Name _____ Date _____

The Spelling Bee

Short story · 3rd–5th grade

Noah could spell anything. Rhythm, necessary, Wednesday: he could spell them forward and even backward. So when Mr. Patel announced the school spelling bee, everyone in the class turned to look at him.

Noah smiled, but his stomach did a flip. Spelling in his head was easy. Spelling on a stage, in front of the whole school, with a microphone that squealed, was something else.

The night before the bee, Noah couldn't sleep. He imagined standing on the stage and forgetting how to spell cat. His big sister, Ava, found him in the kitchen at ten o'clock eating cereal. "Nervous?" she asked. Noah nodded.

Ava sat down. "I was terrified before my first piano recital," she said. "My hands were shaking so hard I thought I'd play the wrong song. My teacher gave me a plan." She counted on her fingers. "One: take a slow breath before you start. Two: ask for the word in a sentence, so you have time to think. Three: picture the word written on paper, then just read it off the page."

The next morning, Noah's knees felt like noodles as he walked onto the stage. The first word was garden. Easy. The second was ceiling. He breathed, pictured the word, and spelled it right. Kids were dropping out one by one. Soon only two spellers were left: Noah and a fifth grader named Grace.

Grace spelled her word perfectly. Then the judge read Noah's: "Separate." His mind went blank. Was it s-e-p-e-r? Or s-e-p-a-r? His heart pounded. Then he remembered Ava's plan. He took a slow breath. "Can you use it in a sentence, please?"

While the judge read the sentence, Noah pictured the word on paper, and there it was, with a rat hiding in the middle: sep-a-rat-e. "Separate," he said. "S-e-p-a-r-a-t-e. Separate."

"Correct!" Grace spelled her next word right too, and then Noah missed one: rhinoceros. He came in second. But when he walked off the stage, he didn't feel like he had lost. He had been scared, and he had done it anyway. At home, he made a sign for his bedroom wall: Breathe. Ask. Picture it.

Questions

1. Why did Noah's stomach do a flip?

2. Who helped Noah with a plan?

3. What was the first step of Ava's plan?

4. What trick helped Noah spell separate?

5. Why didn't Noah feel like he had lost?

6. When have you felt nervous before something? What helped?

7. Which part of Ava's plan would help you most?

The lesson in my own words

Answer Key

1. He was nervous about spelling on a stage.
2. His sister, Ava.
3. Take a slow breath.
4. He pictured a rat hiding in the middle.
5. He was scared but did it anyway.
6. Answers will vary.
7. Answers will vary.

Lesson: Being nervous is normal, and a plan can help you be brave.