

2015 SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE CHAMPIONSHIP FINALISTS



Speller No. 90, Vanya Shivashankar

The Olathe News, Olathe, Kansas
Age 13, 8th grade
School: California Trail Middle School
Hometown: Olathe, Kansas

Vanya isn't afraid of being on stage in front of a bunch of strangers. Whether she's spelling at the microphone or acting in a play, she enjoys entertaining and performing. In addition to acting, Vanya also plays tuba and piano, and she recently won the Mid-America Music Association award for Exceptional Pianist and Jazz Pianist. When she's not performing, Vanya likes to hang out and eat pizza with her sister Kavya (the 2009 Scripps National Spelling Bee champion), who is Vanya's role model. Vanya swears that she could (and would) eat pizza every single day for the rest of her life. She likes riding her bike and swimming, and is involved at school with the WEB Team and KAY Club. Vanya previously competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2010, 2012 (tied for 10th place), 2013 (tied for 5th place) and 2014 (tied for 13th place).



Speller No. 140, Gokul Venkatachalam

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, St. Louis, Missouri
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Parkway West Middle School
Hometown: Chesterfield, Missouri

Gokul takes to spelling like his idol LeBron James does to basketball. In addition to playing basketball, Gokul is a fan of rap and alternative music, counting among his favorite artists Nas, Linkin Park and Macklemore. When he's not listening to music, he likes to read -- his top pick is *Life of Pi* -- or watch his favorite movie, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. At school, Gokul is drawn to math and economics. He dreams of attending Stanford University and studying business so that he can become an entrepreneur or a stockbroker. Gokul previously participated in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2012 (tied for 10th place), 2013 (tied for 19th place) and 2014 (3rd place).



Speller No. 200, Cole Shafer-Ray

The Oklahoman, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Alcott Middle School
Hometown: Norman, Oklahoma

While he is in Washington, D.C., Cole hopes to have a chance to see his first Major League Soccer game. He plays the sport competitively himself, and would love to meet professional soccer player Lionel Messi and get some tips. When it comes to learning about history, Cole's accomplishments mirror his spelling success, as he will compete in the National History Bee in May. To relax, Cole likes listening to rap and hip hop, and playing FIFA 15. Cole previously participated in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2013 and 2014.

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Speller No. 16, Snehaa Ganesh Kumar

The Sacramento Bee, Sacramento, California
Age 12, 7th grade
School: Folsom Middle School
Hometown: FOLSOM, California

Snehaa is fascinated with ancient Greek history, culture and mythology, and would love to visit Athens someday. An artistic soul, Snehaa loves drawing, crafting jewelry, writing stories, playing the violin and dancing. Snehaa has performed jazz, contemporary dance and ballet for four years. To Snehaa, spelling itself is an art, and she has competed in a wide array of spelling bees -- including a Spanish spelling bee when she was only a kindergartner! A pet lover, Snehaa is especially drawn to dogs, and she's been caring for a tropical fish (a danio) named Juliet for the past three years.



Speller No. 132, Dev Jaiswal

Mississippi Association of Educators, Jackson, Mississippi
Age 13, 8th grade
School: Winston Academy
Hometown: Louisville, Mississippi

Dev's love for video games goes beyond the fun of playing; he has an acute appreciation for video game music as well. When he isn't playing video games, Dev is often reading or playing basketball. He is very dedicated to karate and has won a number of awards in martial arts. Dev likes pretty much any food as long as it's made by his mom -- and as long as it doesn't include mustard, which he's never tried. When he is older, he hopes to become an astronaut. Dev's sister Rani participated in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2010, and Dev previously participated in 2012.



Speller No. 238, Siddharth Krishnakumar

Houston Public Media, Houston, Texas
Age 13, 7th grade
School: Pearland Junior High West
Hometown: Pearland, Texas

Siddharth's best subject in school is math, and he participates in the math and science club. He is also a member of his school's Future Problem Solving club, and he placed 6th in Junior Team Global Issues Problem Solving at the Future Problem Solving Program International Conference in 2014. In his downtime, Siddharth enjoys reading, listening to music and playing tennis. In the future, he would like to study robotics engineering at MIT.

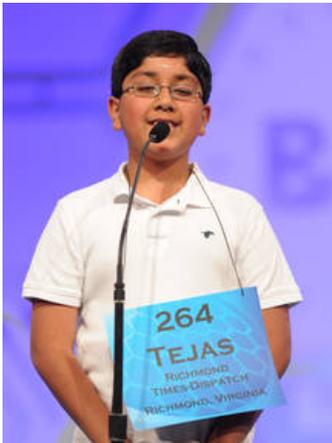
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Speller No. 92, Paul Keaton

Scripps Howard First Amendment Center, Lexington, Kentucky
Age 14, 8th grade
School: Christ Central School
Hometown: Pikeville, Kentucky

Paul dreams of one day starting his own business and would love the chance to meet Donald Trump to get some business advice. In his free time, one of Paul's interests is following publicly traded companies. Paul enjoys trivia and watching his favorite television show, Jeopardy! In addition to playing basketball and chess, Paul likes listening to classical music. Paul's sister Emily competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee from 2009 to 2013, when she tied for 13th. Paul and Emily enjoy spelling against one another, but they have agreed not to compete against each other after they had such a lengthy stalemate that the county spelling bee was suspended and other children were sent home. Paul previously competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2014 (tied for 13th place).



Speller No. 264, Tejas Muthusamy

Richmond Times-Dispatch, Richmond, Virginia
Age 12, 6th grade
School: George H. Moody Middle School
Hometown: Glen Allen, Virginia

Tejas takes time to see the world from different perspectives. He has observed it from the Empire State Building in New York City, Chicago's Willis Tower and the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. While in Washington, D.C., he hopes to visit the International Spy Museum because of his appreciation for the work that they do while facing life-or-death situations. Tejas swims, practices karate and Indian Classical dance, and also enjoys hiking on trails in the Appalachian Mountains. His varied interests will undoubtedly help to lead him to his dream school, Harvard University, where he hopes to study biology or public policy. Tejas previously competed in 2014 (tied for 8th place).



Speller No. 29, Sylvie Lamontagne

The Denver Post, Denver, Colorado
Age 12, 7th grade
School: Creighton Middle School
Hometown: Lakewood, Colorado

Sylvie likes to keep moving. If she's not running races or dancing, she's hiking those stunning Colorado mountains -- nearly 100 miles of them in 2014. Back at home, Sylvie enjoys caring for her seven fish and two chinchillas. With an aquarium full of mostly unnamed fish (minus her plecostomus, Winnie), Sylvie is inspired to learn more about marine biology and will perhaps work with aquatic life after college. In the near future, Sylvie plans to exercise her creative side by writing some Harry Potter fan fiction. One of her favorite hobbies is correcting grammar and spelling errors, so we can expect top-notch writing out of Sylvie!

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Speller No. 39, Siyona Mishra

Orlando Sentinel Communications, Orlando, Florida

Age 11, 6th grade

School: Orlando Science Middle High School

Hometown: Orlando, Florida

Siyona likes to read, listen to music and dance, and her checklist of must-see prehistoric sites includes Easter Island, Stonehenge and Mohenjo Daro. One of Siyona's favorite hobbies is solving math problems, and she is on her school Mathcounts team and math club. She has also been selected as a Broadcom MASTERS nominee. In her free time, Siyona loves challenging herself with chess or taking on a friend at badminton.



**THE 2015 SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE
CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS**
TheSpellingChamp.com
THURSDAY, MAY 28
8:00 P.M.
LIVE ON ESPN