

With spelling bee canceled due to coronavirus, two teens launch online bee

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.29.20

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Level 580L



Image 1. Shourav Dasari of Spring, Texas, at the Scripps National Spelling Bee in Oxon Hill, Maryland, June 1, 2017. With this year's bee canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic, an online spelling bee launched by two Texas teenagers is offering a consolation prize of sorts, with competitors nationwide including many who were considered favorites for the national bee title. Photo: Manuel Balce Ceneta/AP Photo

The Scripps National Spelling Bee was canceled because of the coronavirus. The contest is the top spelling bee in the United States. Now, two Texas teenagers have started their own bee. It will take place online. Many spellers who were considered favorites to win Scripps have already signed up.

Many events have been canceled because of the new coronavirus. The flu-like illness is spreading quickly across the world. For some, the disease can be quite serious.

The SpellPundit Online National Spelling Bee will be held the last week of May. SpellPundit will use the same format as Scripps. The champion will receive \$2,500. The prize is way less than Scripps' \$50,000. Still, the money is worth the effort for a middle-schooler.

More than 200 spellers have already signed up. Many are from last year's top 50 at Scripps.

Not Going To Replace Scripps

"Obviously I don't think we're going to replace Scripps," said 17-year-old Shourav Dasari. He is from Woodlands, Texas. Shourav founded SpellPundit with his 19-year-old sister, Shobha. SpellPundit is a spelling tutoring company.

The Dasaris are both ex-spellers. They decided to have a bee when they realized Scripps would not happen.

SpellPundit is counting on the spellers to be honest. Webcams will continuously record the spellers' movements. If spellers get outside help, they will be removed.

Shourav Dasari thinks they can make the bee better. Last year, eight people won Scripps. Most of the winners used SpellPundit. People said the bee was broken.



Words Had Been Too Easy

Shourav said the Scripps words had been too easy. "They had been repeated in bees before." The Dasari siblings will write the word lists for their bee. They think they will have one winner.

At least SpellPundit is offering a nationwide spelling contest. The opportunity is particularly important for eighth-graders. This was the last year they could have taken part in Scripps. Only elementary and middle school students can enter the bee.

Parents of eighth-graders are upset. They want Scripps to find a way to let their kids take part. One idea is to let ninth-graders enter next year. Another is a smaller event for this year's top eighth-graders.

Shourav feels for the eighth-graders. Not knowing how they would have done feels worse than falling short. He thinks they should get to take part next year. "I also think that they should probably get another year of eligibility," Shourav said.

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article states the MAIN idea of the entire article?
- (A) The contest is the top spelling bee in the United States.
 - (B) Now, two Texas teenagers have started their own bee.
 - (C) Many events have been canceled because of the new coronavirus.
 - (D) Still, the money is worth the effort for a middle-schooler.
- 2 A main idea of the section "Words Had Been Too Easy" is that it will be sad for eighth graders to miss the Scripps Spelling Bee. Which key detail from the section supports this MAIN idea?
- (A) Shourav said the Scripps words had been too easy. "They had been repeated in bees before."
 - (B) The Dasari siblings will write the word lists for their bee. They think they will have one winner.
 - (C) At least SpellPundit is offering a nationwide spelling contest. The opportunity is particularly important for eighth-graders.
 - (D) Not knowing how they would have done feels worse than falling short. He thinks they should get to take part next year.
- 3 WHY did people think the Scripps National Spelling Bee was broken last year?
- (A) because many spellers used SpellPundit
 - (B) because there were eight winning spellers
 - (C) because it was canceled due to the coronavirus
 - (D) because it stopped giving out prize money
- 4 How does having the spelling bee online affect spellers?
- (A) It makes it OK for them to get outside help.
 - (B) It makes it easier for them to spell quickly.
 - (C) It means webcams will record their movements.
 - (D) It means only elementary school students can enter.

Answer Key

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