



school gym. Ms. Cross stands nearby holding a clipboard.

**N3:** Facing the contestants is an audience of teachers, students, and lots of empty folding chairs. Mr. Welch is in the second row. Next to him is a serious-looking man, Dr. Joshua Larabee.

**CROSS:** Welcome to Crenshaw's first spelling bee! OK. First up: Akeelah Anderson.

**AKEELAH (to herself):** Let's get this over with.

**N4:** In round one, each student is asked to spell one word. Half the kids get their first word wrong and drop out.

**N1:** After two more rounds, Akeelah is the only speller left.

**CROSS:** Akeelah, if you get this one right, you'll be the winner. Spell "placid," meaning peaceful.

**AKEELAH (quickly):** P-L-A-C-I-D.

**CROSS:** Outstanding, Akeelah. You've won!

**N2:** Welch claps enthusiastically. Larabee does not look impressed. He knows the words were too easy for Akeelah.

**LARABEE:** Spell "prestidigitation."

**N3:** Nobody expects Akeelah to know this word.

**AKEELAH:** P-R-E-S-T-I-D-I-G-I-T-A-T-I-O-N.

**LARABEE:** That's correct.

**N4:** Everyone is amazed.

**LARABEE:** Spell "pulchritude."

**AKEELAH:** P-U-L-C-R-I-T-U-D-E.

**LARABEE:** That's incorrect. You left out the "h."

**BULLY:** See, she's not so smart!

**N1:** Laughter breaks out. Close to tears, Akeelah runs out of the gym. Welch and Larabee follow her.

**WELCH:** Akeelah, where are you going? You did great!

**AKEELAH:** They were laughing at me!

**LARABEE:** They laugh because you intimidate them. Stand your ground, and you'll win their respect. You have potential, but you need a coach. Here's my card.

**N2:** As Larabee walks away, Welch smiles excitedly at Akeelah.

**WELCH:** Akeelah, do you know who that was? Dr. Joshua Larabee! He thinks you've got a shot at winning the National Spelling Bee!

**N3:** To Akeelah, that seems **improbable.**

### SCENE 3

**N4:** Two days later, Akeelah stands outside Larabee's house. She rings the bell. No one answers. Akeelah finds Larabee in his backyard.

**LARABEE:** You're late.

**AKEELAH:** You didn't answer the door.

**LARABEE:** That's because you were late. So, you want to learn how to spell.

**AKEELAH:** I know how to spell.

**LARABEE:** Spell "staphylococci." It's a word of Greek origin, referring to a type of bacteria.

**AKEELAH:** Um, S-T-A-F . . .

**LARABEE:** There are no "F's" in Greek words. Don't you know your Latin and Greek roots?

**AKEELAH:** Well, maybe I'm not that serious.

**LARABEE:** Then maybe I'm not either.

**AKEELAH:** Whatever.

**LARABEE:** You can leave now.

**AKEELAH:** How come?

**LARABEE:** Because I don't have time to waste on **insolent** little girls.

**AKEELAH:** I'm not insolent. I just don't like people criticizing me!

**N1:** Larabee doesn't reply. Akeelah turns to leave, then stops.

**AKEELAH:** Do you know what? When I put my mind to it I can memorize anything. And I don't need help from a **dictatorial, truculent, supercilious** gardener! Sorry to be so insolent.

**N2:** Larabee watches Akeelah leave. She has impressed him with her vocabulary, and her spirit.

### SCENE 4

**N3:** Later that week, Akeelah is in her bedroom, bent over a huge dictionary. Her mom, Tanya, opens the door. She's wearing her

nurse's uniform.

**TANYA:** Baby, why are you still up?

**AKEELAH:** I've got to learn more words. Are you going to come see me in the District Bee this Saturday?

**TANYA:** Is it at your school?

**AKEELAH:** No, it's in Beverly Hills. Can you be there?

**TANYA:** You know I work at the hospital on Saturdays. Maybe your sister Kiana can go with you.

### SCENE 5

**N4:** It's Saturday. Mr. Welch waits in his car outside Akeelah's house.

**WELCH:** Come on girls, we're going to be late!



Panhandler Steve asks Akeelah and a friend for change. Later, he helps Akeelah study for the Bee.

#### PLAY POINT:

Last year's National Bee winner was Anurag Kashyap, a 13-year-old from California. His winning word was "appoggiatura," a musical term.

**N1:** Akeelah and her sister Kiana run out and jump in the car.

**N2:** They soon arrive at Beverly Hills High School. Students and their parents fill the auditorium.

**N3:** Akeelah, feeling numb and scared, sits next to a boy.

**JAVIER:** Is this your first time?

**AKEELAH:** Yes. How about you?

**JAVIER:** It's my second. I made it to the Nationals last year. So did that kid over there.

**N4:** He points to a guy sitting next to his stern-faced father.

**JAVIER:** That's Dylan Chiu. He's come

in second at the Nationals two years in a row. This is his last chance, and everyone thinks he's going to win. By the way, my name's Javier.

**AKEELAH:** I'm Akeelah.

**JUDGE #1:** Will all the spellers take their positions on the stage, please?

**JAVIER:** Good luck.

**AKEELAH:** Good luck to you too.

**N1:** The contest begins. There are 139 spellers, but only 10 will go to the Regionals. Two hours pass.

**JUDGE #1:** As you can see, we're down to 11 spellers. In this round, if you miss a word, do *not* leave the stage. You may have an opportunity to compete for any remaining places.

**N2:** Akeelah walks nervously to the front of the stage, and spells her next word.

**N3:** A bell dings. She has misspelled the word! She sits down, crushed.

**JUDGE #1:** Would the next contestant please step forward?

**N4:** A kid with spiky hair approaches the microphone.

**JUDGE #1:** "Carmagnole."

**SPIKE:** Um, C-A-R-M-A . . .

**N1:** Stumped, he looks at his mom. She mouths the letter "G." Kiana sees the whole thing.

**SPIKE:** . . . G-N-O-L-E!

**JUDGE #1:** Congratulations! You're the 10th finalist!

**KIANA (yells out loud):** They cheated! His mama helped him!

**JUDGE #1:** Is this true?

**SPIKE (ashamed):** Yes. I'm sorry.

**JUDGE #1:** I'm afraid you are now disqualified. Akeelah, if you spell one more word correctly, you'll be the 10th finalist. Your word is "**pastiche.**"

**AKEELAH:** P-A-S-T-I-C-H-E.

**JUDGE #1:** That's correct. That means you're going to the State Regionals.

**WELCH:** Way to go, girl! I knew you could do it!

**N2:** Dr. Larabee is also in the audience, smiling.

### SCENE 6

**N3:** The next week, Akeelah takes a bus to Javier's school in the suburbs. She can't believe how clean and new everything is. She sees Dylan Chiu in a classroom.

**AKEELAH:** Dylan? Hi. My name is Akeelah. I was in the District Bee with you last week.

**DYLAN:** I remember.

**AKEELAH:** Javier said I could join your study group today.

**DYLAN:** The study group is for rejects. My father coaches me privately. Who's your coach?

**AKEELAH:** I don't have one.

**DYLAN:** Spell "**xanthosis.**"

**AKEELAH:** Z-A-N . . .

**DYLAN:** It starts with an "x." You'll never make it past the Regionals.

**N4:** Upset, Akeelah runs out of the classroom, into Javier.

**JAVIER:** Akeelah! I'm glad you could make it.

**N1:** Akeelah has a great time with Javier and the other spellers in the study group. She gets home late.

**TANYA (angrily):** Where have you been?

**AKEELAH:** At a spelling club in Woodland Hills . . . I didn't think the bus would take so long, I'm sorry.

**PLAY POINT:**  
The first National Spelling Bee took place in 1925. There were nine contestants. In 2005, there were 273 contestants.

Friends from Akeelah's neighborhood help her memorize the thousands of words she needs to know to win the Bee.

**TANYA:** Akeelah Anderson, did you lose your mind? You can't take a bus to the suburbs by yourself!

**AKEELAH:** But there was nobody around to take me.

**TANYA:** That's because I was at work. I will not have you disappearing at all hours. This spelling thing is off!

**AKEELAH:** But I'm going to the Regional Spelling Bee!

**TANYA:** Not this year, Akeelah, and that's final.

**N2:** In her room, Akeelah unfolds a parental consent form for the Southern California Regional Spelling Bee. She looks at a picture of her father, who died when she was 6.

**AKEELAH (to picture):** You'd let me do it.

**N3:** She slowly signs her father's name.

## SCENE 7

**N4:** The next day, Akeelah stands in front of Larabee's door. She takes a deep breath and rings the bell. Larabee opens the door.

**AKEELAH:** Please reconsider coaching me for the Regional Bee. I need a coach, bad.

**LARABEE:** Badly. You need a coach "badly." Come in.

**N1:** Akeelah enters the tidy house.

**LARABEE:** You'll need to study with me every day. Can you make that commitment?

**AKEELAH:** Well, I have summer school, but Mr. Welch said working with you could take the place of it.

**LARABEE (frowning):** Do you have any goals in life?

**AKEELAH:** I don't know. The only thing I'm good at is spelling.

**LARABEE:** Akeelah, you can't win this

bee if you don't believe in yourself. Why are you here today?

**AKEELAH (quietly):** I want to win.

**LARABEE:** Say it louder!

**AKEELAH (yelling):** I want to win the National Spelling Bee!

**LARABEE:** Good!

**N2:** Larabee teaches Akeelah how big words are made up of little words. She learns hundreds of new words.

## SCENE 8

**N3:** For months, Larabee and Akeelah study together. Finally, it's the day of the Southern California Regional Spelling Bee.

**N4:** Akeelah arrives with Mr. Welch and Dr. Larabee.

**WELCH:** It's too bad your mother had to work today, Akeelah.

**AKEELAH (lying):** Um, yes.

**N1:** Akeelah, Javier, Dylan, and a hundred other spellers take the stage. Soon, Akeelah is spelling her first word.

**AKEELAH:** P-S-A-L-M...

**N2:** There is a commotion in the auditorium. Someone unexpected has entered.

**TANYA (loudly, to Mr. Welch):** I did not give my permission!

**AKEELAH:**... O-D-Y. "Psalmody."

**WELCH (to the judge):** Excuse me; one of the speller's mothers needs to speak to her daughter.

**JUDGE #2:** Well, if she's not back onstage for her next turn, she's disqualified.

**N3:** Tanya, Akeelah, Welch, and Larabee leave the auditorium.

**WELCH:** We thought you were on board with this, Mrs. Anderson!

**TANYA (to Akeelah):** How do you

think I felt when Javier's mother called me to see if I needed a ride? I didn't know what she was talking about! I never signed a consent form.

**AKEELAH (ashamed):** I signed Daddy's name to it.

**N4:** Upset, Tanya pulls Akeelah toward the exit.

**LARABEE:** Please don't leave. My name is Joshua Larabee. Akeelah has been studying with me. I think she has a chance at winning the National Spelling Bee.

**TANYA (to Akeelah):** You've never lied to me before. You must want this pretty badly.

**N1:** Tanya makes a decision.



**PLAY POINT:** The 79th Scripps National Spelling Bee will be held on May 31 and June 1, 2006. Last year's winner took home more than \$28,000 in prizes.

**TANYA:** You have to do double chores for the next three months. Now get back on that stage!

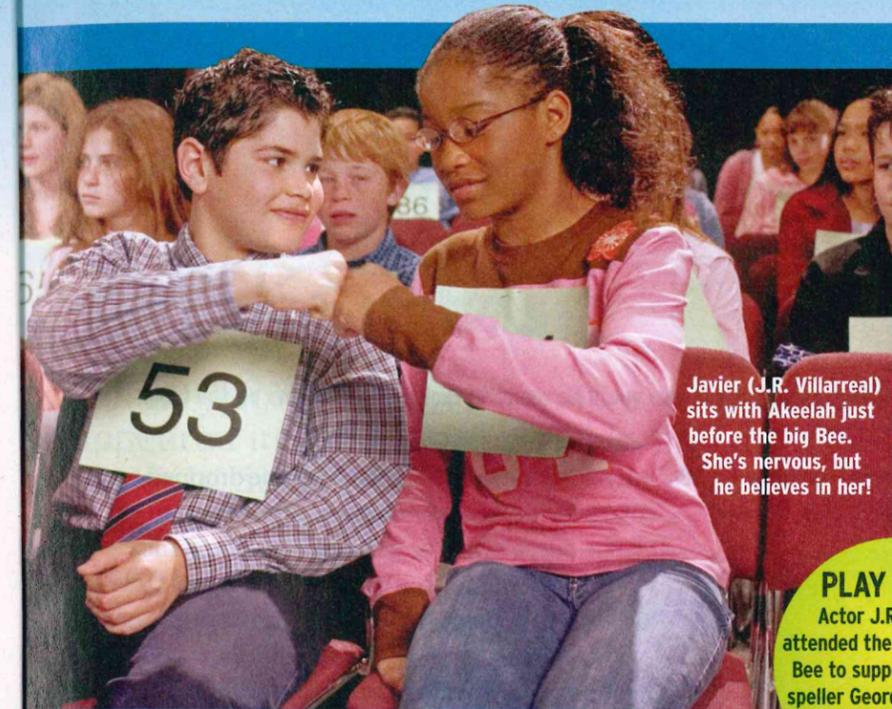
**N2:** Akeelah hugs her mom, and runs back inside.

**N3:** The competition continues. Akeelah, Javier, and Dylan all qualify for the National Bee!

## SCENE 9

**N4:** Now Akeelah is famous. Kids ask for her autograph. But Larabee is acting strangely. One morning, he hands Akeelah several boxes of index cards.

**LARABEE:** Here are 5,000 new words



Javier (J.R. Villarreal) sits with Akeelah just before the big Bee. She's nervous, but he believes in her!

**PLAY POINT:** Actor J.R. Villarreal attended the 2005 National Bee to support his friend, speller George A. Hornedo. "I don't know how they do it," says J.R.

for you to learn.

**AKEELAH:** But there's only a month left. Are you going to coach me 24-7?

**LARABEE:** No. You can learn them on your own. I've taught you everything I can.

**N1:** Akeelah can't believe her ears.

**N2:** Back home, Akeelah turns on the TV and sees Ms. Cross talking about the spelling bee.

**CROSS:** If Akeelah wins, it'll be like the whole neighborhood won!

**N3:** Akeelah runs into her room and throws herself on the bed. Her mom follows her.

**AKEELAH:** Dr. Larabee won't coach me anymore. Everyone's expecting me to win. It's too hard, Mama!

**N4:** Tanya strokes Akeelah's hair.

**TANYA:** Did you know I went to college right after high school?

**AKEELAH (curious):** No.

**TANYA:** I had a scholarship. But I felt completely out of place. I told myself I was going to fail. So before that could happen, I

dropped out. I don't want you to do the same with this bee.

**N1:** Tanya takes one of the cards out of a box.

**TANYA:** If you take part in this, Akeelah, you're already a winner. Look around. You'll probably find about 50,000 coaches. Starting with me.

**N2:** Over the next few weeks Akeelah's mom helps her study. Ms. Cross helps her. Her classmates help her. The grocer on her block helps her.

**AKEELAH:** I have 50,000 coaches!

## SCENE 10

**N3:** A couple of days before the National Bee in Washington, D.C., Akeelah visits Larabee.

**AKEELAH:** Dr. Larabee, please come to D.C. with me.

**LARABEE (nervously):** I don't like a lot of excitement in my life, Akeelah.

**AKEELAH:** I can't win without you.

**LARABEE:** Yes, you can. You can do anything you want, Akeelah.

**AKEELAH:** No. I can't beat Dylan.

**LARABEE (smiling):** Well, then, when you and I get to Washington, let's make sure we give him a run for his money.

**N4:** Akeelah and Larabee give each other a big hug.

## SCENE 11

**N1:** The evening before the National Bee, Tanya, Akeelah, and Javier drink soda and watch a movie at a hotel in Washington, D.C.

**AKEELAH:** What do you think Dylan is doing now?

**JAVIER:** He's probably trying to learn ancient Greek.

**AKEELAH:** I'll be right back.

**N2:** Akeelah knocks on the door of Dylan's hotel room. His

dad answers. Akeelah can see Dylan bent over index cards.

**AKEELAH:** Hi, does Dylan want to watch a movie with us?

**CHIU (shocked):** Certainly not! The spelling bee is tomorrow.

**AKEELAH:** Would you give this to him?

**N3:** Akeelah hands Mr. Chiu a soda. Dylan looks puzzled. When the door closes, Akeelah hears Mr. Chiu yelling.

**CHIU:** This is your last chance at the National Spelling Bee! You took second place two years in a row. If you let that girl win, you'll be second best your whole life!

**N4:** Akeelah returns to her room with mixed feelings. She desperately wants to win the Bee. But if he loses, will Dylan's life be ruined? ■

**Will Akeelah win the National Spelling Bee? Or will the prize go to Dylan Chiu? To find out what happens, see the movie *Akeelah and the Bee*.**

# Play Skills

How well did you understand the play? Put your knowledge to the test with these exercises.

## NO-SWEAT TEST PREP

**STRATEGY:** Notice which *type of question* is asked (see parentheses)—so you'll be ready to tackle all questions on the big tests!

- Why is Akeelah reluctant to enter her school spelling bee? (*analyzing character*)
  - She is afraid to stand out.
  - She is afraid of getting stung.
  - She is a lousy speller.
  - She doesn't want to have to study.
- What is the order of the spelling bees leading up to the National Bee? (*sequencing*)
  - local, regional, district
  - regional, local, district
  - district, local, regional
  - local, district, regional
- How many spelling bees were held between 1925 and 2005? (*factual information*)
  - 78
  - 80
  - 77
  - 76
- What is the meaning of the adjective "placid"? (*word meaning*)
  - made of plastic
  - shiny
  - peaceful
  - noisy
- How are Javier and Dylan different? (*compare & contrast*)
  - They are both good at spelling.
  - Javier goes to Woodland Hills Middle School.
  - Javier is friendly right away, but Dylan is not.
  - Dylan encourages Akeelah, but Javier tries to intimidate her.
- Why does Tanya tell Akeelah that she dropped out of college? (*making inferences about characters*)
  - She doesn't want Akeelah to make the same mistake and drop out of the bee.
  - She wants Akeelah to know that studying is not for everyone.
  - She wants Akeelah to know she is smart too.
  - She doesn't want Akeelah to feel bad about dropping out of the bee.
- What effect does participating in spelling bees have on Akeelah? (*cause & effect*)
  - She becomes shy and withdrawn.
  - She becomes more confident.
  - She falls behind in school.
  - She learns to speak French.
- What does Akeelah notice about Javier's school in the suburbs? (*understanding setting*)
  - There are no broken windows.
  - All the students are in uniform.
  - There are computers in every classroom.
  - Everything is clean and new.
- How many new words does Dr. Larabee give Akeelah to learn a month before the National Bee? (*detail*)
  - 500
  - 5,000
  - 50,000
  - 50
- What would be a good alternate title for *Akeelah and the Bee*? (*main idea*)
  - Bee-lieve in Yourself!
  - Bee-witched
  - Bee reasonable!
  - Bee My Valentine



## INTERVIEW Understanding Character

# KEKE Spells Success

In the upcoming movie *Akeelah and the Bee*, Akeelah is at first reluctant to try spelling her way to the National Bee. But for Keke Palmer, the actress who plays Akeelah, there's nothing reluctant about the way she's forging ahead in her career.

Even though she won't turn 13 until the summer, Keke has already appeared in countless TV shows and movies. The Chicago native recently spoke to *Scope*.

**SCOPE:** Describe your character in *Akeelah the Bee*.

**KEKE:** She's shy about her spelling talent. She doesn't want to let other people in her neighborhood know how smart she is because they might think that she's trying to be better than them.

**SCOPE:** Why do you think kids and teenagers will like this movie?

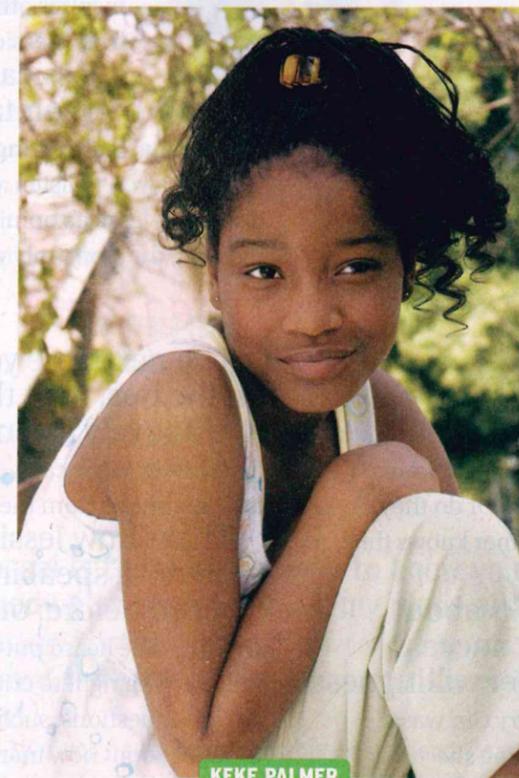
**KEKE:** I think they'll be happy to see other kids like them that they can relate to, and imagine being in their shoes. Also, the movie is not only about spelling, it's about how family and community come together to help Akeelah do great things.

**SCOPE:** Have you ever been in a spelling bee in school?

**KEKE:** Yes, I have. I made it down to the end and the last word was "gorilla" but there was another kid there who was really smart and I lost.

**SCOPE:** Akeelah has a voracious appetite for learning new words. Do students need good memorization skills to become better spellers?

**KEKE:** I have great memorization skills, so when I get a script, I only have to look at it two or three times



KEKE PALMER

## WRITE NOW!

Keke says *A Wrinkle in Time* is one of her favorite books. Have you recently read something you'd recommend? Why don't you write a book review and send it to: **SCOPE**, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 or e-mail [scopemag@scholastic.com](mailto:scopemag@scholastic.com) and we may publish it!

and I get it. But I think other kids who don't have that ability can just keep on studying or do some of the things Akeelah does. Although Akeelah also has good memorization skills, she asks her mom, her teacher, her friends, and other people in her community to help. Also, reading is important because it can help you increase your vocabulary and learn new words. One of my favorite books is *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. When you finish reading a book, you feel like you've accomplished a great thing.

**SCOPE:** What are your goals?

**KEKE:** I just want to be really good at what I do. Like Akeelah, I never give up and I strive to be the best. To me, that's a good quality.

**SCOPE:** What's the biggest challenge that you've faced so far?

**KEKE:** Being away from my family and my home, Chicago. But my mom and my dad tell me to keep on trying. They're always telling me, "You're almost there. If you keep on going, you'll be there—at the top."

—MARIE MORREALE