

# The spelling bee

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Surabhi has been bitten by the spelling-bug these days. She happens to be a member of the "cabinet" of her school in the City Beautiful. Donning the new mantle of authority came as naturally to her as the ensuing innovative ideas to resurrect the sagging and deplorable standard of English language, as she said, among her peers.

Charged anew by her new-found power, she thought of re-introducing the spelling contests for each class with a new gusto and momentum. The new student cabinet, however, chose to do everything in a very methodical manner right from the word go. The Collins, Webster's, Oxford as well as the Thesaurus came out of the closet, much to the admiration of the parents and the teachers. These consulted; words were chosen carefully, underlined and copied in the notebook with utmost precision for ready reference.

An emergency meeting of the student-cabinet was convened and the words were discussed. It was decided to consult the language teachers concerned also. The teachers' role was limited to "guidance" only so as to match the selected words with the prescribed language standards of each class level. This done, a fanciful notice, "The Spelling Bee" was promptly put up on the noticeboard. Each member of the cabinet then visited each class so as to acquaint the students with the new rules of the spelling competition. Instructions galore were passed on to the juniors with the tautness of a quivering lip betraying superior knowledge of the school matters.

The D-day finally arrived and the hopeful eyes shone in excitement at the prospects of having either to make or mar their chances of getting into the list of the "chosen few". Each member of the cabinet took charge of her allotted class and the competition was conducted smoothly, meticulously and successfully.

Next came the onerous task of judging and marking the spelling sheets. This part actually proved to be quite a hilarious experience for them. The spelling instincts and acumen of our school-going children spoke volumes about the ever-widening gap between our modern, hip life-style and a terminology to match that only betrays their shrinking knowledge of the correct understanding and usage of the English words. Alas! but for the poor Fowler's relegation into the depths of anonymity and oblivion and his fading relevance in the field of modern life. A peep into some of the words actually spoken, understood and written down by the students would prove to be an eye-opener for us.

"Archaic" was comprehended and spelled as "Our-cake", while "vociferous" conveniently became "bossiferous". "Chaos" was spelled as "Kay-oss" and "Queue" was downgraded as "Que" and also nick-spelled as simple "Q". "Chron-

ic" was made out to be "Kronik" and "wreckage" became our poor, old, "Reck-age". "Vital" was spelled as "Whytal" and "Aisle" as "Isle". The ever popular "Rendezvous" became "Brandey-voov" and poor "pious" was elevated to the more famous "Paes". "Zealous" was forced to become "jealous" and "melancholy" was understood to be "meloncoolly". "Juxtapose" had to content with "Yuchs-please" and "wrought" iron came poorly as "rot" iron. Last, but not the least, a large number of students mistook "astray" for a more fanciful "ash-tray".

Needless to say that many more "faux-pas" were committed and our age-old colonial language was mercilessly massacred and brutally butchered to adjust to the whims and fancies of our trendy teenagers and make way for their modern peek-a-boo into the contours of our revered old Queen's English. It can at best be a computer-age delight but an old grammarian's agony!