

Best of Fulbright ETA

AMINEF
American Indonesian
Exchange Foundation

FULBRIGHT
Indonesia



Monthly Highlights

from January - March 2025

NINTH SPECIAL EDITION

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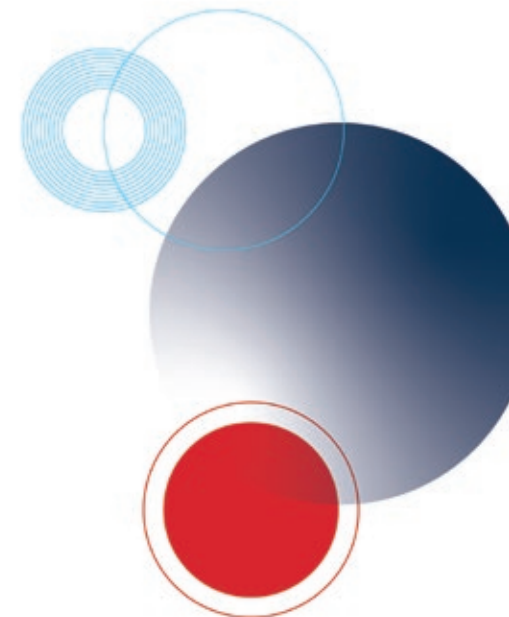


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Welcome to our special edition of the *Fulbright ETA Monthly Highlights* from Indonesia, where we have compiled the best ETA stories from January to March 2025.

Nine English Teaching Assistants departed in April after successfully closing their grant period at their sites throughout Indonesia. We are pleased to showcase their activities and contributions to their host communities.

This edition showcases three categories of highlights: **School Activities, Community Engagement Projects, and Cultural Exchanges.** We have also featured special activities that the ETAs participated in during these months, such as the national WORDS competition, the US Fulbrighters Conference, and Ramadan Bliss projects. Read on to see how the ETAs spent their time between January and March 2025.

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 10-20 schools hosting ETAs yearly. AMINEF collaborates closely with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education 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. This agreement was formalized by implementing the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Education, signed in December 2021 by the 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

Links & Resources

Fulbright ETA Monthly Highlights Newsletter.

Local and National WORDS Competition

WORDS is an annual competition celebrating the English language through storytelling and storybook format. Before competing at the national level, students from each ETA host school participated in local competitions organized by ETAs in collaboration with local English teachers. Read on to see how **ETA Annie** executed her local WORDS competition at her school.

Local WORDS Storybook and Storytelling Competition SMA Xaverius Bandar Lampung



On January 20, 2025, **Annie Cowen**, a **Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA)** at SMA Xaverius Bandar Lampung, hosted her Local WORDS Storybook and Storytelling Competition. The event aimed to promote creativity, build students' confidence in using the English language, and celebrate cultural expression through storytelling and writing.

Leading up to the competition, students crafted original stories inspired by the theme of tradition. These stories reflected their unique perspectives, weaving together personal and cultural narratives. On competition day, participants showcased their thoughtfully designed storybooks and captivated the judges with engaging storytelling performances that celebrated the diversity of their traditions.

The event encouraged students to step out of their comfort zones, embrace public speaking in English, and share their voices with confidence. The competition concluded with an award ceremony honoring the eight outstanding storytellers. The first-place winner earned the opportunity to represent SMA Xaverius Bandar Lampung at the National WORDS Competition in Jakarta next month.

The Local WORDS Competition was a huge success, leaving a lasting impact on all who attended. It inspired attendees to deepen their connection to their culture and highlighted the importance of storytelling as a tool for creative expression and English language learning.

Annie looks forward to continuing to improve her students' confidence in using the English language and is excited to cheer on her student as they shine at the National WORDS Competition in Jakarta!

(First appeared in the January 2025 edition)



WORDS Storytelling and Storybook Competition 2025

From February 17–20, 2025, ten high school students and their Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) gathered in Jakarta for the National WORDS Storytelling and Storybook Competition. Held at @america, the competition and its accompanying activities have long been highlights of the program, offering students and ETAs the opportunity to bond over shared interests and unique experiences. The ten storybooks the participants produce will be printed by AMINEF and gifted to the students and their respective schools, enriching English language resources for future learners.

WORDS is a national English language competition that brings together one student from each ETA host school. It follows a storytelling and storybook format, with entries centered on a specific theme—in 2025, the theme was “Tradition.” Participants were asked to share their thoughts and interpretations of tradition in Indonesia through their stories.

Before competing at the national level, each participant entered and won their local school competition, an event organized by their ETA in collaboration with local English teachers. ETAs spent weeks recruiting students, hosting brainstorming sessions and workshops, assisting with story development, and providing feedback on performance. Despite the challenges, both ETAs and students found the local WORDS competitions to be memorable and rewarding experiences. (Check out the January edition of the Fulbright ETA Monthly Highlights for reflections on these local competitions!)

At the national competition, every student represented their school with pride. The storybooks were beautifully illustrated, and the performances on stage were as diverse as they were captivating. Friends, family members, and teachers from across Indonesia tuned in via @america’s live-streaming platform to support the participants from afar.

The judging panel included:

- **Melariisa Sjarief**, screenwriter and Fulbright Master’s Degree Scholarship Program alumna
- **Ahmad Fuadi**, writer, novelist, social entrepreneur, and Fulbright Master’s Degree Scholarship Program alumnus
- **John Colombo**, clean energy investment manager and former Fulbright ETA
- **Loyce Arthur**, emeritus associate professor at the University of Iowa, costume designer, and US Fulbright Scholar

Four students received special recognition for their outstanding performances:

- **First Place: Eugenia Sharron Wijaya** from SMA Xaverius Bandar Lampung
- **Second Place: Nikita Kuorifai** from SMKN 5 Pontianak
- **Third Place: Cornelia Luna** from SMA Santo Paulus Pontianak
- **Honorable Mention: Callista Nathaniel** from SMAN 1 Manggar

Eugenia, the first-place winner, shared, “... the WORDS competition is an amazing opportunity for students to express their creativity and show the world their abilities to create and inspire other individuals.” Her sentiment was echoed by many participants, who agreed that the event exceeded their expectations.

During an additional day in Jakarta, students and ETAs immersed themselves in cultural activities, visiting the Indonesian United Nations Office, Monas, and the National Museum of Indonesia. ETAs also organized additional programming during free time. Though many students wished the program lasted longer, everyone left with new memories, friendships, and a deep appreciation for the experience.

(First appeared in the February 2025 edition)



School Activities

During their grant in Indonesia, ETAs' primary responsibility is to assist their co-teachers with planning and executing lessons in the classrooms at their site. **These lessons are encouraged to incorporate interactive activities to foster engagement and active student participation.** ETAs bring innovative learning strategies to their schools from their various backgrounds and experiences in America.

In the following pages, discover how **ETAs Hannah, Brady, and Mary** have participated in cross-cultural exchange.



Back-to-School Classroom Activities

SMA Santo Paulus Pontianak, West Kalimantan

After a restful break, **ETA Kylie** was ready to get her students' adrenaline pumping! In *Ibu Siska's* class, students reviewed the simple past tense and learned how to play Bang!, an English Language Club favorite. In Bang!, students must race to say the correct English response before their opponent. This friendly competition resulted in laughter and hilarious exclamations whenever someone was eliminated.

In *Ibu Ika's* Advanced English Classes, Kylie wanted to challenge the students' ability to think critically about word formation and phonics. The class warmed up by completing the Wordle—credit to The New York Times Games and Kyle's parents and sister, who send the Wordle in her family group chat daily. Then, the classes worked in pairs to write partial anagrams. Using one word, "determination," students wrote as many English words as possible: tree, ton, deter, minion, men, and more. Kylie was very impressed with some of the words students came up with!

In *Ibu Lenny's* class, students started a unit on cooking and procedural texts. In their first lesson, students learned typical cooking vocabulary, such as "stove" and "stir." In groups of four, students were given a set of flashcards with vocabulary words and another set with corresponding photos. The students created a scorecard and took turns reading the vocabulary aloud while the others in the group raced to tap the photo first. Students got into this game; it was a great way to practice speaking and listening!

(First appeared in the January 2025 edition)



Learning English Through Data: Bar Graphs and Surveys

SMKN 5 Pontianak, West Kalimantan



In early February 2025, **ETA Hira Baig**, in collaboration with her co-teacher and counterpart Ridha Astanti, led an interactive lesson with students from Class 10 Culinary two at SMKN 5 Pontianak. The lesson focused on reading and interpreting bar graphs and charts in English. It encouraged students to apply their English skills in a practical and engaging way while incorporating real-world data collection.

After an introduction to bar graphs and key vocabulary, students were divided into groups of five to six. Each group surveyed their classmates on popular topics such as favorite foods, drinks, snacks, desserts, school subjects, and cafes in Pontianak. Using the collected data, students created colorful bar chart posters and prepared short presentations in English to explain their findings. Each student was required to speak at least once during their presentation, encouraging everyone to use their English-speaking skills.

The activity reinforced students' understanding of data representation and allowed them to practice speaking English in an academic setting. The students showed enthusiasm in the survey process and their presentations, making the lesson educational and enjoyable. Through this activity, the students gained confidence in using English for real-life communication.

(First appeared in the February 2025 edition)



A Flight of Dreams and Farewells

SMAN 1 Tomohon, North Sulawesi

During her last week at school, before departing from SMA N 1 Tomohon, **ETA Alyssa Guiang** led a special activity with her classes involving paper airplanes, favorite memories, and dreams.

Alyssa began by explaining the activity to her students. She told them that it was her last week in the classroom with them and that in the coming weeks, she would be taking an airplane from Indonesia back to America. Then, she asked her co-teacher and students if they were familiar with paper airplanes and explained that they are a popular craft for grade school students in America. Alyssa learned that her co-teacher had made paper airplanes during her elementary school days and that several students in the class had already made them in the past.

In honor of their previous English lessons on procedural texts, Alyssa gave the class step-by-step instructions. First, she had the students take out a piece of paper from their notebooks. Second, she instructed them to write a favorite memory from the school year on the paper. Third, she guided them in creating their paper planes: fold the paper in half, unfold it, then fold the two top corners to the middle line, fold each remaining edge to the middle line, fold the figure in half, and create the wings.

Next, Alyssa had the students write their names on one of the paper airplane wings and a place in the world they dreamed of visiting on the other. Finally, they went into the field outside the classrooms and let their airplanes take flight.

Alyssa ended the activity by telling the students that she hoped this farewell exercise would serve as a memorable reminder of their dreams—and that with continued hard work, English study, and belief in themselves, they could let their potential take flight and soar into the horizons of their bright futures.

(First appeared in the March 2025 edition)



Community Engagement Projects

ETAs also engage with their school community through extracurricular activities and projects.

They combine their interests and passions with assessing community needs to join or create clubs and events at their school that further bridge the connection and impact they have on their sites.

Please continue reading to see how **ETAs Maria and Adeena** engaged with their school communities outside the classroom.



English Olympics Day: Compete, Communicate, Conquer!

SMK Abdurrah Pekanbaru, Riau



On February 15, **ETA Maria Osman** organized and hosted English Olympics Day, an engaging, school-wide competition that brought together around 200 students from SMK Abdurrah Pekanbaru. This event aimed to enhance students' English proficiency, teamwork, and critical thinking skills while fostering cultural exchange through American and Indonesian traditions.

The immersive experience featured six dynamic games, including Jeopardy, which tested students' knowledge of Indonesian and American culture, history, and English. Other activities included a word-scrambling race, whispering relay, picture memory game, obstacle course, and an energetic game of Capture the Flag. The competition challenged students to listen attentively, think strategically, and actively use English in real-time scenarios. Before the event, 62 percent of participants reported feeling excited and eager to put their skills to the test.

By the end of the competition, 77 percent of students reported improvements in their English abilities, while 89 percent noted stronger teamwork skills. Many highlighted the joy of collaborating with teammates, practicing English in a competitive setting, and forming new friendships with students they don't typically interact with. They also valued how the event strengthened their public speaking, critical thinking, perseverance, and competitive spirit.

With students already looking forward to next year's event, English Olympics Day successfully reinforced AMINEF's mission of cross-cultural exchange and educational development. The event proved that language learning extends far beyond the classroom—it's an opportunity for students to challenge themselves, grow, and connect with others.

(First appeared in the February 2025 edition)



Words On Wall

SMAN 2 Tanjungpandan, Kepulauan Bangka Belitung

ETA Adeena Ali's final project at SMAN 2 Tanjung Pandan, the "Words on Wall" mural, vibrantly and meaningfully brought together students' creativity and dreams. Designed by the English Club and students, the mural was painted on the school canteen wall, blending graffiti art with language learning. The mural's theme focused on "dreams," encouraging students to reflect on their aspirations for the future.

The project included four workshops, beginning with an introduction to the history of graffiti. Students then designed their mural sections, combining artistic techniques with English language skills. The final workshop was dedicated to bringing their designs to life on the wall, resulting in a colorful, collaborative masterpiece.

A powerful symbolic act marked the end of the project—students placed their handprints on the mural, signifying their commitment to pursuing their dreams. The mural now serves as a lasting source of inspiration for current and future students, showcasing their creativity, teamwork, and dedication.

Through this initiative, students gained confidence in their artistic abilities and language skills while learning the value of collaboration. ETA Adeena hoped the mural would inspire generations as a constant reminder of self-expression and the pursuit of dreams long after her grant ended.

(First appeared in the March 2025 edition)



Cultural Exchanges

The main tenet of the Fulbright program is building mutual cultural understanding. Through the Fulbright ETA grant, grantees have a tremendous opportunity to learn about the local culture at their site and share aspects of American culture with community members.

In the following pages, discover how **ETAs Hannah, Brady, and Mary** have participated in cross-cultural exchange.



Gratitude is the Attitude: Thanksgiving & Ramadan

SMAN 10 Bengkulu, Bengkulu

To set the scene for upcoming Ramadan celebrations, **ETA Hannah Semmes** and her English Club students celebrated Thanksgiving at her house, where they prepared food together, learned new vocabulary related to the holiday, and discussed traditions (the theme of the upcoming national AMINEF WORDS competition). Students noticed similarities between Thanksgiving and Ramadan when people join neighbors and extended family to break their fast and give gratitude.

In classic Indonesian fashion, the sister-in-law of a schoolteacher and other friends of friends banded together to lend different supplies— from an oven to rare pie tins. Pumpkin pie was a favorite among students and teachers. Together, they made garlic mashed potatoes, green beans, and Indonesian turkey (chicken)— with a few yummy Indonesian additions like *sambal* and rice.

Students passed an inflatable globe Hannah brought from home to use in the classroom, and each shared three things they were grateful for (in English, of course!) It was heart-warming to hear a common theme: the friendships and memories they had made together this year in English Club. They also drew comparisons between Native American and Indigenous Indonesian history.

After dessert, they played “We Listen, and We Don’t Judge,” a TikTok trend that allowed students to practice their English, build friendships, and amuse Hannah. Hannah is grateful for an incredible group of students, teachers, and neighbors who love to learn!

(First appeared in the January 2025 edition)



Guac & Talk: A Tasty English Club Session

SMKN 1 Kutalimbaru, North Sumatra



On Wednesday, February 5, **ETA Brady Allen** hosted a special cooking activity for SMKN 1 Kutalimbaru's English Club students. His co-teachers and students wanted to try a popular American food they had never experienced before. After researching potential ingredients available at the local store, Brady decided that guacamole would be a fun and delicious introduction to a well-loved American dish.

The cooking activity involved different groups of students assigned various roles. Some students cut up avocados, while others chopped tomatoes and onions—and yes, the onion cutters shed a few tears. All students were able to participate, making it a genuine group effort. Thankfully, their hard work paid off, and everyone enjoyed the guacamole, saying they couldn't wait to have it again.

This activity became one of Brady's highlights from the English Club sessions, as he introduced one of his favorite foods to the school community. The successful guacamole-making session has inspired Brady to attempt a similar activity before the end of his grant. Now, he faces the challenge of finding a dish that can top guacamole.

(First appeared in the February 2025 edition)



The Best Last Class Ever

SMAN 1 Manggar, East Belitung



As the students trickled into SMAN 1 Manggar's assembly hall, they clumped together in groups of five to twenty, each surrounding a pile of fried snacks, cakes, and sweet drinks in shades of pink, orange, and blue. At the front of the room, teachers laid out their feast. It was the day before the school holiday for Ramadan began, and the tenth-grade classes at SMAN 1 Manggar were celebrating Iftar together.

ETA Mary Breen helped distribute iced tea cartons and arrange cakes on a plate while people quietly chatted or scrolled on their phones. A tap on the microphone signaled that it was time for speeches and prayers from the principal and several teachers. When it was her turn, Mary gave each class a letter sharing memories from the year and explained her going-away present—a penny for everyone.

After the speeches, students ensured their cups had straws and sat quietly again. What were they waiting for? Exactly when was sunset? A horn sounded after a few more minutes, and everyone promptly dug in.

Immediately after eating, most of the participants went to pray. The party kicked up again when they returned as people mingled, took photos, and even organized a running race. Several students ensured Mary could try local pastries and taught her the names of all of them. Her favorite was *dadar gulung*, a thin, bright green pancake wrapped around shredded coconut and palm sugar. Between the delicious food and the community spirit, it was the best final meeting a class could ask for.

(First appeared in the March 2025 edition)



US Fulbrighters Conference 2025

The first annual US Fulbrighters Conference took place from February 20–23, 2025, in Jakarta. The event brought together 22 current American Fulbright grantees placed across Indonesia, offering opportunities to network, share experiences, and learn about each other's work on various Fulbright grants. Attendees included nine English Teaching Assistants (ETAs), seven Fulbright Student Researchers, and six Fulbright Scholars.

This marked the first time AMINEF organized a conference of this nature, as past events typically involved American grantees from a single program. The idea for the conference was inspired by feedback from former grantees who expressed interest in networking opportunities that connected all American Fulbright grantees in Indonesia.

The conference was officially opened by AMINEF's new Executive Director, Dr. Sandra Hamid. Grantees participated in a range of lectures, workshops, sharing sessions, and presentations showcasing the work of both researchers and ETAs. Topics covered included building community in Indonesia, highlights and challenges of living abroad, post-Fulbright opportunities, and more.

ETA Maria Osman shared, “The conference was a powerful reminder of the impact we create, bringing together scholars, researchers, and ETAs who are all driven by curiosity and a commitment to cross-cultural exchange. It allowed me to network, learn more about research, and explore new interests.” Osman also noted, “The conference deepened our understanding of the Fulbright program and of the diverse ways we can make an impact.”

ETA Brady Allen suggested the conference “...was an incredible opportunity to connect with fellow Fulbrighters and learn about their research.” Participants widely agreed that the conference was a success. Osman added, “It should be repeated in the future because it builds a strong community of support, inspiration, and collaboration that enhances our work and shared purpose.”

AMINEF extends its gratitude to all grantees for their active participation throughout the US Fulbrighters conference and wishes everyone continued success for the remainder of their time in Indonesia.



Ramadan Bliss, A New AMINEF Initiative

The Ramadan holiday season in Indonesia offers ETAs a variety of unique and exciting opportunities to engage with their communities. With some schools changing their activities for part or all of the month, ETAs had an opportunity to increase their broader cultural and community engagement. The goals of the Fulbright ETA program in Indonesia are to encourage grantees' involvement in local communities, promote mutual understanding, and create channels for active English speaking.

In 2025, AMINEF introduced a new initiative, “Ramadan Bliss.” This program provides opportunities for ETAs to leverage the holiday season to increase their impact in the community.

Leading up to Ramadan, ETAs worked to craft funding proposals for Ramadan-related projects. We are excited to share a brief selection of their successful initiatives:

At SMK Abdurrah Pekanbaru, ETA Maria Osman implemented a special Ramadan Iftar project that blended cultural exchange with language learning. Students created English videos about how Ramadan is celebrated in Indonesia for a video competition, and Osman gave a presentation about how Ramadan is celebrated in the United States.



The event provided a space for storytelling, shared experiences, and deeper understanding—all over a meaningful Iftar meal.

At SMKN 1 Kutalimbaru, ETA Brady Allen hosted a collaborative Iftar event where teachers and students gathered to break their fast together.



The event allowed participants to share traditions, customs, and the significance of Ramadan in English. They also learned and practiced new vocabulary related to the holiday season. Allen shared, “The event brought together members of SMKN 1 Kutalimbaru for an evening full of sharing and learning about Islamic traditions while becoming more informed members of their community.”

ETA Hannah Semmes worked with the English club at SMAN 10 Bengkulu to host an educational Iftar for a local community orphanage.



Semmes's students led activities and games in English before everyone joined in breaking their fast.

Reflecting on the experience, Semmes noted, “The event offered effective hands-on teaching, relationship-building, and memories to last a lifetime. The high school students had the chance to practice leadership, the children in the orphanage were exposed to new ideas, and the community was strengthened by sharing Iftar with those who may not have a family to celebrate with.”

ETAs Adeena Ali and Mary Breen collaborated to host a two-day Ramadan event in Belitung.



The event featured group discussions, breakout sessions with multiple ETAs, and Iftar. Ali reflected, “Ramadan is always an experience that differs for Muslims and non-Muslims, but it should be a bridge rather than a barrier to open conversation—that is what this project is about.”

At SMA Xaverius Bandar Lampung, ETA Annie Cowen collaborated with her OSIS student council to organize and deliver 200 boxes of takjil to Muslim residents of Bandar Lampung while braving the rain outside. This initiative helped celebrate the breaking of the fast during Ramadan and promoted cultural exchange throughout the preparation process as the student council planned the event.

This new initiative was a success, enhancing the impact of the Fulbright ETA program in Indonesia. AMINEF hopes to continue it in future years.



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