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Parma Heights teen headed to Washington after spelling bee win

By Sarah Jane Tribble, The Plain Dealer

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Lonnie Timmons III, The Plain Dealer

Anamika Veeramani, a student at Incarnate Word Academy in Parma Heights, won the Plain Dealer Cuyahoga County Scripps National Spelling Bee at Cuyahoga Community College. She also won last year. (Lonnie Timmons III / The Plain Dealer). CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Anamika Veeramani barely edged out the competition to win her second consecutive Plain Dealer Cuyahoga County Scripps Spelling Bee Saturday.

The 13-year-old duelled it out with Anshika Niraj in the final tense moments of the bee as both spelled a host of words, including "pugilist," "meniscus," "surreptitious," "Graustark," and "strabismus."

In the end, Veeramani clinched the victory with the correct spelling of "pyrethrum" -- a word with Greek and Latin roots that means "any of various chrysanthemums with finely divided and often aromatic leaves."

The bee on TV

Watch Plain Dealer Cuyahoga County Scripps Spelling Bee winner Anamika Veeramani compete in Washington for the national championship:

Semifinals: Live on ESPN from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday, June 4.

Championship finals: Live on WEWS Channel 5 from 8 to 10 p.m. Friday, June 4.

Easy, right?

Veeramani, an eighth-grader from Incarnate Word Academy in Parma Heights, had been studying since September by reading dictionaries and examining the list from the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

She used the same technique to win last year's local spelling bee and place fifth at the national competition, which she'll compete in once again this June.

In all, 47 students took the stage Saturday to compete for a spot in Washington, D.C. Some looked relaxed, yawning and stretching during breaks and mouthing words into the audience. Others, though, appeared downright nervous, staring at their feet as they answered questions and mock-writing on their hands in an effort to visualize the spelling of a particularly tricky word.

In the audience, parents and coaches scribbled madly on their notepads, shook their heads at difficult words and gave a thumbs up for success.

For first-year competitor Jonathan Poilpre, the experience was well worth it. The 12-year-old from Garfield Middle School in Lakewood slipped late in the competition on the word "wherewithal," mistakenly adding an extra "l" to the end.

But that's OK, he said. He plans to try again next year.

Reigning champion Veeramani can offer words of advice. Before the competition, Veeramani studies but also likes to read a lot -- she just finished "Flowers for Algernon," by Daniel Keyes.

During the competition, Veeramani makes sure to ask the judges all the questions she can before spelling a word. That includes clarifying pronunciation, asking for the word's origin and asking for the word to be used in a sentence.

"Before I spell it, I try to see the word in my mind," Veeramani said

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Champion speller Scott Remer of Beachwood writes book so others can be(e) like him

By Thomas Feran, The Plain Dealer

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Scott Remer of Beachwood doesn't claim to have the last word on spelling.

But as a two-time winner of **The Plain Dealer Cuyahoga County Scripps Spelling Bee**, and a former finalist in national competition, he knows plenty about a contest in which success means being letter perfect.



Peggy Turbett /

The PD Champion speller Scott Remer, a 10th-grader at Beachwood High School, has written a book to help others be successful ... uh, successful ... uh, successful, yeah, that's it ... in the Spelling Bee. Though he's now too old to compete, the Beachwood High School sophomore will cheer on the seventh- and eighth-graders in this year's Bee at **Cuyahoga Community College** today.

And he is sharing what he's learned in "**Words of Wisdom: Keys to Success in the Scripps National Spelling Bee**," a 292-page guide he spent 16 months writing.

"When I started out in the spelling bee, my mother and I looked to see what sort of resources we could find," he said. "They were pretty limited, so my mother decided to take it upon herself to coach me, and we had a good time doing it.

"What occurred to me after my bee experience was that it seemed like a rather haphazard way of going about it. I told my mother that she should write a book, because I didn't want all of the knowledge we had accrued to go to waste. She said, 'No, you should write a book.' So I did.

"There's advice from previous spellers in the contest, musings on the significance of the spelling bee and mundane advice for making the most of your experience in Washington," he said. "I wanted to craft a comprehensive and authoritative guide, and I wanted to save spellers time."

If you go

What: The Plain Dealer Cuyahoga County Scripps Spelling Bee

When: 9 a.m. today; doors open 8:30 a.m. Usually over by 12:30 p.m.

Where: Arts & Music Auditorium, Cuyahoga Community College, 2900 Community College Ave., Cleveland.

Free and open to the public

Advice for contestants

Scott Remer, who has written a book on the national spelling bee, has advice for the 47 contestants competing today in 'The Plain Dealer Cuyahoga County Scripps Spelling Bee:

- "Keep your cool. When you're onstage, it can be daunting. If you can just deal with the word and analyze it, you're more likely to get the word correct."
- "Keep the big picture in mind. No matter the outcome, just being there is a significant accomplishment. Losing is not the biggest deal. If you win, try to not inadvertently make anyone feel bad."
- "Keep reading. It will help with your spelling and give you wider appreciation for the language."

Without a guide, prepping for the Bee can be time-consuming and laborious. The only restriction on words is that they must be found in Merriam-Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

"It has 475,000 entries," Scott said. "Obviously that's a pretty wide selection."

His book, \$25 at spellingbeebook.com, compiles the words that have been favored by judges over the years, rules of the languages that the words come from, plus spelling exercises and tips.

Scott was thrilled to see last year's local winner, Anamika Veeramani of North Royalton, advance to the **Scripps National Spelling Bee** finals in Washington by spelling a word included in the book -- fedelini, which is a type of pasta.

Anamika, an eighth-grader at Incarnate Word Academy in Parma Heights, is again representing her school at the local bee.

She's coached by Janice Hearst, a fourth-grade teacher at the school, who may be the Paul Brown of spelling coaches. Incarnate Word Academy has produced seven local spelling champs since 1994. Hearst, who is in her 11th year at the school, coached the last five.

"It's the students we have," she said. "If you don't have the students with the capability and the drive and the dedication, there's only so much a coach can do. If they don't take the time to work on their own, all that I say is for naught. I've been blessed with students really giving it their all."

Scott is an avid reader, fascinated by words. He'd like to join the spelling bee staff someday.

"I hope to be a word panelist and help select the words," he said. "It's such a classy competition. I'm a little sorry I can't go back. I really did have a good time."