

Fresno 4th-grader wins California Elementary Spelling Bee

Fugman Elementary fourth grader Ananya Vinay was named the 2015 California State Elementary Spelling Bee champion on Saturday in Stockton. ULMERPHOTO — SPECIAL TO THE BEE

As the rounds progressed and the words got tougher, Fresno fourth-grader Ananya Vinay kept her cool at the podium of Saturday's California State Elementary Spelling Bee in Stockton. One by one, contestants were bested by words like "eponymous," "mastodon" and "languid."

Ananya, who attends Fugman Elementary, a Clovis Unified School District campus in northeast Fresno, survived 18 rounds, including a back-and-forth duel with a contestant from Sonoma County in the final four rounds, to be named state champ. Her victory was delicious in more ways than one — Ananya's winning word was "stroganoff." (Meat or vegetable sliced thinly and cooked in a sauce of sour cream, mustard, onion and condiments.)

"I'm really happy that I won," Ananya said Sunday evening, adding she had stumbled upon the winning word from a list of words she'd studied.

The 10-year-old is an avid fiction reader — including all seven Harry Potter books. That helped in later rounds, when she correctly spelled "pewter" and "sorcerer" after she recognized them from reading the adventures of Harry, Ron and Hermione.

Mom Anupama Poliyedath calls Ananya a "detective" who is passionate about reading and understanding the structure of words beyond simple memorization. She anxiously supported her daughter from the audience. In the sixth round, after most of the contestants had been eliminated, the tension built, she said.

"I've never heard most of those words, but she was confident," Poliyedath said of her daughter.

Ananya was one of three fourth-graders who competed in the 54-person, fourth-through-sixth-grade competition. She was awarded an iPad. In addition, and all participants received medals and an iPod Shuffle inside a Spelling Bee backpack.

Five other Valley kids participated in the competition, which was sponsored by the Teachers College of San Joaquin: Fresno County sixth-grader Gianni Manfredi, fifth-grader Brandi Valdez and sixth-grader Nathanael Atmajian, both of Kings County, and sixth-graders Jasmine Judge and Naomi Khosalim of Merced County.

The other top finalists were Caleb Luis, Marin County; Sepenta Shirvan, San Joaquin County; Andrew Crabtree, Santa Cruz County; Annie Wang, Marin County; Nicolas Keys, Amador County; Gloria Park, Stanislaus County; Varnika Kailash, Sonoma County; Camille Cheng, Santa Barbara County; and Julian Gonzalez, Riverside County.

The California State Junior High Spelling Bee Championship for students in grades seven through nine will be held on May 2 and is coordinated by the Marin County Office of Education.



Ananya made it clear Sunday her spelling days are far from over:

“I hope to win a national spelling bee,” she said.

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