

THE POWER OF THE BEE

Bees Make More Than Honey - They Make Confident Children (4/1/12)

Ask any adult whether he or she ever participated in a spelling bee as a child, and you usually get a smile followed by "The Word". "The Word" is the one that tripped you up as a spelling bee contestant and brought about your swift elimination. Months of studying down the drain because you left out that one silent consonant. But that's OK; you usually got some consolation juice and cookies.

Spelling bees have hit the big time recently. ESPN -- the biggest sports media brand in the world -- airs the National Spelling Bee from Washington D.C. every year. There was an award-winning Broadway music written about a spelling bee and the gamut of emotions expressed by everyone involved -- contestants, parents, judges. Even the Vice-President of the United States - Dan Quayle - infamously misspelled the word "potato" (he put an 'e' on the end) at an elementary spelling bee in New Jersey in 1992.

But the truth is, the spelling bee has always been big. Like politics, all bees are local. They touch almost every American student, providing at least one memory that usually sticks, a memory that we call "The Word". *Winning* a spelling bee, though, is not the only measure of success. *Participation* is. Every correct word is a little victory, and every misspelled word, a lesson in grace and acceptance. In that regard, victory is all but inevitable for every single child. That American institution known as the spelling bee is a wonderful thing.

At Woodcrest School, a private elementary school in Tarzana, every student in grades one through five participates in the school's annual bee -- one of the biggest academic events of the school year at Woodcrest. That means that by the time they graduate into middle school, Woodcrest students have experienced the joys and the disappointments, the preparation and the pressures, of the Spelling Bee five times. The Woodcrest Spelling Bee is one of those moments where you can see a child growing up right before your eyes. The academic benefits (spelling increases writing fluency, reading fluency and speaking ability) and life experiences in self-esteem and grace under pressure make the Spelling Bee an invaluable rite of passage. Experiencing it once is powerful. Experiencing it five times is superior.

- John Khouri is the Executive
Director of the Woodcrest School.
"The Word" for him was "clique".