

FADE UP ON SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

Two rows of steel chairs line the stage of a school auditorium. Seated in these chairs are the best spellers in California. Each speller looks miserable as they focus their attention on the front of the stage. The shot widens to reveal...

ANGLE ON PODIUM

A young boy stands at the podium with a huge smile. He wears a red, white and blue striped shirt. Stands on his tiptoes to try and see over the podium.

ANGLE ON TROPHY

A middle-aged man appears from backstage holding a golden TROPHY that shines brighter than the sun. It reads "California State Spelling Bee Champion". The boy extends his hands and upon touching the trophy, a deafening CHEER is heard from the audience.

ANGLE ON AUDIENCE

Cheers and screams fill the air. ONE MAN though, whose face is barely visible, remains seated. He applauds, but not as enthusiastically as the woman standing next to him. This couple is the young boy's parents. The woman grabs the man by the arm and pulls him up.

ANGLE ON YOUNG BOY

The young boy's feeble frame buckles under the pressure of holding this massive trophy. Suddenly something DRIPS on his left cheek. He loses his grip on the trophy. It FALLS onto the stage floor with a OMINOUS THUD, silencing the raucous crowd. The boy wipes his cheek to inspect.

ANGLE ON BOY'S HAND

The boy tries to identify this RED substance. Suddenly another drop falls on his hand. He slowly begins to look up when...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

AARON, 17, breathes heavily as he removes an extra soppy spitball from his left cheek. He resumes drawing creepy doodles of skulls and crossbones. Great potential but no drive. Looks around the room. Spots KEVIN FULLMAN and his posse exchanging high fives. Looks to the front of the room. Realizes his teacher's desk is vacant.

(CONTINUED)

AARON

You coulda killed me, you know.

KEVIN

(laughing)

You missed a spot. Loser!

Aaron looks as if he's about to say something when he's stopped by the perfectly manicured hand of JULES, 17. The beautiful yet humble type. Definitely the kind of girl you bring home to mom. She nods her head in disagreement to whatever Aaron has planned.

KEVIN

Now you're getting girls to fight for you. You outta be thanking me. You were snoring so loud, Resnick would have definitely caught you.

As if on cue, MR. RESNICK, a tall, slender bookworm type walks frantically into the room carrying a stack of papers.

MR. RESNICK

Sorry class. That damn copy machine always malfunctions.

Jules nudges Aaron and they share a giggle.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)

Mr. Carpelli. I hope summer school is as amusing as this.

Aaron's countenance quickly changes.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)

Now, as you all know the end of the year is fast approaching. Which of course means...

Kevin raises his hand.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)

Yes Mr. Fullman.

KEVIN

That I'll be at the beach checking out the babes.

The class laughs.

MR. RESNICK

I wouldn't count on that Kevin. Perhaps you should become more

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MR. RESNICK (cont'd)  
acquainted with Mr. Carpelli. You  
might discover similarities in your  
summer plans. But that's neither  
here nor there.

Mr. Resnick begins to walk around the room handing out the  
sheets.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
Now, I have decided to cancel your  
final exam...

The class cheers. Aaron and Jules look surprised.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
(speaking over noise)  
Instead I will be giving you a  
final paper. A twenty page personal  
essay, twelve point font,  
double-spaced.

The class moans.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
And as you can see on the handout  
it will count for fifty percent of  
your final grade.

Mr. Resnick coughs.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
Excuse me.

Mr. Resnick coughs again. He walks to his desk. Takes a  
drink from his one-gallon water jug.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
So the assignment will...

Mr. Resnick coughs yet again.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
I am terrib...sorry class. Jules  
will you...read the assignment.

JULES  
Of course Mr. Resnick.

Mr. Resnick chugs his water.

JULES (CONT'D)  
Fear is something everyone faces...

Mr. Resnick continues coughing.

JULES (CONT'D)  
...sometimes on a daily basis.  
Fears can range from something as  
small as myrmecophobia, the fear of  
ants to something as big as  
thanatophobia, the fear of death,  
and anywhere in between.

Aaron nervously looks around the room. He breathes heavily.  
Wipes his sweaty palms.

AARON'S DAYDREAM...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Aaron has his head on his desk.

MR. RESNICK  
Aaron Carpelli how many times do I  
have to tell you, no sleeping in my  
class!

Aaron quickly lifts his head up, horrified to see Mr.  
Resnick coughing up large amounts of BLOOD. Jules' voice  
then becomes audible.

JULES  
What is your biggest fear , Aaron?

Aaron turns and sees Jules bleeding from her head.

AARON  
Jules you're bleeding.

Aaron turns his attention back to the front of the  
classroom. Mr. Resnick is right in front of him! Mr. Resnick  
COUGHS blood right onto his face. Aaron JERKS BACK.

REALITY...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Aaron jerks back knocking his seat over. Lets out a SCREAM.  
Quickly scans the room and sees Mr. Resnick coughing  
normally. The entire class is silent and staring at him.

(CONTINUED)

MR. RESNICK  
Aaron I didn't ask for a  
demonstration!

AARON  
What?

MR. RESNICK  
Sit down.

Aaron sits back down, confused and embarrassed.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
So as I was saying, fear isn't  
always expressed in the obvious  
ways like screaming or crying.  
Sometimes it's so powerful, it can  
grip you into silence.

The bell rings. The class starts to leave.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
Believe me class, I'm certain this  
essay will allow you to uncover  
some fascinating things about  
yourself.

Aaron and Jules are walking to the door when Aaron is  
stopped by his teacher.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
Aaron, a word please.

AARON  
(to Jules)  
I'll meet you outside.

Aaron walks over to Mr. Resnick's desk, still shaken from  
his dream.

MR. RESNICK  
Aaron, that little stunt you pulled  
back there wasn't funny.

AARON  
But...

MR. RESNICK  
Your grades aren't funny either. I  
spoke with Principal Jones and if  
you don't pass this class, you  
won't graduate.

Mr. Resnick takes another look at Aaron's grades.

(CONTINUED)

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
And to pass this class, (pause) you  
have to ace this paper.

Aaron rolls his eyes.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
Aaron, what's wrong? You haven't  
been acting like yourself the past  
couple of weeks. Is everything ok  
at home?

AARON  
I'm fine. Can I go?

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
This might shock you, but I think  
you can do really well on this  
assignment.

AARON  
Yeah.

MR. RESNICK (CONT'D)  
Why don't you prove me right.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Aaron and Jules walk down the hallway to their next class.

JULES  
What happened in there?

AARON  
Oh you mean how that neurotic  
imbecile bushwhacked me again.

JULES  
You know what I'm talking about.  
(pause) It's happening again, isn't  
it?

AARON  
No, I'm fine. I just need to stop  
letting everything get to me. (long  
pause) What you should be worrying  
about is not seeing my pretty face  
anymore.

Jules chuckles.

(CONTINUED)

JULES

Why?

AARON

Resnick said I'm not graduating if I don't ace that stupid assignment. (pause) What's the assignment again?

JULES

Weren't you listening? (pause) Oh right. Well, you have the handout.

Aaron gives Jules a LOOK.

JULES (CONT'D)

Here.

Jules hands Aaron her copy of the handout. Aaron is reluctant to take it.

JULES (CONT'D)

Don't worry I already have it all up here. (touches her head)

AARON

Figures.

JULES

Look its obvious you need a little motivation. I think I can help.

AARON

(flirtatious)

Really? Will my mom approve?

Jules smacks Aaron on the arm.

JULES

Just meet me after school.

Jules walks into a classroom. Aaron smiles.

EXT. FRONT OF SCHOOL - LATER

Aaron reads a piece of paper.

ANGLE ON PAPER

It's the English assignment.

(CONTINUED)

AARON  
Identify your biggest fear...ta,  
ta, ta...why do you fear it...uh  
huh...

A biker ZOOMS past Aaron, almost knocking Aaron down. He clenches his fists.

AARON (CONT'D)  
(to himself)  
Bastard.

Aaron glances over at his watch. It's three-thirty.

AARON (CONT'D)  
Where the heck is she? (pause) Crap  
I have to get home.

Aaron begins to walk home.

EXT. FRONT OF AARON'S HOME - HALF HOUR LATER

A wide shot shows Aaron in front of his house. House not well kept. Structure has aged rapidly. An old house with a long, sordid past.

ANGLE ON AARON

Looks like he forgot something.

AARON  
Where are my keys?

About to ring bell.

AARON (CONT'D)  
No, she'll kill me.

Thinking. Thinking. Light bulb goes off. Aaron lifts up the flower pot. Spare key underneath. Saved.

INT. AARON'S HOME - AFTERNOON

Aaron begins to ascend the stairs. Looks at his cell. Three missed calls from Jules. Doesn't bother to call back. Suddenly, he hears a woman CALLING his name. Stops in mid step.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
Aaron!!!