



RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 8 to 12; year 3 to 6

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A fun and heartwarming novel that explores the key learning outcome of **spelling**

THEMES

- Spelling
- Competition
- Family
- Friendship
- Bullying
- Kindness
- Shyness
- Fibbing

PREPARED BY

Deborah Abela and Penguin Random House Australia

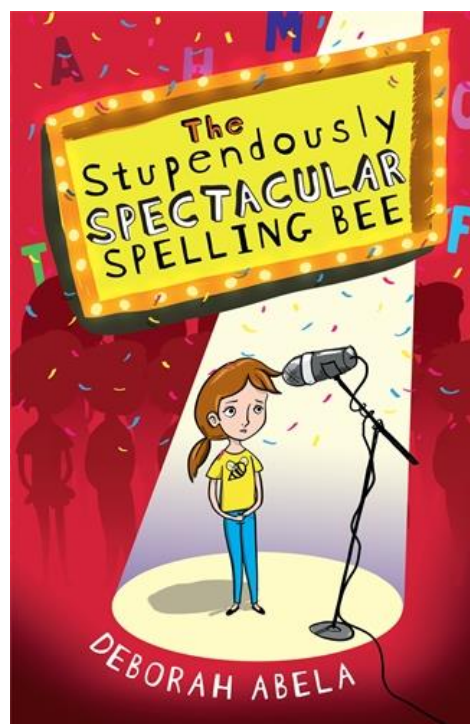
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The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee

Deborah Abela

PLOT SUMMARY

India Wimple can spell. Brilliantly. Every Friday night, she and her family watch the Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee. When the Wimples suggest she enter the next Bee, India says she's not good enough – but her family won't hear it and encourage her to sign up.

There are plenty of obstacles to reaching the finals: something in India's past has made her terribly shy, and moving on to each round costs more than the Wimples can afford.

And finally, there's Summer Millicent Ernestine Beauregard-Champion, a spoilt rich girl who is determined to win – and isn't afraid to step on anyone who gets in her way.

A heart-warming story about a girl who's afraid to follow her dreams, and the family who help make them happen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After completing a teaching degree and a BA (Comm), Deborah Abela became the producer/writer of a national kids' TV show before leaving to write over 20 novels, including the *Max Remy Superspy* and the *Jasper Zammit (Soccer Legend)* series. Her 'cranky' novels, *Grimsdon* and *New City*, were driven by her wish that we take better care of the planet, with added sea monsters, flying machines and sword-fighting girls. *Teresa: A New Australian* was inspired by her dad, who, with a million other refugees, sailed to Australia after the devastation of WW2.

Deb has won many awards for her books, including a USA IBBY Outstanding International Book Award and the Maurice Saxby Award for services to Children's Literature. She is an ambassador for Room to Read and Books In Homes.

Visit <http://www.deborahabela.com/> for more information about Deb's books.



AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Deb says:

When I was in Year 4, my teacher was Miss Gray. She was young and energetic and we were the first class she'd ever had. Miss Gray made everything fun. She loved words and stories – which, for a bookish kid like me, was perfect.

One of the first things she did was install a spinner in our class – that's a rotating stand where she slotted lots of brand new books. When she announced it was our very own class library, I was in heaven. This is where I truly remember falling in love with books and where I met one of my favourites, *Professor Branestawm* by Norman Hunter, about a crazy professor whose inventions always backfired or blew up.

Miss Gray seemed to make a game of everything and one of my favourites was our weekly spelling competition. We would clear all the desks from the

room and line up along the back wall. The girls would wait on one side and the boys on the other. Two kids would stand at the head of each line while Miss Gray called out a word and counted down from three. The two kids would race to the board and write the word in chalk. Whoever was the first to spell the word correctly earned a point. Both teams were determined to win.

I recently wrote to Miss Gray to tell her she had inspired this novel. She has only recently retired from teaching but had been following my career. When I asked if I could send her a copy of the book, she said she'd be delighted. Thank you, Miss Gray, for being one of the best teachers I ever had.

CHARACTERS

Read the following character descriptions.

India Wimple, age 12

India is bookish and quiet and smart but also very, very shy. Her shyness began years ago while performing in a school play and everything went horribly wrong. She's been terribly shy ever since.

India adores her family. This is the most important thing about her. She especially adores her young brother, Boo. Boo was born too early and when the doctors warned the Wimples he may not make it, India sat by his hospital crib, willing him to get better. With his family and sister at his side, Boo grew stronger and was finally allowed to go home, and they have doted on him ever since.

India loves living in the small country town of Yungabilla. She knows it isn't famous for anything, or a holiday destination or even on the way to a holiday, but to her, the town and its people are perfect and she wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

Dad

Dad used to be a journalist for the local paper, but the drought has meant times are tough for lots of businesses, including the paper, and he was the one who turned off the lights when it was finally shut down. He's now a handyman. He bought a cheap van with dented panels and an engine that mostly starts, and he painted a sign on the side that says, 'Arnie the Fixer: You Bust It, I Fix It'.

Sometimes people don't have enough money to pay him, so they give him IOUs or pay him in other ways: a live chicken, a freshly baked apple pie, or a handmade pair of bright yellow pants.

He's also clumsy, something that comes from daydreaming about being back at the paper.

Even though money is tight, Dad is a hopeless optimist and as long as he has his family, he knows everything will be fine.

Mum

Mum used to be a teacher at Yungabilla Primary School. It was a job she loved, but when Boo's asthma became worse, she quit and began teaching Boo from home, saying she needed to be near him *in case*. She never said in case of what, and the rest of the Wimples were happy that she didn't.

Mum and Dad met on a trip to India when they were young. It was love at first sight and, when they had their first baby, they knew exactly what they were going to call her.

Mum never tires of coming up with new stories of *Brave Boo and Ingenious India*, about a very clever girl who always knows how to get out of scrapes and her very brave brother who will scale tall buildings and face down the meanest of bad guys to make her plans happen.

Nanna Flo

Nanna Flo used to live on her own until she broke her wrist during a particularly enthusiastic yoga move and the Wimples invited her to live with them. She didn't like it at first but soon realised she was much happier surrounded by her family.

She can be stubborn and mouthy and say inappropriate things, which is part of her charm, but Dad does step in sometimes if he thinks she is about to cause trouble.

Over the years, Nanna has squirrelled away a secret stash of money from her pension and hid it in an ugly porcelain pug dog she calls Ernie. She has a beautiful singing voice and was once asked to audition for the Sydney Opera Company, but she never did because she was just plain scared. A small part of her has regretted that ever since.

Boo Wimple, age 7

Boo Wimple is India's younger brother. He's lively and funny and smart.

He and India often snuggle up at night when he finds it hard to sleep and she tells him stories of when he was a baby and almost didn't make it home from hospital. He also loves his Mum's stories of *Brave Boo and Ingenious India*.

In truth, he will never be as adventurous as Brave Boo because of his asthma. It can sneak up on an otherwise perfectly fine day and wrench his body so that he has to be rushed to hospital and hooked up on machines that whir and beep while his family hover over him trying not to look as scared as they are.

Summer Millicent Ernestine Beauregard-Champion

Summer is rich. And she likes it that way. Her parents are high-flying types who Summer rarely sees but, when she does, they bring her presents. They even bought her a helicopter, which is how she gets to the Spelling Bee.

She is smart and resourceful and always gets her way, but at night, when she's alone and her nanny is asleep in her room not far away, Summer fills her bed with the 78 soft toys her parents have bought her over the years. She knows each one by name. She pretends they are her brothers and sisters and it's only when she snuggles into the middle of them that she can fall asleep.

Summer misses her parents and decides she is going to win the spelling bee to make them notice her – and no one is going to get in her way.

Rajish Kapoor

Another competitor in the Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee, Rajish is keen to do well, but it's his dad who really wants him to win, and he follows Rajish around making him practise.

Rajish helps India to overcome her shyness, and becomes a supportive friend.

THEMES

Shyness

Discussion questions

- India's shyness began from an unfortunate event many years ago and she's been shy ever since. What was the event and why do you think it left India feeling so shy? Do you think this has any influence on why India is so protective of her brother? Why?
- When India is feeling at her most nervous, she often hears a voice inside her head that tells her she's no good and makes her feel worse:

What have you done? it said. Why did you think you could even do this? You're not just going to freeze in front of a few hundred people like you did during the school play – you're going to freeze in front of millions. (Chapter 20)

Has this ever happened to you? Describe a time when it did. How did you feel? Was there anything you could do to silence the voice? When the voice in India's head gets louder, what does she do to make it go away?

- Nanna Flo was a brilliant singer and was once asked to audition for the Sydney Opera Company but she never did. There is a small part of her that feels sad she didn't try. Has there been a time in your life when you felt really shy? Has being nervous ever stopped you doing anything you wanted to do? How did it feel? What helped you feel less nervous?
- Mum has tips for India on how to overcome her nerves. What are they? Imagine you are India's best friend. What would be your three top tips for what can help overcome feeling nervous?

Family

India adored her family – it was the most important thing about her. There was her younger brother, Boo, Mum, Dad and Nanna Flo. (Chapter 1)

Discussion questions

- Why is India's family the most important thing about her? When India's family first ask her to sign up for the Spelling Bee, why does she say no? Why does she later change her mind?
- When Boo was born too early and he was very sick, India sat by his hospital crib and didn't move until he was better. Boo loves hearing India retell this story, especially after an asthma flare-up. Why do you think he likes hearing it? Why do you think India doesn't mind retelling it even though she has told it many times before?
- When Boo is rushed to hospital with a very bad asthma flare-up, how does India feel? India doesn't even consider going to the spelling bee grand final because she would rather be with her brother. When Boo wakes up and sees India, he is upset at her decision. Why? What is it that Boo says that finally makes India change her mind?
- In Chapter 21, India overhears Summer talking to her mum on the phone and quickly realises she is not going to make it to the final. India hears

Summer crying and tries to comfort her, but Summer rudely rejects her sympathy. Do you think this helps to explain why Summer behaves as she does?

- Does overhearing the conversation in Chapter 21 change India's attitude towards Summer? What makes you think this? Does your attitude change from when you first read about Summer? Do you think this is a good reason to get to know someone better first before making decisions about what kind of person they are?

Activities

- The Wimple family are very close. Find three examples in the novel where the author has shown this either in what they say or do.
- Summer Millicent Ernestine Beauregard-Champion could be described as ill-tempered, peevish, discourteous, impolite, churlish, disobliging and disagreeable. Describe what happens when Summer first meets the Wimples in Chapter 14 that proves the above adjectives are suitable when describing Summer. Write a list of five mean things Summer does. What do you think is the worst thing Summer does? What do you think about Summer's behaviour? What are three more words to describe how Summer behaves?

Fibbing

In *The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee*, there is a bit of fibbing. Dad fibs about being worried about money, India fibs about being nervous about the spelling bee and Mum fibs about Dad looking good when he makes interesting wardrobe choices.

Discussion questions

- Do you think it is ever a good thing to tell a fib? Or do you think it would be better if everyone told the truth all the time?
- Have there been times in your life when you may have told a fib but for a very good reason? Did you still think it was a good reason after you told the fib? Did telling the fib makes things better or worse?

Activities

- Form debating teams and argue the following topic: It is always better to tell the truth. Some will argue the negative and others the affirmative.



CREATIVE WRITING

Making trouble

An author's main job when writing a story is to make lots of trouble for their characters. Stories are full of problems and authors need to constantly decide which trouble is going to be the most exciting.

Read the following extract from Chapter 10 of *The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee*. The Wimple family are on their way to the second round of the spelling bee when something goes wrong:

The Wimple family piled into the van. Dad had to turn the key a few times before it spluttered to life and they were off, but they were only a few kilometres out of Yungabilla when the engine coughed and groaned and the van staggered to a stop by the side of the road.

'I'm sure this won't take long,' Dad said, squeezing out of his tight jacket and rolling up his shirt sleeves. He grabbed his toolbox and began fossicking under the hood. There was a series of clangs and grunts, and one very loud, 'Ouch!'

'Are you okay?' Mum asked.

'Fine,' Dad sang back.

'Huddersfield is a long way.' India tried not to sound worried. 'Do you think we'll be there on time?'

Activity

- Discuss as a class or in groups what could happen next to make the story exciting. Make a list on the board and talk about what would be most exciting and why, keeping in mind that it must keep the story moving forward. Choose the trouble you like best and write what happens next.

Creating tension

Stories not only build from beginning to the end but the tension can also build within each chapter. The opening sentence of Chapter 22, on the day of the finals, is:

It began as an ordinary day: the sun rose, the birds chirped, people everywhere began to stretch and yawn.

But for India Wimple, this was no ordinary day.

Activities

- Name at least five things that have made this day anything but ordinary for India?
- How do you think the author wants you to feel at this point in the story?

- What problems has India overcome to get this far in the competition?
- What happens at breakfast that changes everything?
- Have a look at how the writing style changes from before and after this incident. How does the author build the tension from the beginning of this chapter to the end? Study the words she has chosen and the sentences she has used. Write a diary entry from India describing what happened and how she felt.
- Chapter 22 ends in a cliffhanger. This is where the author has deliberately decided to end the story at a really tense moment. If you were the author, what do you think you would write next to keep the tension high?

Building setting

Yungabilla is the small country town where the Wimple Family live:

It's a small, forgettable town, with a hall, a few shops . . . and not much else.

India knew that was how most people would see her home, but to her it was perfect. She liked how quiet it was, and the frothy vanilla milkshakes at Gracie's Café, and Mrs O'Connell's Bakery with her famous blueberry cheesecake. But what made Yungabilla really special were the people, especially in the last few years when the drought drove families off the land and forced businesses to close down.

When anyone was having a hard time, a neighbour would knock at the door with a dish of lasagne or the Men's Shed would call round to fix a broken fence or the whole town would gather under the stars for a film projected onto the wall of the side of the town hall. That made everyone feel better, for a while at least.

India felt at home in Yungabilla, and that's where she was going to stay. (Chapter 3)

When Deb creates a setting in her books, she likes to imagine it as if she has been there, so it will come to life when she writes about it. She based Yungabilla on a small country town in Victoria called Hopetoun, where her in-laws live. She loves how Hopetoun is always so friendly and everyone helps each other out when they need it. They've also been really badly affected by drought. People gather for public events like nights by the lake or the Hopetoun Show, which does make them feel better.



Activities

- Draw a map of how you think Yungabilla might look, including the shops we know about, like Gracie's Cafe, Mrs O'Donnell's Bakery and the Yungabilla Primary School, and other buildings and sites you might find in a small country town. For example, you could add the lake and the nearby bike track. Think about activities nearby like fishing or yabbing. Are there any caves to explore or forests to hike through?
- Create a blog post, travel brochure or webpage about Yungabilla and why it would be a perfect holiday destination. Make sure to mention all the things you think would be exciting about going to Yungabilla. You can make up as many activities as you like.
- When India is too nervous to enter the spelling bee, Dad arranges for the town to appear in the church hall all dressed in onesies, hoping that will ease her nerves. It works. Later, the town lines the streets to say a fond farewell to India as she leaves for the first round. Write a newspaper article describing both events in the lead-up to India's departure for the spelling bee.

Playing with words

One of the main reasons Deb wrote this novel is because she loves words and especially loved the spelling competitions she used to have in Year 4 with her teacher Miss Gray.

Activity

- Each chapter starts with a word that captures its theme. Choose five of those words below and write a sentence using that word.

tremulous	disconcerting	valorous
endeavour	trepidation	precarious
calamitous	worrisome	fortuitous
skulduggery	surreptitious	magnificent
imperious	panoramic	daunting
flabbergasting	unexpected	disquietude
disagreeable	sagacious	momentous
nervous	castigation	emergency
splendiferous		

Fantastical stories

There was a girl called Ingenious India, who had a brother called Brave Boo. Together, they once saved the Prime Minister from a perilous plot of treacherous turmoil. (Chapter 18)

Mum likes to make up stories and her favourite one is called *Brave Boo and Ingenious India*, about two brave children who fought *villainous* villains and *ravenous* monsters. She uses tricky words in the stories to help India practise her spelling.

Activity

- Create your own adventure story using some of the tricky words below. If you don't know the meaning, look them up in the dictionary. Use as many words in your story as you can, while still creating an exciting beginning, middle and end. The person who can use all the words in the story will be crowned Brave and Ingenious.

gigantic	heroic	zealous
foolhardy	obnoxious	sneaky
thundering	adventurous	abandoned
admirable	calculating	colossal
defenceless	grouchy	grotesque
kind-hearted	gloomy	forbidding
loathsome	marvellous	woeful
vain	vengeful	

Examining a scene

One of the best ways to learn how to write is to look at your favourite books and examine why you love them.

Activity

- Write a paragraph about your favourite scene in the novel and why. It could be for the action, the humour or because you found it moving. Include what it is about the scene that appeals to you.

SPELLING FUN

Run your own spelling bee

This can be done over a whole term and involve your class or your whole school.

To prepare:

- Create a name for your competition, and design a logo that could appear on banners, microphones, podiums and scoreboard. For example: 'World's Greatest Spelling Bee', or 'Spell-o-rama' or 'Spelling Legends'. Give each entrant a card to wear around their neck with their name.
- Nominate someone to be the scorekeeper and timekeeper.
- Establish your rules. How many words can you misspell before you are out of the competition?



How long do you have to spell a word? How many people will go through each round? How many rounds will there be? Will you involve just your class or the whole school? Will the children be given the list of words beforehand?

Commonly misspelled words

Below is a list of fifty words that are often misspelled. Study the list carefully and, like India, practise spelling them every chance you can. In your class, form small teams and see which group can spell most of the words correctly. (Note that some words will be spelled differently depending on the way they're used or their meaning, such as principal/principle, or licence/license.)

embarrass	accessory	accommodation
guarantee	opportunity	eighth
receipt	February	acceptable
amateur	conscientious	believe
exhilarate	fiery	grateful
liaison	maintenance	mischievous
noticeable	principal	questionnaire
rhyme	rhythm	sergeant
disappearance	environment	exaggerate
forty	government	irresistible
knowledge	laboratory	harass
villain	weird	excellence
fascination	license	marriage
necessary	occurred	official
neighbour	particularly	peculiar
parallel	psychology	restaurant
temperature	persuade	

SPELLING RESOURCES

Australian spelling bees

- For NSW:
<https://www.artsunit.nsw.edu.au/speaking-competitions/spelling-bee/premiers-spelling-bee>
- For all Australian school children:
<http://www.spellmasters.com.au/>

More fun and games with spelling

There are loads of websites with great spelling activities. Here are a few:

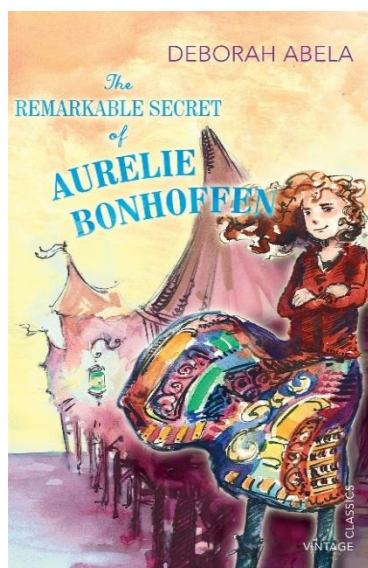
- <http://www.superteacherideas.com/spelling.html>
- http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/03/lp314-01.shtml
- <https://au.pinterest.com/rhymetime/spelling-activities/>
- <http://www.popsugar.com/moms/10-Ways-Make-Spelling-Practice-Fun-27333262>
- <http://www.kidspell.com/>

Online spelling games

- <http://pbskids.org/superwhy/#/game/spellingbee>
- <http://www.spellingcity.com/> This website allows kids to enter their spelling list and creates an online game to test if they can spell them all correctly.
- <http://www.knowledgeadventure.com/subject/spelling-games/> This website has loads of links to spelling games.



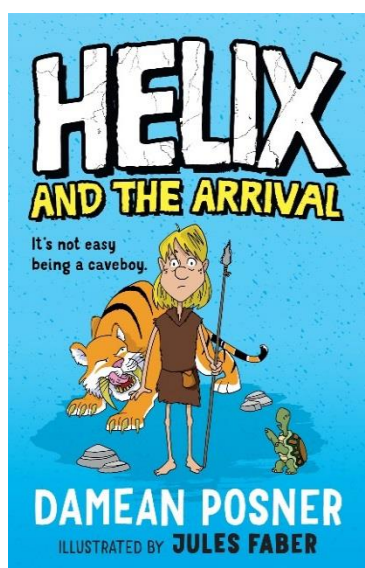
FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



The Remarkable Secret of Aurelie Bonhoffen
by Deborah Abela

Ever since Aurelie Bonhoffen was a child, she has juggled, played the dead girl on the ghost train and the back end of the cow in the marquee of Bonhoffen's Seaside Pier. She adores her family – especially her uncles Rolo and Rindolf – but on her twelfth birthday, she stumbles on her family's remarkable secret. It's hard to accept at first, but when her new friend at school reveals a dangerous plot against the pier, the secret helps Aurelie confront the greatest threat her family has ever faced.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



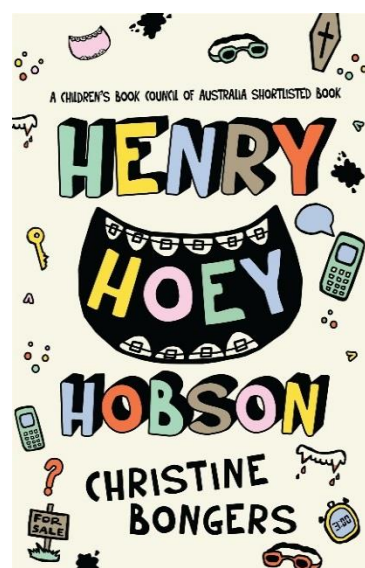
Helix and the Arrival
by Damean Posner

Hi, I'm Helix. I'm twelve years old and the worst caveman-to-be that Rockfall has ever seen. I'm even less cavemanly than my lazy bonehead brother, whose hobby is grooming his nose hair.

It's almost time for my Arrival. I'll be expected to disappear into the woods and return with something big, dangerous or rare – preferably all three. My best friend Ug is preparing for his Arrival too. He has the strength of a hungry rhinovore so he will no doubt bring back something impressive. And our friend Saleeka would pass with flying colours, except girls aren't allowed to take the test – a rule that makes her angrier than a sabre-tooth.

But me? I can't even lift a club above my shoulder. Banishment to the Dark Side, here I come . . .

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



Henry Hoey Hobson
by Christine Bongers

Henry Hoey Hobson arrives at his sixth school, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, to discover he's the only boy in Year Seven.

Friendless, fatherless and non-Catholic, Henry is not only a Perpetual Sucker, but a bloodsucker, according to his catty classmates.

When he's caught moving a coffin into the creepy house next door, it drives a stake through the heart of his hopes of fitting in.

His only chance to fight back is the school swimming carnival – sink-or-swim time in the treacherous waters of Year Seven.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)

CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHEET:

Story mountains

Stories are like climbing mountains . . . they start describing characters who then face various problems they struggle to solve, until they reach a climax and slide down towards a resolution.

Look at the story mountain below. Can you plot the points in the story where India changes because of her decisions?



Describe India at the start of the novel. What do we know about her? What do we know about why she doesn't want to enter the spelling bee?

What is the first moment of change that pushes India toward competing in the spelling bee?

What struggles and roadblocks happen along the way?

On the story mountain, the highest point is the hardest part of the story, where it seems like the characters will never meet their goals. What is the hardest point for India? How does she overcome this?

Do you think India is the same person at the end of the story as she was at the beginning? How do you think she has changed?



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee	Deborah Abela	9781925324822	3-6	\$14.99		
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