

# SPELLBOUND



## Synopsis:

Spellbound follows eight kids on their quest to win the 1999 National Spelling Bee. This Oscar-nominated entry documents the intense experience of the National Spelling Bee as seen through the eyes of eight young spellers, with viewers glimpsing the kids' private lives as they train for and compete in the ultimate cerebral showdown. While they try to keep their eyes on the \$10,000 prize, their personal stories illuminate their quirks, their obsessive study habits and their alternately heartbreaking and inspiring family dynamics.

**Director/  
Producer:**  
Jeffrey Blitz

**Run Time**  
97 minutes

## Awards

The Academy Awards:  
*Best Documentary, Nominated*  
American Cinema Editors:  
*Best Edited Documentary Film*  
Chicago Critics Association Awards:  
*Best Documentary*  
Emmy Award:  
*News & Documentary, Best Cultural Programming*  
Independent Spirit Awards:  
*Truer Than Fiction Award, Nominated*  
International Documentary Association:  
*Feature Documentary, Nominated*  
Los Angeles IFP/West Film Fest:  
*Audience Award*  
*Best Documentary*  
*Special Jury Prize*  
Online Film Critics Society Awards:  
*Best Documentary, Nominated*  
SXSW Film Festival:  
*Best Documentary*  
Satellite Awards:  
*Best Documentary, Nominated*  
Woodstock Film Festival:  
*Best Documentary*



Jeffrey Blitz is a director, producer and screenwriter who has worked in documentary, features and television. His first film, the 2002 documentary, *Spellbound*, was nominated for an Academy Award and won an Emmy Award. It was recently named one of the top 5 documentaries of all-time by the International Documentary Association. In 2007, Jeffrey won the Dramatic Directing Prize at the Sundance Film Festival for his first fiction film, *Rocket Science*. That film was also nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards including Best First Feature and Best First Screenplay. In 2009, Jeffrey won the Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series for his work on *The Office*. His most recent documentary, *Lucky*, depicts the lives of lottery winners, premiered at Sundance and screened on HBO. Jeffrey grew up in New York and New Jersey, then studied creative writing at Johns Hopkins University and directing at the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts.

## Questions for Discussion - Spellbound

- Why is the title of this movie significant?
- What kind of picture of America does this documentary paint in terms of race and class?
- Do you think the parents of the contestants are supportive? Do they put too much pressure on their children to succeed? Do parents put the same type of pressure on children in your society?
- Is Spellbound a celebration of American values and/or the American Dream? Why or why not? Which families support this theory/feeling and how do they convey this?
- Why do you feel that 1st or 2nd generation immigrant children succeed in the spelling competition?
- What motivates these kids to compete in the spelling bee? Do you think some of the parents are living out their dreams through their children's participation in the national spelling bee? Do your parents put pressure on you to succeed or as parents do you put pressure on your children?
- How is this documentary effective in portraying the pressure of competitions?
- Which of the contestants do you feel the most connection to or like the most? Why?