

Best of Fulbright ETA Monthly Highlights

from January – March 2024

AMINEF
American Indonesian
Exchange Foundation

 **FULBRIGHT**
Indonesia

SEVENTH SPECIAL EDITION

Best of Fulbright ETA Monthly Highlights

from January – March 2024



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American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF)

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This is a special edition of the *Fulbright ETA Monthly Highlight* from Indonesia, where we have compiled the best stories from January – March 2024.

The 2023-2024 Fulbright English Teaching Assistants and their host schools have completed their eight-month Fulbright ETA program in Indonesia. Throughout the second semester, they actively created dynamic English learning environments and fostered connections beyond the classroom through various community engagement projects.

Collaborating with the school community, they organized the local WORDS Storytelling and Storybook Competition, fostering student literacy and creativity. They also helped AMINEF organize the WORDS National Storytelling and Storybook Competition in Jakarta.

As their time in Indonesia ended, they bid heartfelt farewells to their schools and communities, leaving behind cross-cultural understanding and educational enhancement.

The following pages offer a glimpse into their transformative experiences, highlighting their classroom innovations, community engagement efforts, and contributions to fostering intercultural exchange.

About the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program and ETA in Indonesia

The Fulbright ETA program places US citizens holding bachelor's or master's degrees who receive Fulbright grants from the US Department of State to help English teachers around the globe, including Indonesia. ETAs help teach the English language while serving as cultural ambassadors for the US. The ETA program began in Indonesia in 2004, initially starting with five schools. It has since grown in scope, with 20-35 schools hosting ETAs yearly. AMINEF collaborates closely with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to select the schools that welcome ETAs.

In 2022, the Fulbright ETA program, along with other Fulbright programs in Indonesia, was part of a renewed arrangement signed by Secretary General of the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Suharti and US Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Lee Satterfield formalizing the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the field of Education signed in December 2021 by Indonesian Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Nadiem Makarim and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

About the *Fulbright ETA Monthly Highlights*

The Highlights are informal stories submitted by the ETAs that recount their experiences with co-teachers, students, and community members where they are placed. We hope they are informative and capture the special value of this program. We welcome your feedback and encourage you to sign up for *The Highlights* e-newsletter, delivered straight to your inbox. For both feedback and sign-up, please email us at communications@aminef.or.id.

If you wish to catch up on our previous editions, they are available at

www.aminef.or.id



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[Fulbright ETA Monthly Highlights Newsletter.](#)

School Activities



While in Indonesia, an ETA's main responsibility is to assist their co-teachers with lesson planning and classroom instruction. **The lessons are crafted to incorporate interactive activities that promote student involvement and active learning.** Discover these creative teaching techniques here.

Read on how **ETAs Allison, Natalie, Avery, Parker, Molly, Harry, Tineer, Luke, Owais, and Harrison impacted their classrooms.**

Active Learning

SMAN 1 Sedayu, Yogyakarta.

Over the last month, the English classrooms at SMAN 1 Sedayu have been filled with active learning, dialogic role-playing, and sweaty board race games. As of late, **ETA Allison Gross** and her co-teachers have thoroughly enjoyed opening the class with a few challenging rounds of Hangman, a game in which her students are impossibly skilled. (It only took them three turns to correctly guess the word "METACOGNITION").

After the students are warmed up, English classes usually begin with a brief review or introduction of the week's learning focus. For the last two weeks, students have focused on Procedural Texts. The students impressively related what might have otherwise been a dry subject to their daily lives, writing, discussing, and sharing the steps of how to use an ATM machine, how to cook *nasi goreng* (fried rice), or make Indomie (an Indonesian favorite – think an elite Cup of Noodle).

Allison and her co-teachers have learned that the students' brains work best when they can get up and move about after sitting for some time. With this unit, the students loved miming the actions of various cooking verbs that accompanied their personal procedure texts ("boil," "chop," and "fry"). Allison will never boil water and rice again in the US without thinking of her beloved students!!

(First appeared in the January 2024 edition)



A Food Focused Lesson

SMKN 3 Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan.

ETA Natalie Suh's 10th-grade students have been working hard on procedural texts this month. Students learned about the structure of the procedural text, ordinal words, and present tense verbs. Her students are always excited by the topic of food, so she decided to have the students create and present their own recipes. Many students chose local favorites like soursop (*sirsak*) juice, corn cheese (*jasuke: jagung, susu, keju*), and spicy cassava chips (*keripik singkong*). Thus, it was also a great opportunity for Natalie to learn from her students how to make these delicious foods.

In groups, students wrote their recipes in their notebooks and then created drawings to go along with each step. The drawings helped students remember the verb in each step. Students then presented their recipes to the rest of the class. The students were all very supportive of one another. One of the students kindly brought in some *keripik singkong* that he made himself to share with the class on the day of the presentation. It was spicy, sweet, and delicious. It is also now Natalie's favorite snack!

(First appeared in the January 2024 edition)



Wellness Club at SMKN 4 Surakarta

SMKN 4 Surakarta, Central Java.



January was a very physically active month for **ETA Avery Erickson**. Returning to Solo from her vacation in Bali reinvigorated and inspired her. Avery began hosting her second Community Engagement Project, a Wellness Group for the students at her school. The project aims to build mental and physical confidence in students and empower them to take charge of their health. As a long-time yoga practitioner, Avery shared the fundamentals of yoga with her students at their last practice. They learned breathing techniques and learned the sequence of Surya Namaskar, also known as Sun Salutation.

ETA Avery also became a member of *Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate*, an Indonesian *pencak silat* organization. She attends intensive training several times a week, learning the exercises and the metaphysical teachings of *pencak silat*, an Indonesian martial art.

(First appeared in the January 2024 edition)

Educator Engagement - Faculty English Sessions at SMKN 1 Cangkringan

SMKN 1 Cangkringan, Yogyakarta.



This month, the faculty at SMKN 1 Cangkringan completed the third session of **ETA Parker Raybourne's** English seminars. These seminars aim to provide English language opportunities and resources to faculty at Parker's school. To execute each seminar, Parker works closely with *Ibu* Latifah, his counterpart, co-teachers, and school administration to craft sessions encouraging faculty to use and practice English. Session topics are based on faculty requests while building on previous lessons' material.

This most recent session featured a recap of basic greetings, an introduction to daily activities, and exploring additional English resources. Every session includes guided practice, take-home materials, and ample opportunities for questions and answers.

Participants in this session were most enthusiastic about introducing new resources they could use to learn English and incorporate English into their respective subject areas. Parker says that Kahoot, a trivia software covering new materials, was a major hit, and he expects to see this implemented in the classes of SMKN 1 Cangkringan very soon.

Previous sessions have explored additional English-related topics and American and Indonesian cultural norms. The most recent session included 45 participants. All participants indicated they learned something new, felt positive about learning English, and gained insights into American culture. These sessions achieve the goals of the Fulbright program by promoting mutual understanding and enabling teachers to use English, ultimately building real-life conversational skills.

(First appeared in the February 2024 edition)

An Exciting First Week of Teaching

SMKN 3 Pekanbaru, Riau

On February 24, 2024, **ETA Molly Gleason** hosted an exciting initiative at SMKN 3 Pekanbaru. Students and teachers came together for a tree-planting project that enriched the campus, fostered environmental responsibility, and boosted English language skills. The project aimed to achieve multiple goals: environmental enhancement, education and awareness, and English language development. The project aimed to cultivate a deeper understanding of the importance of native trees and their positive impact on the environment.

Before students began, Molly provided a demonstration of proper planting techniques. Molly and the students also discussed air quality, climate change, and biodiversity. The event closed with a performance by the Ecology Club students. They presented an original story entirely in English, creatively emphasizing the importance of conservation. Their performance highlighted their grasp of the language and showcased their understanding of ecological principles.

The project was a great success, with the school now boasting 15 new trees and an increased interest in conservation and ecological awareness.

(First appeared in the February 2024 edition)



Class or Restaurant?

SMKN 3 Manado, North Sulawesi.

At SMK Negeri 3 Manado, the focus of every daily activity is preparing students to find better success in the future job market and while working at their jobs. Teachers from different departments hold meetings to coordinate lesson topics and design integrated lessons that test skills from many different topics at once, with an eye toward real-world applications of the knowledge gained. For example, a recent collaboration between the English department and the culinary teachers led to the temporary creation of a full-service English-language restaurant operating within the walls of the massive school campus.

ETA Harry Crawford has an important part in this integrative exercise, commonly referred to as *praktek* by major-specific teachers and within the school community. Culinary and hospitality teachers invited Harrison to serve as a guest in a mock restaurant setting, where he was greeted and guided to his table by English-speaking culinary students. These students practiced their vocabulary extensively to be able to communicate with foreign guests and were very excited to practice on their ETA. Harry ordered a dory fish fillet with soup and a deviled pancake for dessert. It was amazing, and he's so happy to have been able to try it.

(First appeared in the February 2024 edition)



The Charm of Indonesian Dance and Poetry: A Podcast by SMAN 3 Banjarbaru English Club

SMAN 3 Banjarbaru, South Kalimantan.

The English Club set out to do a new, adventurous project – to create their podcast to appreciate Indonesian culture, heritage, and arts.

This is the first time a podcast has been made in SMAN 3 Banjarbaru, so the students collaborated as a team to achieve this. The students involved were hosts Nabilla and Rafiq; interviewers Fajar, Kevin, Minnah, Mey, Muna, Ziddan, Syahid, and Fariz; videographers Cika, Atika, Uno, Danish; and editors Atika and Nabilla.

All the students put their time and effort into making an engaging and informative podcast episode for a widespread audience.

Before interviewing community members, **ETA Tineer** led two workshops where students created at least five research questions in English to ask performers. During the mock podcast episode, English teachers *Ibu Ari* and *Ibu Mahrita* acted as potential interviewees and gave constructive feedback to improve the students skills.

On International Mother Language Day, the students watched dancers and poets showcase their talents on stage and then interview them for the podcast. In one of the interviews, the students asked *Bapak Rhoni* about his inspiration for choreographing a unique Banjar dance involving a guitar. The students edited a 30-minute video to finalize the project and translated the dialogue from Indonesian to English subtitles. Please view the YouTube video "The Charm of Indonesian Dance and Poetry" via <https://youtu.be/VU2ubOvBwOk?si=kzPiYhPa2NIqwxS>.

The students had fun taking on new roles in a team and gained more confidence in interviewing and interpersonal connections while engaging with their community. Overall, the student-run podcast fostered an environment outside the classroom that encouraged students to build real-life communication skills in English.

(First appeared in the March 2024 edition)



English at the Asrama!

SMAS Nurul Ilmi Padangsidempuan, North Sumatra.

Of the many community engagement initiatives **ETA Luke Losie** has done, few have been as enjoyable as the dormitory English course at SMAS Nurul Ilmi in Padangsidempuan, North Sumatra.

Every Thursday and Saturday, throughout February and March, Luke and his counterpart *Ibu Ade* have led extra English classes for the *asrama* (dormitory) students for an hour before *Maghrib* prayer.

This course aligns with Nurul Ilmi's long-term goal of creating an English-speaking atmosphere at school. The canteen was often packed full of students excited to learn.

On March 2, for example, students reviewed how to answer the question: "What are you doing?" By using fun roleplay activities where a student acts out some activity and the other students must guess what they are doing, as well as focusing on examples that the boarding school students regularly encounter on a day-to-day basis, Luke and *Ibu Ade* were able to bring life to the lesson material. The constant enthusiasm and high turnout of the students were very encouraging.

(First appeared in the March 2024 edition)



Bukber at SMAN 4 Kota Jambi

SMAN 4 Jambi, Jambi.

Shorter school days, *Taraweeh* at *Masjid*, *ngabuburit* (hanging out), and a long, consistent schedule of *bukber* (break of fast together) fill up the month of *Ramadan*. It seems like **ETA Owais Mahmood** is straight at home, able to enjoy and immerse himself with friends, students, and all.

On March 20, Owais *bukber* with the school, breaking (or opening) his fast with the community. They had *nasi Padang*, a classic go-to dish in Jambi from West Sumatra, and many non-Muslim students and teachers joined in, celebrating with the community. Because of the prevalence of Islam, everyone is familiar and aware of *puasa* (fasting), something that has a bit of a sparser understanding in the US, and understandably so.

This month of *Ramadan* also ends Owais' term as a teacher at SMAN 4 Jambi. Classes are shortened, which means less time with the school and students. Regardless, this is a great way to celebrate the beginning of the end.

(First appeared in the March 2024 edition)



Wrapping Up

SMKN 3 Manado, North Sulawesi.

March was **ETA Harrison Crawford's** sixth month at the site, making it the last month before he departs for America. As part of his preparations for leaving the site, Harrison is also wrapping up his two ongoing Community Engagement Projects: separate, independent English Clubs for SMK Negeri 3 Manado students and teachers. These projects aim to improve the general level of English knowledge at the school through low-pressure, fun exercises and an environment where practice and questions are encouraged. Students from all grades and majors would attend in a rotating cast that included over 60 students and extended throughout the entire life of the grant.

Harrison created a culminating debate project for the Student English Club to help students demonstrate their increased ability to express themselves in English. In their penultimate English Club meeting, students were randomly assigned an opponent and asked to draw one of several thought-provoking topics from an envelope. They were then given 15 minutes to prepare their thoughts and formulate arguments defending their position. Students had a great time and demonstrated a significantly increased knowledge of English relative to the semester's start. Harrison couldn't be prouder of how far his students have come.

(First appeared in the March 2024 edition)



Reflecting on Eight Months of Learning

SMKN 3 Pekanbaru, Riau.



In the final week before the Eid Al Fitr break, Grade 10 and 11 students, alongside **ETA Molly Gleason**, wrapped up grammar lessons. Amidst this, Molly and her students wrote heartfelt notes to each other, expressing gratitude and reflecting on their progress over the past eight months. These notes highlighted their appreciation and significant improvement in their English skills and confidence since the beginning of the year.

Additionally, students practiced spoken English by verbally expressing their appreciation to Molly. This exercise sharpened their language abilities and boosted their confidence in using English.

As the last week of teaching concluded, Molly felt a lot of pride in the progress made by her students. While saying goodbye for the break feels bittersweet, Molly is hopeful that her students will continue to develop their English skills long after her grant has ended.

These moments of connection and growth serve as a reminder of the impact of dedicated teaching and motivated learning, setting the stage for even more outstanding achievements in the future. Molly hopes that her students carry memories of English and the bonds forged through mutual respect and shared experiences, showing the transformative power of cultural exchange in fostering understanding and connection across diverse backgrounds.

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02

Cultural Exchanges

ETAs are encouraged to extend their involvement beyond the classroom by engaging in extracurricular activities within their school community. They can join existing clubs or even initiate new ones, fostering stronger connections and deepening their impact within their host schools.

Read on to see how **ETAs Natalie, Katrien, Owais, Allison, Avery, Parker, and Lily** took part in enriching their school communities beyond traditional classroom settings.

Elections and English Lessons
SMKN 3 Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan.

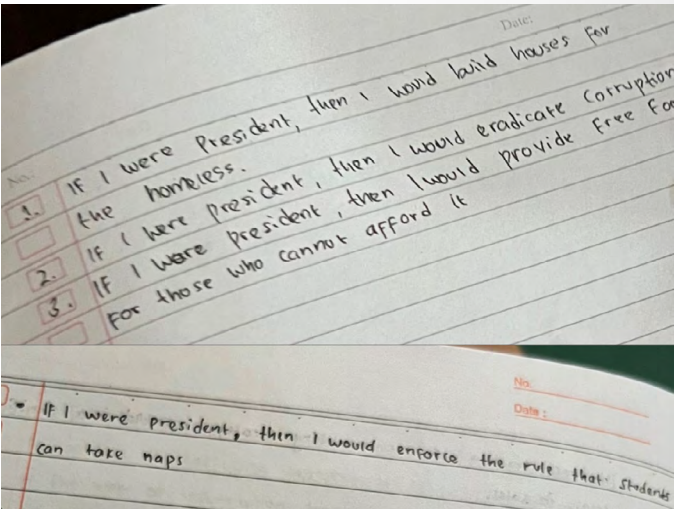
February 14 was the date of the presidential election in Indonesia. Many of **ETA Natalie Suh's** 11th-grade students were excited and passionate about voting for the first time, as the voting age in Indonesia is 17. Given the excitement, she thought it was only fit to have a fun English lesson around elections.

Students learned about the differences and similarities between US and Indonesian elections. Some students were surprised to learn that in the US, voters fill out their ballots with pens rather than the nails that Indonesian voters use to "poke" their favorite candidates. Other students were surprised to learn that election day in the US is not a holiday like in Indonesia.

After learning about election processes, students imagined what they would do if they were president by creating conditional sentences. Students wrote three statements that were creative and thoughtful solutions to the problems they wanted to fix. Responses included, but were not limited to, building houses for people without homes, providing free food to communities facing hunger, giving free skincare, and getting rid of corruption.

Initially, Natalie simply wanted the students to share their answers with the class. However, the students innovated and turned the class into a mini mock election. Three students went up at a time to share their conditional statements. Students then thought about whose statements were the best and then voted on the best presidential candidate. Overall, it was a great way to connect current events and active English learning.

(First appeared in the February 2024 edition)



Fostering Connection Through Joyful Learning
SMAN 1 Matauli Pandan, North Sumatra.



Drawing from her interest in early childhood education, **ETA Katrien Weemaes** was driven to delve deeper into the international education landscape in Indonesia while forging new connections in the local community.

She dedicates her Saturday mornings to volunteering at SDN Aksara Pandan, a nearby elementary school. Enlisting the help of her 11th-grade students from SMAN 1 Matauli Pandan, she organizes vibrant language sessions packed with speaking activities, music, and games, finding ways to infuse constant joy and laughter in the classroom. Whether mastering the English alphabet through games like Hangman or gleefully chanting along to Down by the Banks, each week leaves students singing and smiling, eager to explore new language skills while collecting an abundance of encouraging high-fives and stickers along the way.

Yet, beyond language acquisition, these sessions foster a rich cultural exchange. Even among adolescents, the spirit of sharing thrives as students eagerly vie for Katrien's attention to showcase their singing, dancing, marching, and football skills every Saturday.

These collaborative efforts not only enhance young learners' language skills but also cultivate valuable English-speaking and leadership experiences for the 11th-grade volunteers.

As Katrien and her students say goodbye to the energetic Aksara elementary students each week, they are continually inspired by the kids' boundless curiosity and love for learning. Several students repeatedly sprint across the school, pleading with the teachers to stay longer, adding a bittersweet touch to their farewells. These moments are a testament to the impact of their shared time, fueling hopes for a future where the next generation of global citizens thrives, never losing their innate joy for learning.

(First appeared in the February 2024 edition)

Crossroads of P-5 (*Pancasila*) and Black History

SMAN 4 Jambi, Jambi.

An objective of the Fulbright Program is cultural exchange; Fulbrighters not only do their jobs but are encouraged to engage in cultural exchange within their community/site. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology runs the P-5 project to instill *Pancasila* within its students. Students can have lots of free time, which is an amazing opportunity to introduce the American culture. And that is what **ETA Owais Mahmood** did.

The month of February marks Black History Month in America. Though Owais himself is not Black, he found it important and necessary to talk about Black history and its meaning in America. So, throughout the month, he visited each of his classes that had completed their projects and taught about Black history. Many of the students were astonished and unaware of the history.

Students related *Pancasila* and the injustices that African Americans faced; the timing of this project and Black History Month opened students up to understanding the importance of their identity. After all, *Kebangsaan* (Nationality) and internationalism are concepts that could be relevant to the topic.

(First appeared in the February 2024 edition)



Making the Moments Count

SMKN 4 Surakarta, Central Java.

February was a busy, productive, and heartwarming month for **ETA Avery Erickson** and her school. Avery and her co-teachers curated lesson plans for students to prepare them for upcoming job interviews and end-of-year examinations.

One particularly successful lesson in the Beauty and Space program included reading and navigating a map and giving guests accurate directions. Avery and her co-teachers also led a hide-and-seek instruction game, where students were instructed to hide objects around the classroom and give directions to their partners to find them before time was up.

Aware of the approaching end of the grant, ETA Avery also strove to spend as much quality time as possible with her students and teachers outside of school while exploring the wonderful city of Solo. Together, they explored the Saturday night market in downtown Surakarta, attended a traditional Javanese dance performance at Solo city hall, explored neighborhoods dedicated to *batik*-making, and watched local fishermen as the sun set over a nearby lake.

(First appeared in the February 2024 edition)



International English Club

SMAN 1 Sedayu, Yogyakarta.

ETA Allison Gross and her students connected across oceans and time zones with high schoolers in Turin, Italy, this past month via Zoom.

Despite initial technical challenges (and understanding differing English accents), the high schoolers quickly discovered common ground, bonding over their shared dislike of math and enthusiasm for volleyball and soccer. The Indonesian students were intrigued by the Italian students' casual demeanor and school clothing, while the Italian students were impressed by how Indonesian traditions of *pencak silat*, Javanese dance, and *gamelan* were maintained through extracurriculars at SMAN 1 Sedayu. (The Italians were in near disbelief when hearing about the volcanic activity in Indonesia).

The conversation then organically turned to discussing underserved communities' rights and dating/societal norms in Italy versus Indonesia-the Indonesian students were surprised by the Italian students' late nights and social gatherings, while the Italian students were equally curious about the Indonesian students' more conservative, family-oriented culture.

Despite the notable cultural differences, the Zoom call was a resounding success-some students exchanged Instagram handles with plans to keep perhaps in touch. The students were engaged, curious, and open-minded, and the conversation flowed easily across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Allison was thrilled to have facilitated this connection between her and her aunt's students, and she looks forward to future opportunities for cross-cultural exchange.

After the Zoom call, Allison and her students celebrated learning about Italian culture by indulging in a pizza party.

(First appeared in the February 2024 edition)



Welcoming Ramadan

SMAN 4 Banjarbaru, South Kalimantan.

ETA Lily has been excited about March to April since the beginning of her grant, as she was looking forward to learning more about what the month of *Ramadan* seems like in a predominantly Muslim country and community. For quite a while, fellow teachers and students alike have been telling Lily about the vibrant and unique *Pasar Ramadan* that can be found in the nearby hub city of Banjarmasin.

There was much talk and encouragement to try the *takjil* (sweet food eaten upon breaking the fast) and *kue* (cakes) found, especially during *Ramadan*. Lily finally visited the *Pasar Ramadan* with her co-teacher, Ibu Yulia, and tried local specialty foods. *Binka barandam*, a sweet mini yellow sponge cake with sugar water, and *ipau*, a creamy rice cake with coconut milk, were most notable.

Although it is tough gearing up to say goodbye to her host school and community, ETA Lily is enjoying her last month with her students and friends, having lots of *buka bersama* (breaking fast together), relaxing, and reflecting.

(First appeared in the March 2024 edition)



Celebrating Jogja: A Day of Festivities at SMKN 1 Cangkringan

SMKN 1 Cangkringan, Yogyakarta

March 13, 2024, marked the 269th anniversary of The Special Region of Yogyakarta, commonly called 'Jogja.' **ETA Parker Raybourne's** placement at SMKN 1 Cangkringan in North Jogja gave Parker an active role in the day's festivities.

Parker's school kicked off the celebrations with a *Kirab* or parade through the surrounding villages. Students worked in their classes for weeks preparing costumes, floats, and performances that would be displayed in the *Kirab*. Many passed out snacks and locally grown produce to onlookers.



The *Kirab* was led by the school's marching band, village livestock, faculty, and the student police. Parker was most impressed by the students' dedication to preserving local Javanese culture and their elaborately designed floats.

Following the *Kirab*, students performed in a competition showcasing Javanese poetry and storytelling. They acted out traditional folktales and parables.

The day, he concluded with a *gamelan* (Javanese ensemble) performance by faculty, including Parker. While Parker has been playing *gamelan* throughout his time in Indonesia, this was his first time playing for an audience. The performance was a resounding success, and Parker is forever grateful for being included in the tradition.

In honor of the anniversary, a brief synopsis of the historical significance of Jogja: Jogja played a significant role throughout the development of modern Indonesia and continues to be an epicenter of culture and education for the entire nation. Jogja was one of the capitals of independent Indonesia and is one of the last Sultanates on earth (areas governed by a hereditary sultan). In short, '*Jogja istimewa!*' Or 'Jogja is special.'

(First appeared in the March 2024 edition)

03

Local & National WORDS Storytelling & Storybook Competition



In February 2024, Jakarta buzzed with excitement as eleven high school students and their Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) converged for the **National WORDS Storytelling and Storybook Competition**. Held at @america, Jakarta, this event serves as a highlight of the program, fostering connections and showcasing talents. Each participant shared dreams through their stories, crafted with care during weeks of preparation led by dedicated ETAs. The competition, while intense, yielded remarkable performances, leaving a lasting impression on participants and spectators alike.

Dive into the full story of **ETAs Katrien, Tineer, Luke, and Lily** to experience the journey of creativity and collaboration.

Distinguished Guests and Unleashed Dreams
SMAN 1 Matauli Pandan, North Sumatra.

Determined to craft an unforgettable experience for all participants in the local WORDS Competition, **ETA Katrien Weemaes** collaborated with the US Consulate Medan to orchestrate a special surprise. Deputy Principal Officer Kristy Modhorst from the Consulate graciously agreed to serve as a judge, adding a prestigious touch to the event.

While student participants tirelessly prepared their storybooks and storytelling performances, the school partnered with the Consulate to organize an event honoring the distinguished guest. The day preceding the competition, SMAN 1 Matauli Pandan hosted a warm welcome event featuring traditional dancing, singing, and speeches from local government officials, drawing a large crowd and expressing sincere gratitude for the honored guest's presence. This set the stage for an impactful presentation from Kristy on the power of expanding student horizons through volunteerism, sparking newfound interest among the attendees. Kristy encouraged students to tap into their own passions as a source of inspiration when participating in projects that positively impact their community.

The following day, 20 eager students entered the audiovisual room with palpable anticipation, ready to showcase their dreams (the theme of the competition) through the performance of their original short stories. One by one, each student captivated the audience with exceptional talent and creativity, weaving narratives around environmental conservation and anti-bullying themes. The panel of judges, including **ETA Luke Losie**, faced the challenging task of selecting not only the winning performance and storybook but also bestowing special judges awards upon students for their outstanding creative writing, speaking, drawing, and performing talents.

Katrien expresses profound gratitude for the hard work and dedication of all participants, judges, and student and faculty volunteers who contributed to the success of this remarkable event. Several students have already expressed interest in organizing a similar event to showcase their English skills in the near future.

(First appeared in the January 2024 edition)



SMAGA's 26th Anniversary & Storytelling Competition
SMAN 3 Banjarbaru, South Kalimantan.



It was SMAGA's 26th Anniversary Celebration! The one week a year that all students and teachers look forward to commemorating SMAN 3 Banjarbaru (also called SMAGA). The spirits were high as there were 30 student performances ranging from flash mobs using Disney princess songs to historical roleplay using Indonesian dances. The students collaboratively choreographed their performances in their classes and presented them in front of the school.

The Anniversary week also included *Jalan Santai*, a leisurely stroll in which every homeroom class dressed up in a theme and walked 2.5 kilometers outside the school grounds. To end the festivities, students and teachers cheerfully sang classic songs, like *Kangen* by Dewa 19, and danced together in a big crowd in the courtyard! The school supported the students in multiple events in January as well.

ETA Tineer Ahmed organized SMAGA's first WORDS Storytelling Competition with 15 student participants, three guest judges, and over 1,000 spectators. Weeks leading up to the competition, Tineer helped prepare the students to make an original storybook centered around the theme of Dreams and give a creative performance to the audience. After granting Rafiqi the first-place winner with his story "Unity in Diversity," Tineer, *Ibu Ari*, and *Ibu Mahrita* coached him in perfecting his performance for the national WORDS storytelling competition in Jakarta. The year 2024 is off to a good start!

(First appeared in the January 2024 edition)

Storytelling at Nurul Ilmi

SMAS Nurul Ilmi Padang Sidempuan, North Sumatra.

The sports hall of SMAS Nurul Ilmi was filled with excitement as the senior high school students enjoyed a day of storytelling with their classmates. As all of the English Teaching Assistants are expected to do, **ETA Luke Losie** helped organize a WORDS Storytelling competition at his school in Padangsidempuan on January 16.

After weeks of writing, practicing, and preparing, many brave 10th and 11th graders presented their original stories to their classmates in the school's local competition. Nurul Ilmi was lucky to be joined by fellow **ETA Katrien Weemaes**, who offered to be a judge for the competition.

After an hour of hearing many engaging stories from their classmates, the SMAS student body was elated to hear that the winner would continue to the national competition held in Jakarta, where he will no doubt represent Nurul Ilmi fabulously. Luke is so proud of all his students! Reading an original story in front of your classmates is certainly no easy task!

(First appeared in the January 2024 edition)



Dreams Do Come True! WORDS 2024

SMAN 4 Banjarbaru, South Kalimantan.

The 2024 National WORDS Competition theme was Dreams, and the experience was nothing short of one!

ETA Lily Rhinehart was joined by her student, Balqis, in Jakarta to participate in AMINEF's National English Storytelling Competition in February. After hosting the local competition in January, ETA Lily and Balqis spent weeks together having fun, practicing Balqis' performance, and perfecting the creation of the props. In the end, Balqis created a story inspired by Indonesia's history of liberation from colonialism and purposely and intentionally reflected the current crisis in Palestine. Balqis used her art skills to create a mesmerizing storybook and her literary skills to tell a story of hope, freedom, and bravery. ETA Lily was so proud of her, as she was also named the 2024 overall winner!

Eleven students and ETAs representing Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Java, and Sumatra all joined together for the well-awaited competition. The multi-day event was one of courageous growth on behalf of the students, connection, new friendships, and cultural exchange. From ice-skating to Monas tours, it was a memorable week for everyone.

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WORDS Storytelling and Storybook Competition 2024

@america, Jakarta



From February 5 through 7, 2024, eleven high school students and their Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) were gathered in Jakarta for the National WORDS Storytelling and Storybook Competition. The competition, held at @america, and the series of activities ETAs and participants do during the week have always been the program's highlight. It allows the students and ETAs to meet and bond over shared interests and unique experiences. The eleven storybooks the students produce will be printed by AMINEF to be given to them and donated to their respective schools to add English language resources for the students.

WORDS is a national English language competition that brings together one student from each ETA host school. It followed the format of a storytelling and storybook competition centered on a given theme; for this year, it was Dreams. Participant students were allowed to share their dreams about their future, home country, or world.

Before joining the national competition, each participant student had entered and won at their local competition at their school, an exciting event organized by their ETA and the English teachers. It took weeks for the ETAs to recruit students, host brainstorming meetings or workshops, assist with story



creation, and provide performance feedback to their students. Despite all the challenges, ETAs found that the local WORDS competition at their school was spectacular and memorable.

Each student represented their school well. The storybooks they create are beautifully illustrated; the stories and performances on stage were diverse and unique, captivating the audience. The judges needed longer to decide the winners because all the student participants were amazing and talented. Many participants' friends, family members, and teachers watched the competition from their hometowns through the @america live streaming platform.

The four judges were **Melariisa Sjarief**, a screenwriter and Fulbright master's degree program alumna; **Genie Nguyen**, a Public Engagement assistant at the US Embassy Jakarta; **Ahmad Fuadi**, writer, novelist, social entrepreneur, and Fulbright master's degree program alumnus; and **Douglas Ramage**, founding managing director of BowerGroupAsia and AMINEF Board of Manager.



Five participants were recognized at the national competition for notable performances. **Balqis Khairunnisa** from SMAN 4 Banjarbaru was awarded overall winner; **Diva Eca Akadita Kaban** from SMAN 1 Matauli Pandan Sibolga was awarded best storybook; **Elshadai Boham** from SMKN 3 Manado was awarded best use of theme; **Muhammad Rafiqi Al-Farabi** and from SMAN 3 Banjarbaru was granted best use of English. **Lily Kamila Talita** from SMKN 3 Banjarmasin received special recognition from the judges as having the best illustration.

Diva, who won best storybook, said, "This competition is perfect, and hopefully it continues" – a sentiment echoed by overall winner Balqis, who thought the event exceeded her expectations.

A day after the competition, students and ETAs had a cultural day visiting museums around Jakarta. They visited Monas Observation Deck and *Kota Tua*, the Bank of Indonesia Museum, and the Fatahillah Museum. Although many students wished the number of days for the programming was more than three, they also admitted that their time with their new friends and ETAs was well-spent.

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