



(Left to right) Nupur Lala, Harry Altman and Ashley White contestants at the 2002 National Spelling Bee.

Learning to Bee

Standing up for words.

SPELLBOUND: (Documentary) Directed by Jeffrey Blitz. Produced by Blitz and Sean Eigler. Cinematography, Blitz. Music, Daniel Hulsizer. Editor, Yana Gorskaya. Spellers: Harry Altman, Angela Arenivar, Ted Brigham, April DeGideo, Neil Kadakia, Nupur Lala, Emily Staggs and Ashley White. HBO/Cinemax Documentary Films. Think Film, 2003. G. 97 minutes.

Words: Some of us love them. When I was a kid, my father helped me practice my spelling words every week. I looked forward to classroom spelling bees, and from grades 5 through 8, I was one of the top spellers. Competition to be the last speller standing was fierce, but it was nothing compared to the pressure felt by the eight kids in this documentary film. They're going to the National Spelling Bee.

In 249 regional contests throughout the country, the top spellers receive a trip to the National Bee in Washington, D.C., which is televised by ESPN. The media assault is daunting to some shy spellers, and the whole shebang is similar to an athletic event. A lot of expectations ride on the performance of these kids, many from small rural schools. Students from immigrant or underprivileged families seem to have more at stake, because their parents are hopeful for different reasons.

The spellers have at most a few months to prepare as they move through local contests to regional and then on to the nationals, where all contestants know the unyielding rule — one bad letter, and you are out of the game.

The first half of Jeffrey Blitz's lovely film follows three boys and five girls — Ted, Neil, Harry, Ashley, April, Nupur, Angela and Emily — through an ordinary day as they rev up for the nationals.

A diverse group from a wide socioeconomic range, these kids sacrifice precious social time with peers to read dictionaries, memorize word lists culled from previous national bees, learn Latin roots and spellings from other languages. Some parents hire tutors, and in other families, various members take turns calling out words. Some parents are intense and focused, and all are proud. The schools provide less help than you might expect.

Angela is a clear-eyed, smart girl from the Texas border country, who lives in a small house on a large ranch, where her father works. He speaks only Spanish, but his eyes sparkle when he looks at Angela.

He accompanies her to Washington. Angela's school also recognizes her accomplishments. Ashley is a sweet but realistic girl, who's growing up in the D.C. housing projects with her mother. In her own words, Ashley overcomes the "trials and tribulations" that come her way. Although she's surrounded by an extended, loving family, Ashley receives no help in preparing for the nationals from her school.

Neil is the child of Indian immigrant parents, following the protocol that helped make his sister an earlier contestant at the national. Neil's father spares no effort to train his son with tutors and around-the-clock drills. He also tries to instill in this yet unformed boy his own palpable hunger to succeed. But Neil is a level-headed boy who shoots hoops to relax. In contrast, Harry is a talker, a quirky kid with a great, expressive face. His mother tries to channel Harry's surplus energy into studying for the contest, but it's clear that this kid takes on the competition for himself.

I was also attracted to Nupur, who lives in Florida with her parents, also from India. More centered and mature than many of the other contestants, Nupur is neither driven nor scattered, just calmly bright and focused. Emily is a bundle of energy. Her family is the most well-off, and the parents are supportive, but Emily also carries her own motivation to succeed.

The second half of the film takes place at the National Bee. I was mesmerized by the courage of these young people, standing up before a national television audience, their peers onstage behind them, a phalanx of press in front of them, and families and friends off-camera rooting for them. In that context, their eagerness to spell a myriad of difficult words that have worked their way into American English from so many languages and over such great historical and geographic distance speaks well for the future of literacy in this imperiled democracy.

Spellbound opens Friday, June 27 at the Bijou. It's a naturally suspenseful, hilariously human and genuinely dramatic film, with not a single car-chase scene or special effects monster. Very highest recommendations for the whole family. **EW**

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SPELLBOUND
 5:15, 7:15 & 9:15 Nightly
 SAT & SUN MAT 3:15

Ends Tuesday, July 1st!
 "The Dancer Upstairs resonates with emotional intelligence of Graham Greene...its rhythms take hold and pull you in."
 — Elvis Mitchell, NEW YORK TIMES

THE DANCER UPSTAIRS directed by John Malkovich
 9:00 Nightly SUN MAT 2:15

Ends Tuesday, July 1st!
 "The movie — simple, pure and powerful — makes us feel the intensity of both life in transit and life lived, if only for a moment, in another's skin."
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MAN ON THE TRAIN
 In French with English subtitles
 5:00 & 7:00 Nightly SAT MAT 3:00

Starts Wednesday, July 2nd!
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"Watching this delightful film, one can see why it has been winning audience favorite awards at film festivals."
 — Desson Howe, WASHINGTON POST

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HOLES - PG 1:20 3:50 6:20 8:50
HULK - PG-13 12:25 3:20 6:10 9:00
FINDING NEMO - G 1:15 3:40 6:00 8:20
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HARVARD CINEMAS 3161 W. Harvard • Roseburg • 673-6604

*HULK - PG-13 12:00 3:00 6:00 9:00
RUGRATS GO WILD - PG 12:40 2:40 4:40 6:40
FINDING NEMO - G 1:00 3:40 6:10 8:30
MATRIX RELOADED - R 8:40
STARTS 7/2: "TERMINATOR 3: ATTACK OF THE MACHINES"

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*CHARLIE'S ANGELS: FULL THROTTLE - PG-13
 12:10 1:00 2:30 3:30 4:50 6:00 7:10 8:30 9:30
 *28 DAYS LATER - R 1:40 4:10 6:45 9:20
 *ALEX & EMMA - PG-13 2:15 6:20 8:40
 *FROM JUSTIN TO KELLY - PG 2:50 7:30
DUMB AND DUMBERER - PG-13 4:30
HOLLYWOOD HOMICIDE - PG-13 6:40 9:10
2 FAST 2 FURIOUS - PG-13 12:30 4:59 9:40
ITALIAN JOB - PG-13 1:20 4:00 6:30 9:00
BRUCE ALMIGHTY - PG-13 1:30 3:50 6:10 8:50
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CHARLIE'S ANGELS* (PG-13) 10:25, 10:55, 12:05, 1:05, 1:35, 3:20, 3:50, 4:30, 6:30, 7:05, 7:35, 8:05, 9:15, 9:50, 10:30, 10:55	RUGRATS GO WILD (PG) 11:50, 2:15, 4:35
28 DAYS LATER* (R) 10:05, 1:00, 4:00, 7:25, 10:35	DADDY DAY CARE (PG) 10:45, 1:30
THE HULK* (PG-13) 12:00, 12:30, 3:15, 3:45, 7:00, 7:30, 10:15, 10:45	DUMB & DUMBERER (PG) 10:20, 3:05, 8:00
FROM JUSTIN TO KELLY* (PG) 12:40, 5:25, 10:20	HOLLYWOOD HOMICIDE (PG-13) 4:05, [7:15], [10:15]
ALEX & EMMA* (PG-13) 11:15, 1:50, 4:25, [7:25], [10:00]	THE ITALIAN JOB (PG-13) 10:50, 1:45, 4:40, 7:50, 10:35
FINDING NEMO (G) 10:40, 11:20, 12:50, 1:25, 2:00, 3:35, 4:10, 4:45, 7:00, 7:30, 9:50, 10:30	2 FAST 2 FURIOUS (PG-13) 10:30, 1:20, 4:15, 7:20, 10:10
MATRIX RELOADED* (R) 12:10, 3:30, 7:05, 10:20	OPENING: TERMINATOR 3: JULY 1ST SHOWING AT 8:10PM, 8:25PM 11:00PM, 11:30PM
BRUCE ALMIGHTY (PG-13) 11:05, 1:40, 4:20, 7:10, 7:40, 9:55, 10:25	[] NOT SHOWING ON 7/1 *NO PASSES OR SUPERSAVERS

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BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE (PG-13) 11:35, 2:05, 4:35, 7:05, 9:45	LORD OF THE RINGS: TWO TOWERS (PG-13) 12:30, 4:30, 8:30
DOWN WITH LOVE (PG-13) 11:45, 2:25, 4:50, 7:20, 9:50	MALIBU'S MOST WANTED (PG-13) 11:55, 4:55, 9:55
FRIDA (R) 12:40, 4:40, 7:30, 10:30	SHANGHAI KNIGHTS (PG-13) 2:10, 7:15
GANGS OF NEW YORK (R) 11:25, 3:00, 6:40, 10:10	THE CORE (PG-13) 12:35, 4:00, 7:00, 10:00
HOLES (PG) 11:20, 2:00, 4:45, 7:25, 10:05	WRONG TURN (R) 12:00, 2:30, 5:10, 7:40, 10:25
HOW TO LOSE A GUY IN 10 DAYS (PG-13) 11:30, 2:15, 5:00, 7:45, 10:35	X2: X-MEN UNITED (PG-13) 12:20, 3:55, 7:10, 10:15

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