

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Jah'Quane Graham Is USVI's 2018 Territorial Intermediate Spelling Bee

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Following an exciting thirteen-round competition, Juanita Gardine Elementary School sixth grader Jah'Quane Graham correctly spelled "exceedingly" to win the 2018 Territorial Intermediate Spelling Bee on March 27, 2018 in the Charlotte Amalie High School auditorium, the Department of Education announced Thursday.

Jah'Quane will represent the Virgin Islands and travel to Washington, D.C. to participate in the 91st Scripps National Spelling Bee, May 29–31, 2018.

Full of excitement as a result of his win, Jah'Quane began to dance on stage. "I love to dance. After long hours studying and practicing, I dance," said Jah'Quane. "So, I told

myself, when I win the spelling bee, I'm going to dance. The 45th Territorial Spelling Bee champion said that his shortened school day allowed him more time to focus on preparing for the Bee.

Denise Gomes, Program Manager for the State Office of Curriculum and Instruction and Bee Coordinator welcomed audience members to the 45th annual premiere spelling competition of the Virgin Islands. Addelita Cancryn 8th grader Maat Osuji's opened the event in song, performing the Star-Spangled Banner and the Virgin Island March.

St. Thomas – St. John Insular Superintendent Dionne Wells-Hedrington expressed her excitement to be among the top spellers of the territory.

"Today, I am honored to be in the presence of twelve dynamic, determined and talented spellers who represent the St. Croix and St. Thomas – St. John Districts," Wells-Hedrington started. "You are all winners and have proven that despite all of the challenges this Territory faces, you all have found the time and have put in the long hours needed to prepare you to be where you are today. For that focus, hard work and determination, we commend you. Congratulations!"

Following the Superintendent's remarks, Gomes introduced spelling officials. Dr. Rita Howard and Virgin Islands State Teacher of the Year Dinah Browne served as pronouncers. The top spellers then took center-stage and introduced themselves. Chief Judge of the 2018 Territorial Bee Mary Harley read the rules of the competition and the Bee began, first with the practice round.

The top spellers put their best foot forward as they spelled homophones, homonyms, and proved their strengths in vocabulary and language arts. The competition lasted just under an hour with students spelling words such as, "trivet," "silt," "gourmet," "anxiety," and "ahem." Soft-spoken 2018 St. Croix District Spelling Bee champion Hannah Neil misspelled "feral" which then brought Graham and Aliya Lindo of The Church of God (Holiness) Academy battling for six rounds before Lindo misspelled "covetous." The St. Croix District proudly took home the top three places for the Territorial Bee.

This year, the United Way of the Virgin Islands organization sponsored the annual literacy event along with long-time supporter, the Virgin Islands Daily News. United Way USVI CEO Vinod Dadlani congratulated the spellers and expressed his pleasure in partnering with the Department of Education for the Territorial Bee. He also thanked the parents, coaches and teachers for their continued support of students when they participate in extracurricular academic activities.

"...I want you to understand that thankfully seeing you all vie for this title gives me a renewed spirit that our education system is alive and thriving," said Dadlani. "I was happy to see that you all took your time and was diligent in your spelling. You showed grace under fire."

All twelve participants received certificates of participation, a tablet (their District Bee prize), compliments of the United Way USVI and a backpack willed with goodies. The top three spellers also received a crystal Spelling Bee trophy each. The champion additionally received a laptop, compliments of United Way USVI, the Samuel Louis Sugarman Award for the 2018 United States Mint Proof Set, a one-year subscription to

the Scripps National Spelling Bee's official dictionary—the Merriam-Webster Unabridged Online Dictionary, another one-year subscription to Britannica Online Premium and a trip for two to Washington, D.C. to represent the Virgin Islands in the 91st Scripps National Spelling Bee, compliments of the Virgin Islands Daily News.

St. Croix Insular Superintendent Colleen Williams closed out the 45th annual Bee with encouraging words to the top spellers and the champion.

“Twelve dynamic spellers from schools across our territory battled to the very end at 11:44 a.m. Congratulations to you Jah’Quane...know that we all will all be watching with VI pride when you take the stage in Washington, D.C.” m

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