

CHARACTER LIST

THE SPELLERS (in order of appearance)

CHIP TOLENTINO [actor also plays JESUS]

The reigning spelling champion of Putnam County, relatively athletic and social, he expects things to come easily to him. Lately though, he's been going through some weird changes, and things are slipping out of his control. (Be aware when casting his solo requires him to sing a lot of high notes a lot of times.)

LOGAINE SCHWARTZANDGRUBENHIRE

Younger than most bee participants, she is driven by internal and external pressure-- but above all by a desire to win to make her two fathers (from whom she takes her combined last name) proud. She lisps, is a little uncomfortable in her body, has some ties, but still manages to strike a strong presence with her political awareness and keen sense of justice. Having drilled words for hours a day, she is aware of everything that passes in the room.

LEAF CONEYBEAR [actor also plays CARL DAD]

A second alternate, he never expected to compete here today. Home-schooled with his many siblings, everything about this public bee is an adventure for him, from meeting the other kids to showing off his homemade clothing, to each moment of unexpected attention. He may have severe Attention Deficit Disorder but delights in his own wandering focus. Leaf doesn't expect to win-- or even to spell one word correctly-- but he finds absolutely everything incredibly amusing. His mother has made him wear his protective helmet to the bee.

WILLIAM BARFEE

Has a host of health problems and a lot to prove. Loud and combative as a defensive posture, he is the fat kid who becomes a bully to avoid being picked on (though he often gets picked on anyway so gets into a lot of fights). His parents are divorced, his father remarried to a much younger woman, and William does not expect kindness from anyone but his mother. So friendship takes him by surprise. Still, he's noticed on the spelling circuit for his remarkable technique-- spelling words out on the floor with his feet. Taken out of competition last year because of an ill-timed allergic reaction, he's here for vindication. The journey he doesn't expect is one of coming to care about someone else-- when he sees outside his own needs for perhaps the first time, it stakes him fundamentally.

MARCY PARK

The ultimate over-achiever, Marcy has never been given another option. She comes from a family where excellence is expected and so simply produced. A parochial school student, she assumes God, too, expects perfection. She sees herself as a mess of problems but she keeps them to herself. Having moved often because of her parent work, she knows she can beat the local competition. Her many talents include piano, dance, martial arts, baton twirling, and/or whatever special gifts you can find in your casting pool.

OLIVE OSTROVSKY

A word lover, Olive has a fairly quiet life. An only child with often-absent parents, Olive spends a lot of her time alone. She fills some of that time reading the dictionary—the words bring her comfort, as does the idea of the vastness of the world the book contains. During the first half of the bee, she often peeks into the audience to see if her father, who is delayed at work, has made it yet. She starts enormously shy and shyly blossoms.

THE ADULTS (in order of appearance)

RONA LISA FERRETTI [Actor also plays OLIVE's MOM in fantasy]

Putnam's long-time spelling bee hostess, a local realist, and 3rd annual Putnam County spelling champion. This is the Rona's day to be queen. From her perspective she keeps the bee running smoothly, upholds protocol, and conveys crucial information to the audience. Her interest in the competition is unflagging and drive it forward. She thinks of this as a complex cerebral sporting event, and she wants the audience to understand every twist and turn. If anything, in her life in general, she has to minimize the importance of this event to her, embarrassed that her own championship moment remains such a highlight. A little concerned when the substitute word pronouncer arrives, she knows she has to step up her game to make the day a success.

VICE PRINCIPAL DOUGLAS PANCI of Lake Hemingway Dos Passos Junior High is frustrated with his life. He fell into education, less out of love than a general ability uncoupled to a particular passion. The drive of the young spellers is alien to him. He never found anything that important. Stuck in his current job, endlessly awaiting a promotion that isn't coming, he was not happy to get the call this morning that he was needed to substitute; but he starts the bee eager to do well, to redeem himself for past mistakes, and to impress the local hostess, Rona Lisa, who impressed him long ago.

MITCH MAHONEY (Actor also plays DAN DAD, and OLIVE's DAD in fantasy)

With a bruncer's physique and demeanor, Mitch appears an odd choice to be the bee's "comfort counselor," but it's part of his community service assignment. The outsider, who in a way gets to inhabit the audience perspective, he wonders about the wisdom of putting the kids through this at all. He has no idea how to offer comfort, but does increasingly find himself wishing he could find a way to make the kids feel better about losing, and perhaps place misspelling in wider perspective.

A NOTE ON DOUBLING

The doubling of roles as listed above was built into the original premise. However should you wish to accommodate a larger cast it is hypothetically possible to separate the following roles:

SCHWARZY's FATHERS:

CARL GRUBENFERRER (CARL DAD, normally played by actor playing Leaf) Schwarzy's main trainer, the more intense and competitive of Schwarzy's fathers.

DAN SCHWARZ (DAN DAD, normally played by actor playing Mitch) the more laid back and ineffectual of Schwarzy's fathers.

LEAF'S MOM, DAD, and SIBLINGS (normally played by the spellers and audience volunteers as indicated in script) - all more academically gifted than Leaf, they are even more surprised than he is at his success.

OLIVE's MOM (normally played by actor playing Rosa) A fantasy version of Olive's mom at her Ashram in India

OLIVE's DAD (normally played by actor playing Mitch) A fantasy version of Olive's dad coming to the bee from work.

JESUS CHRIST (normally played by actor playing Chip) Duty invoked by a speller in need.