

12th Scripps National Spelling Bee

The **12th National Spelling Bee** was held in Washington, D.C. on May 26, 1936, at the National Museum. Scripps-Howard did not sponsor the Bee until 1941.

The winner was Jean Trowbridge, age 13, of Stuart, Iowa,^[2] with the word *eczema*. Thirteen-year-old Bruce Ackerman, of Tazewell County, Illinois, who took 3rd the prior year, came in second. Catherine Davis, 13, of Indiana took third, falling on "shrieking".^{[3][4]}

In the final rounds, Trowbridge was first disqualified for "numskull", which Ackerman then spelled as "numbskull" followed by "gnome" for the apparent win. The judges then realized that "numskull" was an acceptable spelling, and the contest continued. Ackerman misspelled "predilection" a few words later, which Trowbridge spelled correctly followed by "eczema" for the win.^[4]

The final hour of the competition was broadcast on radio on the Columbia broadcasting system.^[5]

As of 2014, winner Jean Trowbridge (married name Tyler) was living in Grand Junction, Colorado.^[6]

First Black finalists

MacNolia Cox, a 13-year-old girl from Akron,^[7] and Elizabeth Kenny, a 15 year old from Plainfield, New Jersey, were the first African-American children to compete as finalists in the National Spelling Bee—and Cox made it to the final five.

Due to segregation, Cox had to move into a black-only train car when she crossed into Maryland, and was unable to stay at the Willard Hotel with the other spellers. Cox and her mother were also placed at a separate table at the contestants banquet.^[8] Cox was eliminated on the word "nemesis", and her schoolteacher and newspaper sponsor representative both protested the word as being a proper noun (Nemesis being a Greek goddess of retribution). However, the protest was denied as the word can also be used as a common noun.^[9] Some have since suggested that Cox was intentionally given an unapproved word (a capitalized word); any claims of racial bias were denied at the time, but are not surprising considering the segregated treatment that she received.^{[10][11]}

In 2004, poet A. Van Jordan published the book of poems "M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A" based on Cox's life experiences.^{[12][11][13]}

References

- (19 May 1936). Article (https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/107985554/), *Courier-Journal* ("Alternating as pronouncers will be Dr. H.E. Warner and Prof. H.F. Harding.")

12th National Spelling Bee



Date	May 26, 1936
Location	National Museum in Washington, D.C.
Winner	Jean Trowbridge
Age	13
Residence	Stuart, Iowa
Sponsor	<i>The Des Moines Register and Tribune</i>
Sponsor location	Des Moines, Iowa
Winning word	eczema
No. of contestants	17
Pronouncer	H.E. Warner and Harold F. Harding ^[1]
Preceded by	11th Scripps National Spelling Bee
Followed by	13th Scripps National Spelling Bee

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3. (30 May 1936). [Best Speller Stumbles over Word Nemesis](https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2211&dat=19360530&id=xtlmAAAAIBAJ&sjid=qAIGAAAAIBAJ&pg=4525,2656619) (<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2211&dat=19360530&id=xtlmAAAAIBAJ&sjid=qAIGAAAAIBAJ&pg=4525,2656619>), *The Afro American*
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