

Homophones

by: David Legault

CHARACTERS

BILL—a male in his late thirties, early 40's. Slightly overweight.

JIM—a male in his late thirties, early 40's. Also overweight.

MODERATOR—a male in his fifties.

JR—a younger boy 8-12.

SUSIE—a younger girl, same age as JR

JESSICA—a girl, same age as JR and SUSIE

SETTING

We see a high school gymnasium setting. There's a table R with a dictionary sitting on top of it. Behind the table is a single chair where THE MODERATOR sits. At C we see three chairs where JR, SUSIE, and JESSICA sit. BILL and JIM sit in the front row of the theatre.

(At rise we see SUSIE standing, nervously.)

MODERATOR

Your word is "Jurisdiction."

SUSIE

Jurisdiction. J-U-R-I-S-D-I-C-T-I-O-N. Jurisdiction.

MODERATOR

That is correct, you may be seated.

BILL

That's my girl! WOOO!

(SUSIE casts a fleeting glance at her father before sitting down. JESSICA stands.)

MODERATOR

Jessica, your word is "Elementary."

JESSICA

El... Elementary. E-L-E-M-E-N-T...E-R-Y. Elementary.

MODERATOR

I'm sorry, but that is incorrect. Would you please leave the stage?

JESSICA

B...but I spelled it right, I was up all night studying—

JIM

You heard the guy, honey. Time for Jim Junior to get up and show you how to spell!

(JESSICA runs off R, crying. JR stands)

MODERATOR

Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to be respectful of *all* of the contestants.

JIM
Okay, okay... although she wasn't respecting Junior by not leaving when you asked, but okay.

MODERATOR
Alright. Jim, your word is "Elementary."

JR
May I have the definition please?

BILL
(to himself) the definition for elementary? Pfff...

MODERATOR
Elementary. An adjective defined as: relating to the most rudimentary aspects of a subject.

JR
May I hear it in a sentence?

BILL
Seriously?

MODERATOR
"The Elementary school teacher loved to work with young children."

JR
(Snaps his fingers twice) Elementary. E-L-E-M-E-N-T-A-R-Y. Elementary.

MODERATOR
That is correct. You may be seated. Ladies and Gentlemen, we're down to our final two contestants in this year's Franklin Elementary Spelling Bee.

JIM
That's right! A great speller, just like his old man!

(JR sits and SUSIE stands up.)

MODERATOR
Your word is "Technology."

Susie
Technology. T-E-C-H-N-O...

(Beat)

T-E-C-H-N-O-L-O-G-Y. Technology.

MODERATOR
That is correct, you may be—

JIM
No sir. She started the word over. Last time I checked, you don't spell technology T-E-C-H-N-O-T-E-C-H-N-O-L-O-G-Y.

MODERATOR

Sir. Please. Starting a word over is perfectly acceptable according to our by-laws.

JIM

I don't know what kind of show you're running here, but I've been coming to these things since I was six and they never allowed—

MODERATOR

Sir, this is tournament follows the national sanctions. Perhaps the tournaments that you attended were—

JIM

No no! You're right you're right. The ones that I was going to were um... sanctioned? Yeah, sanctioned. I forgot about *that* by-law.

(Beat.)

MODERATOR

Okay... Anyway your word is "psychoanalytic."

JR

Psychoanalytic.

(Beat.)

JIM

(to himself) C'mon Junior. C'mon Jim Junior

JR

May I have the definition, please?

MODERATOR

Psychoanalytic. It comes from the German word Psychoanalyse, meaning "Of or relating to psychoanalysis; using or involving psychoanalysis."

JR

May I hear the word in a sentence please?

BILL

(to himself) this kid doesn't know it.

(JIM casts BILL a look.)

JIM

Let's go JR!

MODERATOR

Please sir, you need to be quiet.

JR

Are there any alternate pronunciations?

MODERATOR

No.

JR

(Snaps fingers twice, then very quick, running the letters together) Psychoanalytic. P-S-Y-C-H-O-A-N-A-L-Y-T-I-C. Psychoanalytic.

MODERATOR

That is correct. You may be seated.

BILL

C'mon! He didn't even pronounce the letters.

(JIM rises to his feet.)

JIM

What'd you say about Junior? At least he doesn't have to start words over like some idi—

(BILL rises as well)

BILL

What're you saying about Susie? Man, that's a little girl you're talking about.

JIM

Yeah, well it wasn't so bad when you were making fun of my son five min—

BILL

Well sorry, I forgot I was messing with the fragile son of some washed up speller who—

(MODERATOR rises to his feet.)

MODERATOR

That's enough out of both of you! Honestly, do I have to remind you of where we are? This is for the title of "Franklin Elementary Champion!" The winner today will go on for the school district title. Another word out of *either* of you and your child is disqualified. Do I make myself clear?

(JIM and BILL look at each other, then slowly sit down.)

JIM & BILL

Yes sir.

MODERATOR

What was that?

JIM & BILL

(More loudly) Yes sir.

MODERATOR

Now that's more like it.

(Beat.)

(SUSIE rises)

Your word is exhaustion.

SUSIE

Exhaustion. E-X-H-A-U-S-T-I-O-N. Exhaustion.

That is correct, you may be seated.

MODERATOR

(JR rises)

Good job, Suze. Keep up the pace!

BILL

Your word is adolescence.

MODERATOR

Adolescence. A-D-O-L-E-S-C-E-N-T-S. Adolescence.

JR

I'm sorry, but that's incorrect.

MODERATOR

(JIM already rising to his feet.)

What?! He spelled the term correctly! A-D-O-L-E-S-C-E-N-T-S!

JIM

I'm sorry, but its Susie's turn to try and spell the word. Let me remind everyone that this is for the regional championship.

MODERATOR

(Susie rises)

Please. This isn't fair. Don't take out your hatred on my son. It's me you want. Oh, why did you forget your snaps?

JIM

I got excited! I thought I knew it!

JR

Please sir, you're going to have to sit down. Now Susie, please spell adolescence.

MODERATOR

May

SUSIE

I have the definition?

JIM

I can't believe this.

BILL

Quiet, my girl's trying to spell.

MODERATOR

Gentlemen: last warning.

(Beat.)

Adolescence. Definition: noun, meaning the state or process of growing up.

Adolescence. A-D-O-L-E—

SUSIE

But you didn't specify! The rules have clearly outlawed homophones without an extended definition.

JIM

They have not, please finish the word Sus—

MODERATOR

They've been outlawed since the tournament in '74!

JIM

But that ban's been lifted since '77!

MODERATOR

Oh, Junior, what have I told you: always check the definition.

JIM

I'm sorry, I... I thought I knew.

JR

(trying to speak over everyone) A-D-O-L-E-S-C—

SUSIE

No! It's not right, I've never heard anything about that ban being lifted.

JIM

It's been on the books for years.

MODERATOR

But that's impossible! Any change in the by-laws must be approved by the previous year's champion.

JIM

Yeah, but he had up and vanished after winning the cup. Driven mad, some say.

MODERATOR

Well, what if he was back, but nobody knew about it because he was afraid? A-F-R-A-I-D afraid?
(Beat.)

JIM

Wait a minute. You're not. *Him*. Are you?

MODERATOR

Afraid so. I'm Jimmy "Thesaurus" Roberts. Former spelling prodigy.

JIM

No way.

BILL

But... the police reports said, *everyone* said that you didn't make it, that you were off hid—

MODERATOR

JIM

It's all true. After I won, I was living the high life: parties in the Caribbean, a big Webster endorsement, I had it all. But then it all came crashing down when I misspelled "ceiling," another homophone. I knew I had to get away from the pressures, the fast paced lifestyle of the spelling bee circuit before it killed me. There were a few rough years I wish I could get back—time wasted as I scraped by on my own: entering illegal, underground spell-offs for a quick buck. It went like this for a long time, until the spelling riot '95.

MODERATOR

You were there? All the reports said there weren't any survivors!

JIM

There were a few, but we had to go underground for a few years. That's where I met Junior's mother. She helped me realize that spelling bees aren't something to hide from, but something to be admired. Sure, there's spell checkers today, making critics go as far to call the competitions useless, but I needed someone, my *son*, to reclaim the family's glory.

SUSIE

E-N—

MODERATOR

Stop!

(Beat)

Don't finish that word until we get this all straightened out.

BILL

You can't stop the girl from spelling! This guy shows up, claiming to be a legendary speller, and you're just going to believe him? I know a speller when I see one and I can tell you this guy is no speller.

JIM

Excuse me? I'm afraid that I am him, and that means that homophones are still illegal in competition.

BILL

You're looking at the 1977 National Spelling champion, the one who changed your stupid by-law.

JIM

You're Bill "Bookworm" Williams?

JR

Wow! I've read about you in American Spelling Magazine!

JIM

Quiet, Jim Jr!

MODERATOR

I'm sorry Jim, but Bill is right. We're going to need some sort of proof that it's you in order to successfully reverse the homophone ruling.

(JIM contemplates, then walks up onto center stage, blocking out SUSIE).

JIM

Give me a word.

This guy isn't serious.

BILL

I'm D-E-A-D serious, take any word out of that book of yours.

JIM

(MODERATOR looks thoughtful, confused)

MODERATOR

Fine. Until we can get official verification, this will have to do.

(MODERATOR starts shuffling through dictionary, looking for the perfect word.)

Your word is farrow.

JIM

May I have the definition?

MODERATOR

Farrow: a noun, meaning "a litter of pigs."

BILL

Another homophone?

JIM

Yeah, and I remembered to check this time.

(BILL looks nervous.)

JR

Go dad!

JIM

May I hear it in a sentence?

BILL

Hurry up and spell already!

MODERATOR

"The sow gave birth to a farrow."

JIM

Ok. Farrow.

(Snaps fingers twice. Lights go down on second snap.)

END