's orchestra. He participated in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2016, where he tied for 11th place. Shourav's older sister, Shobha, competed in 2013, 2014 and 2015.

Speller No. 259, Alex Iyer
San Antonio Express-News, San Antonio, Texas
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Geneva School of Boerne
Hometown: San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alex loves music because it helps him to relax while studying. He considers himself a cinephile, and he loves movies. Alex is a black belt, and he plays tennis and the cello. He is the president of his school's National Junior Honor Society. Alex earned third place in his school's oratory competition for Martin Luther King's Acceptance of Nobel Prize speech. He has enjoyed numerous travel adventures with his family, including journeying to the Dunn's River Falls, ziplining in Jamaica, parasailing in Florida, and relaxing at the beach in Cozumel, Mexico. Alex tied for 22nd place in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 264, Ananya Vinay
The Fresno Bee , Fresno, California
Age 12, 6th grade
School: Fugman Elementary School
Hometown: Fresno, California, United States

Ananya is a natural speller and an avid reader. In her free time, she imagines stories that she has not written down yet. She loves watching movies and playing with her younger brother, although not necessarily in that order! She considers spelling a sport and actually does enjoy spelling words like "dghaisa," which is pronounced "d?s?(TM)." Her favorite sport is basketball, and she is a Golden State Warriors fan. Last year, Ananya volunteered for the Fresno Community Food Bank, and she and her friends organized a food drive for Thanksgiving. Ananya competed in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 265, Catherine Chung
Yoon's English School, Seoul, South Korea
Age 14, 7th grade
School: Yangji Middle School
Hometown: Sejong-si, Sejong, South Korea

Catherine has always done her best to ensure that she's surrounded by words, whether she's at school, at home or on a bus. Her favorite hobbies are writing in a variety of genres and reading as many books as she can get her hands on. Recently, she has taken up computer programming as a new subject of interest, and she looks forward to the day she will be able to write her own programs. As well as listening to many diverse types of music and playing the piano, Catherine spends a lot of her free time watching her favorite TV show, Doctor Who. Catherine's favorite subject in school is science, and in the future she hopes to pursue a career as an astrophysicist. Catherine tied for 22nd place in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 276, Akshra Paimagam
The Charlotte Observer, Charlotte, North Carolina
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Randolph Middle School
Hometown: Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Akshra enjoys studying molecular biology and hopes to pursue a career in oncology. She is inspired by Bill Gates (with whom she shares her birthday) for his philanthropy in the field of cancer research. She envisions one day she will change people's lives like he has. She is excited to be attending the Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins this summer to study biology. Akshra was part of the NASCAR foundation PIT Crew Science Project's winning team, which won a $50,000 grant for her school. Akshra is part of the Science Olympiad varsity team, which will be competing for the state title this spring. In her free time, Akshra enjoys reading classics such as Les Mis?rables. Music and ballet help her relax, and violin is her favorite instrument. Akshra tied for 39th in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2015, and this year she hopes to improve her final standing.

Speller No. 278, Shruthika Padhy
Rosa International Middle School, Cherry Hill, New Jersey
Age 11, 6th grade
School: Rosa International Middle School
Hometown: Cherry Hill, New Jersey, United States of America

Shruthika is a voracious reader, and she also loves solving math problems. She is quite passionate about learning Indian classical music, and she sings in her school's chorus and plays the piano and flute. She is a member of her local swim team, runs cross country, and does track and field, as well as other sports in the summer. During her leisure, Shruthika likes to read books, listen to music, and watch basketball, football, and her favorite TV show, Shark Tank. Shruthika tied for 22nd place in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee, and she hopes to improve her place this year.

Speller No. 280, Srikar Chamarthi
Midland Reporter-Telegram, Midland, Texas
Age 12, 7th grade
School: Abell Junior High School
Hometown: Odessa, Texas, USA

Srikar's role model is Albert Einstein because one day Srikar would like to be "famous for his brains," too. In the future, he would like to pursue a career in chemical or aerospace engineering. Srikar competed in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 281, Thomas York
Southeast Service Cooperative , Rochester, Minnesota
Age 14, 8th grade
School: St. Francis of Assisi School
Hometown: Rochester, Minnesota, USA

Thomas plays saxophone, piano and guitar. He also plays hockey, football and baseball. His favorite athletes are Pavel Datsyuk, Marshawn Lynch and Miguel Cabrera. Thomas plans to be a doctor, engineer or professional athlete when he is older. Thomas' father, Michael York, competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 1982.

Speller No. 287, Nicholas Ivan
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis , Indianapolis, Indiana
Age 13, 8th grade
School: Sycamore School
Hometown: Carmel, Indiana, United States

Nicky enjoys learning new words, whether as practice for the spelling bee or to use in essays and even casual conversation. He is also very involved at school, participating in science bowl, Mathcounts, and the history bee. Nicky is intrigued by pathogens, and when he was in the 4th grade, he threw a party dedicated to parasites. He hopes to attend Stanford University and study to become an infectious disease specialist. This is Nicky's first year at the Scripps National Spelling Bee, after placing second at the regional spelling bee two years prior to this win.

Speller No. 288, Aisha Randhawa
The Press-Enterprise, Riverside, California
Age 11, 6th grade
School: Garretson Elementary School
Hometown: Corona, California, United States

Aisha is a fan of NPR, and she especially enjoys listening to "Radiolab." Science and math are her favorite subjects. Her science fair project won first place in her school district in the subject of toxicology. She studied the effect of cell phone microwave radiation of larvae fruit flies. Aisha also enjoys playing the piano. She often puts on musical shows with her sister, Lara, and her twin brothers, Arav and Avi. They call themselves LA³ after their initials. Aisha hopes to one day become an ophthalmologist. She tied for 22nd place in the 2016 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Speller No. 291, Marlene Schaff
Schaff Family Homeschool, Lake Forest, Illinois
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Schaff Family Homeschool
Hometown: Lake Forest, Illinois, USA

Marlene has been playing with letters since she was an infant, first with wooden alphabet blocks, then with wooden letters, and now with the letters that drift from her mind to her hand as she scribes them onto paper. Letters were some of her first toys and remain equally intriguing to her today. Marlene's love of words is not limited to English; she has been learning and speaking German since she was a toddler, and she hopes that she will get a lot of German words in the Bee! When she's not reading, she's probably writing poetry or short stories, drawing, or delving into her family's genealogical history. Marlene also loves to fence ?p?e, as she finds wielding a sword against her opponents to be very gratifying. She also enjoys spending time outside, where you can find her biking, making fairy gardens, bouncing around on a pogo stick and learning to walk on stilts. In addition, Marlene has an obsession with baking, particularly bread. She aspires to author and illustrate children's books after studying at her dream schools: King's College London and the University of Cambridge. Marlene competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2016, tying for 46th place.

**THE 2017 SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE
CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS**

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