

Bees spell success for fifth grader

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Greensboro Academy fifth- grader Brooke Freeman was a bit surprised to win two regional spelling bees in one day.

Her family and teachers weren't.

"She's been reading since the age of 3," said her grandmother, Emily Hargrove. "She reads non-stop all the time -- anything: books and magazines at the grocery store."

Brooke's mother, Laura Freeman, said she read to Brooke in the womb and while she was an infant, and always kept a lot of books around the house.

Brooke won the regional charter school competition for grades 3 through 5 on Jan. 25 in Mount Airy, spelling "Bolshevik" and "sputnik."

She did so well, she was invited to compete against the middle later that day. She won there, too, spelling "sukiyaki" and "wasabi."

She walked away with a certificate, two trophies, two dictionaries and an invitation to the public school regional bee at the end of March.

"I was kind of surprised about the middle because I didn't expect to win it," Brooke said. "The elementary, I was proud, I kind of wanted to win, but I didn't expect to."

When she went back to school, her friends had made her a poster reading, "You Rock!"

Her teacher at Greensboro Academy, Courtney Evans, held the classroom spelling bee that helped Brooke move on to the regionals.

Each year, the school holds a spelling bee for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The participants are chosen by in-class bees; Evans' class yielded three contestants.

Brooke won second place at her school on Jan. 8 and began studying a list of 700 words for the regional bee.

"She's a very bright young lady," Evans said. "She's very diligent, and spelling is definitely a strength for her."

Brooke's grandmother said winning hasn't gone to Brooke's head.

"She's sweet and not pretentious," she said. "We're hoping she'll stay that way all of her life."

Brooke likes to hear the words called out to her, and she loves to spell them.

"I'm really into spelling now," she said.

She's adding this talent to swimming, gymnastics and playing guitar.

Her spelling bee goal is to make it to the state bee. Her career goal is to be an actress.

Her mother said Brooke seems comfortable on stage.

"She seemed so confident up there, it amazed me," she said.

Brooke moves on to the Winston-Salem Journal regional spelling bee March 30. Evans said Brooke has been studying, and predicts that she'll come out in the top three.

"I'm very excited," Brooke said, "but when I get there, I'll probably start to get real nervous."

