



Yaakov and the Spelling Bee

Ages 6-9
A story and 9 activities

Yaakov and the Spelling Bee

Yaakov is the best speller in the third grade. He never misses a word on Friday spelling tests. He has a gold star chart that is full all the way across.

So when Morah Tamar announces the class spelling bee, Yaakov feels proud and nervous at the same time.

"Everyone who wants to can try," she says. "It's for fun. We'll learn together."

For fun, thinks Yaakov. But for him, it is never just for fun. He wants to be perfect.

That night, he studies the word list for an hour. He writes each word five times. At dinner, his sister Rivka asks, "Why are you whispering letters?"

"I'm practicing," says Yaakov. "I can't make any mistakes."

On Wednesday, the spelling bee begins. The class sits in a circle on the rug. One at a time, each child stands and spells a word.

Yossi spells "friend" and sits down smiling. Chaya spells "castle" with no trouble. Zevi gets "island" wrong. He says "I-L-A-N-D" and the class groans softly. "That's okay," says Morah Tamar. "The right spelling is I-S-L-A-N-D. The s is silent. Thanks for trying, Zevi."

Zevi shrugs and sits down. He doesn't look upset at all.

Yaakov watches, amazed. If he gets a word wrong, he will feel terrible for a week.

Then it is his turn. His knees feel wobbly. His hands feel damp. "Your word is 'necessary,'" says Morah Tamar.

Yaakov's mind goes blank. He can see the word in his head, but the letters keep jumping around. One c or two? One s or two?

"N-E-C-E-S-S-A-R-Y," he says slowly.

Morah Tamar looks at her card, then looks up with a frown. "Hmm," she says. "Let me check that."

Yaakov's heart drops. He is sure he has made a mistake.

Then she smiles. "I was looking at the wrong word. You spelled it perfectly. Well done."

Yaakov lets out a breath. But then he realizes something strange. For one second, when he thinks he got it wrong, he feels scared. But the world hasn't ended. The room is the same. His friends are still smiling.

At lunch, he tells Yossi about it. "I thought I messed up, and I got so scared."

"Why?" asks Yossi. "Everyone messes up. I got 'friend' right today, but last week I spelled it 'freind.' Morah just wrote the right way on my paper, and I fixed it."

"You don't mind?" asks Yaakov.

"Nope," says Yossi. "That's how I learn. If I never made mistakes, I'd never find out what I don't know."

Yaakov chews his sandwich slowly. He thinks about the gold star chart. Maybe it isn't the stars that matter. Maybe the learning matters more.

The next day, Morah Tamar hands out a new challenge. It is a long list of really hard words. Most children groan.

Yaakov looks at the first word. He doesn't know it. He takes a breath and says to himself, I can try. If I get it wrong, I'll learn it.

He writes down his best guess. It is wrong. But Morah Tamar shows him the correct way, and he writes it three times.

That afternoon, Yaakov notices that his shoulders are relaxed. His chest feels light.

When Rivka asks him that night why he is whispering again, he says, "Practicing words."

"You always do that."

"I know," says Yaakov. "But tonight I'm going to get some wrong."



Activity 1 of 9

Remember the story

1. What event does Morah Tamar announce?

2. Which word does Zevi get wrong?

3. What word is Yaakov's turn?

4. What does Yossi say about mistakes?



Activity 2 of 9

Fact or guess? (circle one)

1. Yaakov has a full gold star chart. Fact / Guess
2. Zevi is very upset about his mistake. Fact / Guess
3. Morah Tamar mixes up the card. Fact / Guess
4. Yaakov feels less afraid of mistakes at the end. Fact / Guess



Activity 3 of 9

Think and write

1. Why is Yaakov so afraid of making a mistake?

2. Tell about a mistake that helped you learn something.

3. What can you say to yourself when you make a mistake?

Activity 4 of 9

Word search (find all 6)

Words: SPELLING, ISLAND, MISTAKE, LEARN, NECESSARY, STARS

M	S	K	F	T	N	H	E	I	N	S
T	N	T	M	O	N	N	C	S	T	P
C	J	E	A	I	Y	D	B	L	C	E
W	D	R	C	R	S	R	L	A	E	L
R	P	Y	E	E	S	T	U	N	C	L
G	A	E	K	L	S	M	A	D	W	I
T	D	J	L	E	K	S	L	K	A	N
V	P	G	B	A	U	B	A	T	E	G
F	F	K	N	R	O	D	C	R	G	U
H	P	P	E	N	M	D	D	T	Y	O
V	E	O	R	C	Y	P	T	M	L	O



Activity 5 of 9

Scrambled words (from the story)

1. IDSNAL = _____

2. FRDIEN = _____

3. ELCSTA = _____

4. EALNR = _____

5. SRTSA = _____



Activity 6 of 9

Say it out loud

Practice each line in a calm, steady voice:

"I can try. If I'm wrong, I will learn it."

"A mistake helps me find out what I don't know."

"Thank you for showing me the right way."



Activity 7 of 9

My chart

My Learning Chart

Day / moment	What I tried	What I got wrong	What I learned
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			



Activity 8 of 9

Draw it

Draw a big gold star with the word LEARN across the middle.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin green border, intended for drawing a gold star with the word LEARN across the middle.



Activity 9 of 9

Answers

Remember the story:

1. A class spelling bee

2. Island

3. Necessary

4. That is how he learns

Fact or guess: 1 Fact; 2 Guess; 3 Fact; 4 Fact

Scrambled words: ISLAND, FRIEND, CASTLE, LEARN, STARS

Think and write: answers will vary; talk them over together.