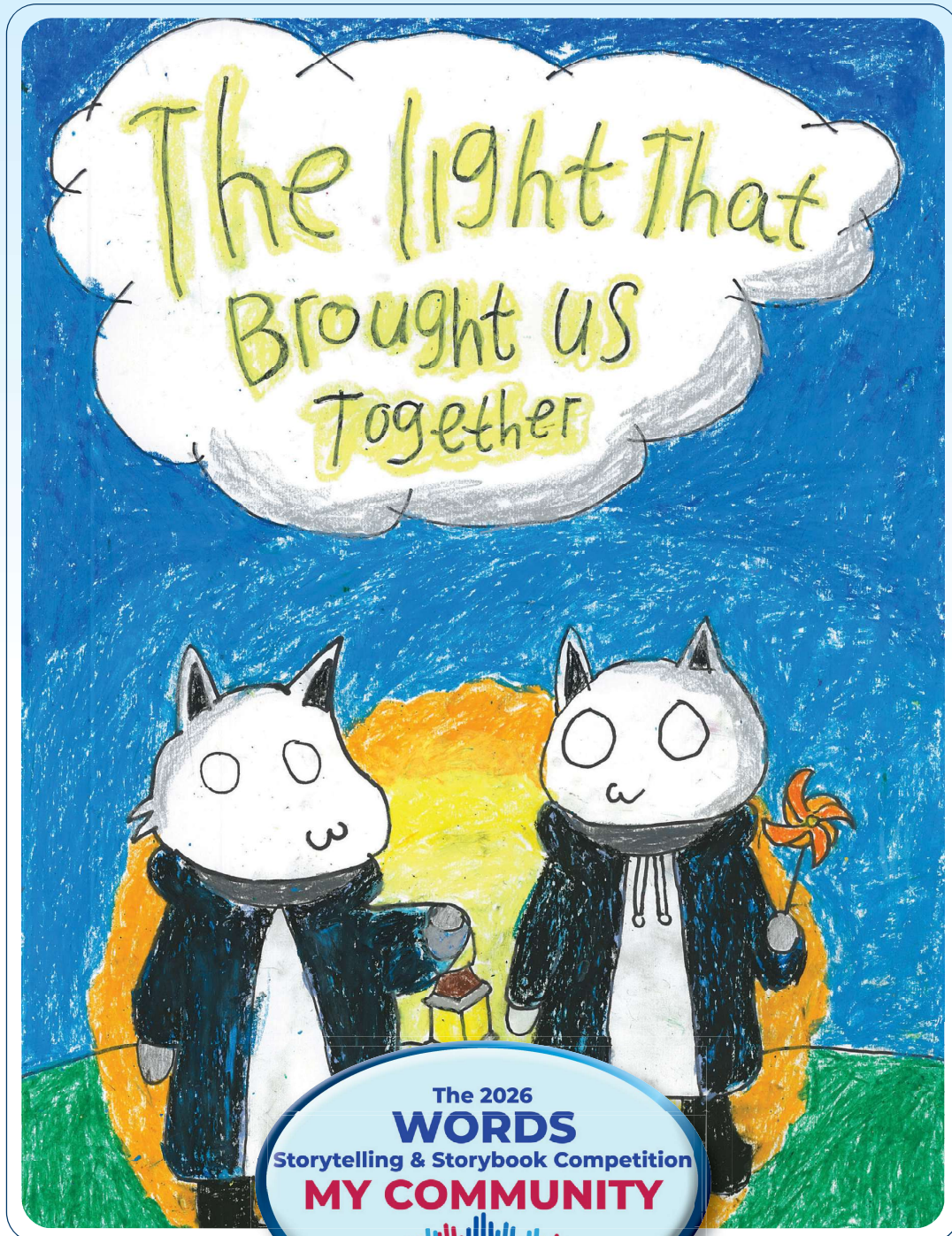
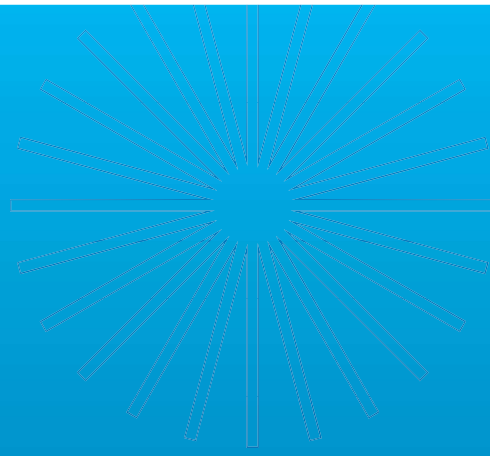


ACHMAD NAKHLA ALFIYAN

- THE LIGHT THAT BROUGHT US TOGETHER -





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These storybooks have been lightly edited for clarity.

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Foreword

The seventeen stories presented in this book came from a collaborative process between students and their teachers— both their home institution teacher (co-teacher) and the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) serving in their schools. At the heart of the collaborative process is the desire to foster understanding and to bridge differences. The schools where they taught were selected through a collaborative process between AMINEF, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to host the ETAs. Indeed, everything about this program underlines cooperation between all parties involved.

After a long selection and preparation process, the ETAs served in Indonesia for eight months. They came from various states in the US, from New York to California, Vermont to Louisiana - some from urban areas, others more rural. Together, they represent the rich landscape of places and cultures in America. Likewise, in Indonesia, the ETAs were exposed to and experienced life in various places and cultures. They co-taught English in various areas, spreading from Padang, Jambi, Lampung, Kulon Progo, Kudus, Sidoarjo, Praya, Palangkaraya, Makassar, and Kendari.

Over the eight months the ETAs, co-teachers, and students, in essence, serve as cultural ambassadors to one another. They forged friendships beyond the classroom walls and invested their time and energy in the communities. And this year's theme for the WORDS Storybook competition is indeed "My Community".

The stories you are about to read here were written by the stars of each school. The authors won a local competition organized by the ETAs and the co-teachers. They then worked intensively on their books and on how to best narrate the stories. In April, the students, co-teachers, and ETAs were invited to Jakarta to celebrate their journey – from beginning to learn English to becoming authors and, subsequently, storytellers.

The students performed confidently in front of a panel of four prominent judges who are all Fulbrighters from Indonesia and the US: Ahmad Fuadi, an author of best-selling novels including "Negeri 5 Menara" and a prominent public speaker; Anna Grundström, a performing artist and independent researcher based in Brooklyn, New York; Azalia Muchransyah, filmmaker, scholar, and lecturer at BINUS University; and Douglas Ramage, AMINEF Board Member and founding Managing Director of Bower-GroupAsia Indonesia.

The third place went to Clarintha Glory Amungin Allokendek from SMK Raden Umar Said Kudus with "Hannah The One-Man Team" whose story reminded us of the importance of collaboration with others. Putri Permata Sari from SMK 9 Padang's story "The Pursuit of Happiness", won second place. It is a beautiful story about self-acceptance and creating a community of your own.

In first place was Florencia Kirana Wilman from SMK 6 Padang, with her story "The Day Coffee Called Us Home." Ms. Wilman presented a powerful reminder that, amid disasters and challenges, communities can work together and find solutions. Her story showed that sometimes what the community needs is one person to plow the way, helping each other, and others will follow.

The WORDS Competition is a celebration for all: the students, the ETAs, and the co-teachers. It is a celebration of a new, and hopefully lasting, connection among people. And AMINEF is proud to have been part of these connections.

Dr. Sandra Hamid

Executive Director, AMINEF

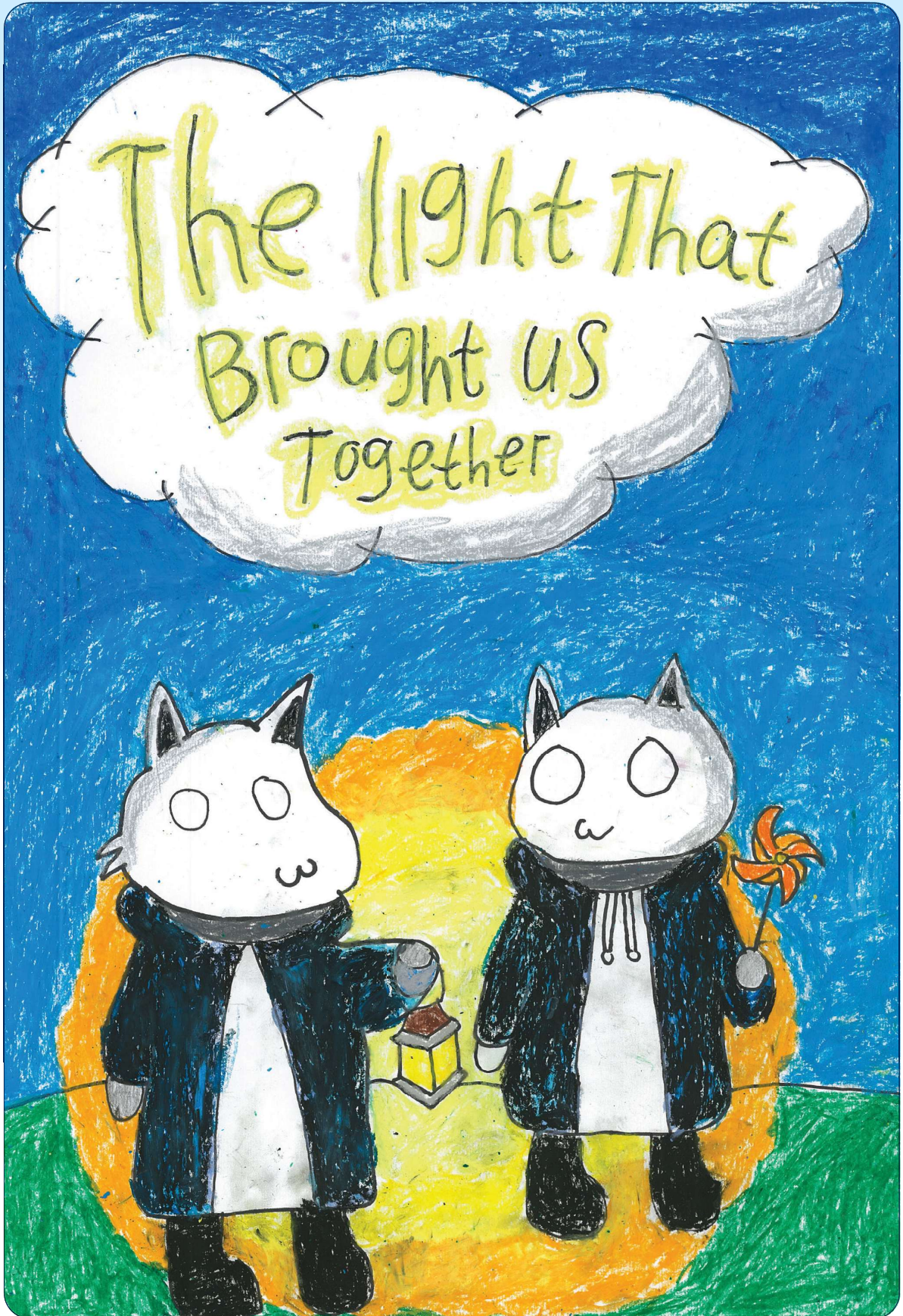
About the WORDS Competition

WORDS is a national English-language competition that brings together one student from each Fulbright ETA host school. Launched as a speech and talent contest in 2007, it evolved into a storytelling and storybook competition in 2018.

Finalists first win their school-level competition, which Fulbright ETAs organize in collaboration with the co-teachers. ETAs support students through brainstorming sessions, workshops, and performance feedback.

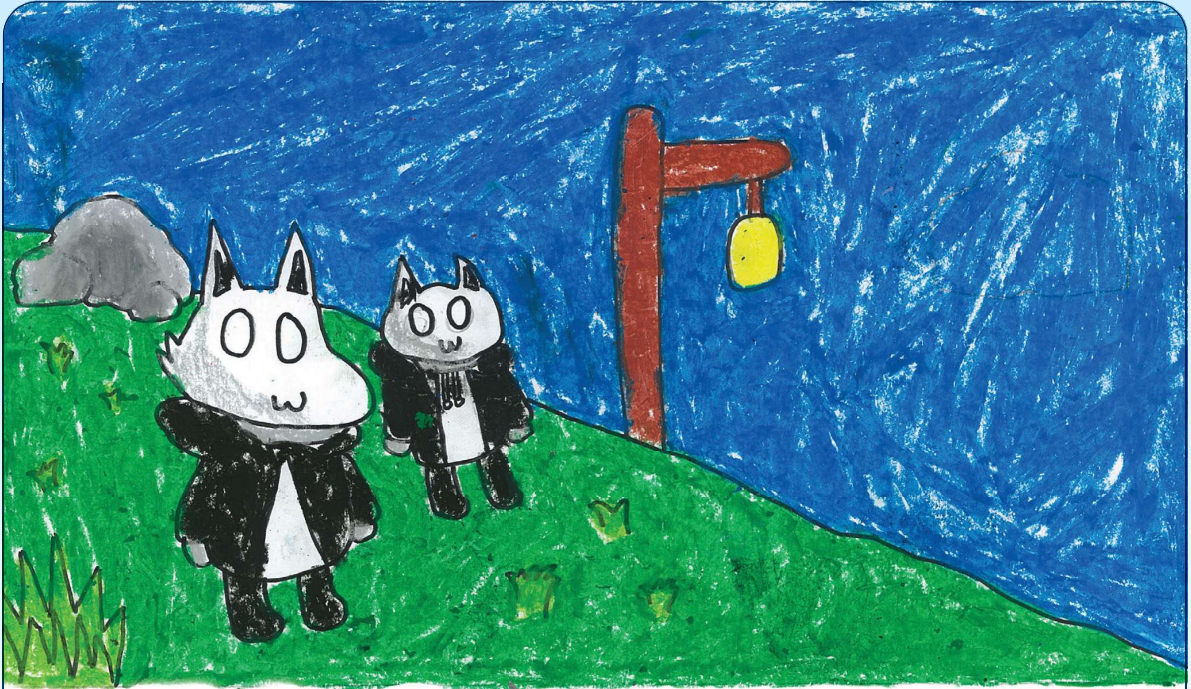
A highlight of the AMINEF year, the WORDS Competition allows 10th and 11th graders to showcase their storytelling skills, English proficiency, and cultural insights. In 2026, seventeen finalists will bring the theme **“My Community”** to life through their original stories.







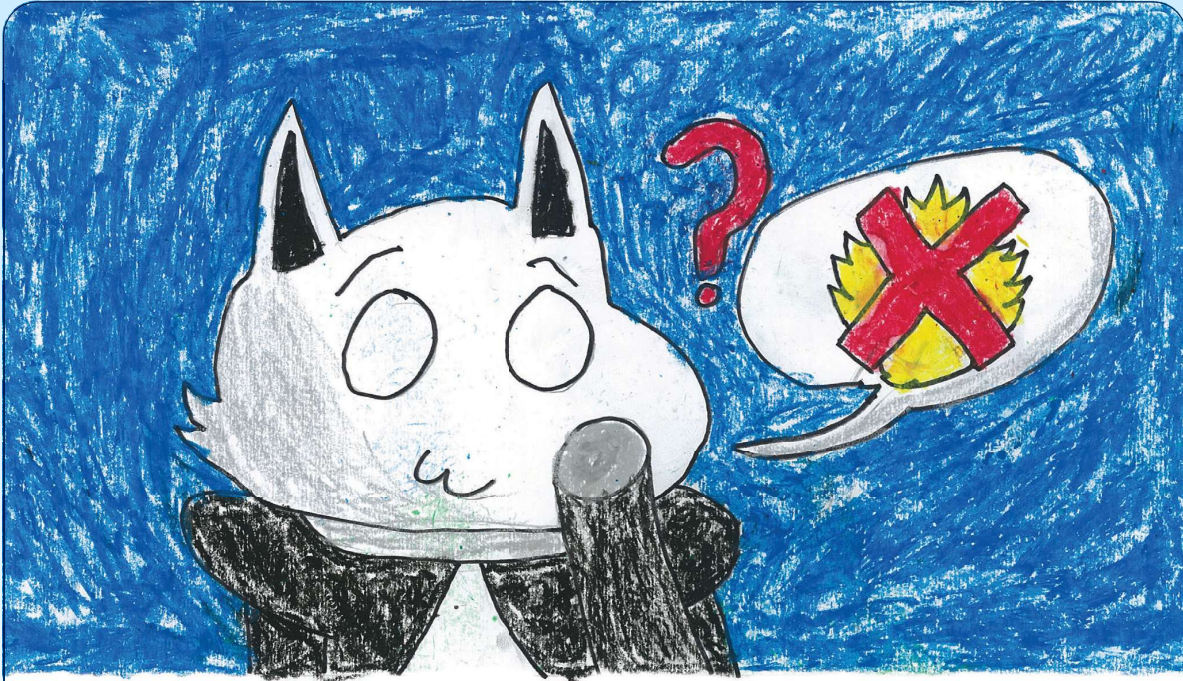
Once upon a time in a peaceful afterworld called Cahyantara, two brothers lived together. Their names were Ren and Sol. Cahyantara was not a dark or scary place. Cahyantara had a shining sky, shiny river, and a silver tree that moved following the warm wind. Many souls lived in Cahyantara together in a big village. They came from different times and different places, but no one felt like a stranger. Everyone felt like they were connected. This was their Community.



Ren was the older brother. He was quiet and liked to think. He often walked near the river and watched the water. Sol was the younger Brother. He was cheerful and active. He liked to walk around the village and meet everyone. Even though they were different, they both cared about the people around them.



In the center of Cahyantara stood a large place called the “Hall Of Light”. Inside this hall, many small lights floated in the air. However, these lights were not made of fire. They became bright when people shared Kindness, Stories, and Time together.



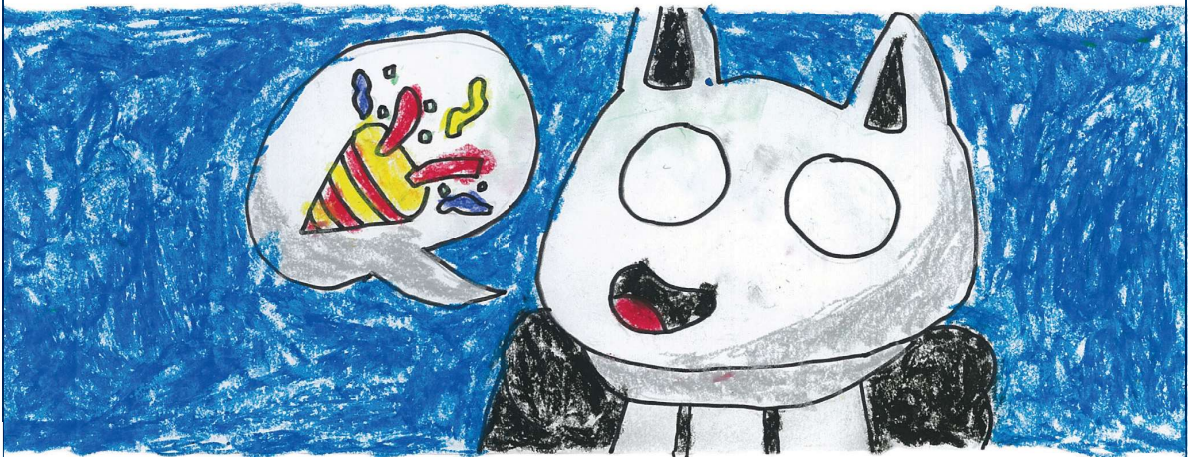
For a long time, the hall of lights was very bright. But one day, Ren noticed something strange. The lights were not as bright as before. Some of them looked weak. Sol also felt that something was wrong.



The village felt quieter than usual. People walked alone. The neighborhoods were empty. The children did not play as much as before. It felt like people were slowly forgetting how to be together. Ren and Sol understood something important. The lights were fading because the spirit of the community was fading. The people were still there, but they were not truly connected.



The brothers wanted to fix this. They visited many people. Ren sat with the elders and listened to their memories. Sol played with the children and helped them laugh again. Slowly, people began to gather again. They remembered how good it felt to spend time with each other. The village slowly felt warm again.



One day, Sol had an idea. He wanted to organize a special event for everyone. And he called it the “Immortal Concert”, a night where all souls would come together to celebrate their community with music and light.



Everyone wanted to help prepare it. The adults made decorations from glowing strings, the children brought glowing flowers, the elders prepared old songs they remembered. While they worked, they talked and laughed together. Without knowing it, they were already bringing back the spirit of their community.



Finally, the night of the “Immortal Concert” arrived. The hall of light was full. Souls sat close to each other. No one sat alone, The small light above them waited quietly. Then the music began, the songs were soft and warm. They were about hope, memory, and kindness.



The sound filled the hall gently. As the music continued, something amazing happened. The floating lights became brighter and brighter. One by one, they shone like small stars. The light could be seen on every face. The whole hall looked beautiful. Everyone felt peaceful. Everyone felt happy. Everyone felt connected again. The concert was not only about music. It was about remembering that they were one community. They needed each other. They belonged together. Ren and Sol stood at the back and watched. They saw smiles on every faces. They knew the light had returned.



After that night, Cahyantara never felt quiet again. People often gathered in the hall of lights. They shared stories, worked together, and helped one another. The children played again. The elders shared their memories with others. The lights in the hall stayed bright, showing the strong spirit of their community. Ren and Sol learned an important lesson. A place is not special because of how it looks. A place becomes special because of the people who care for each other.





About the Author

Achmad Nakhla Alfiyan SMK Krian 2 Sidoarjo



My name is Achmad Nakhla Alfiyan. I am 17 years old and I will turn 18 in May. I am a student at a vocational high school (SMK). I am just a normal student who likes watching movies, YouTube, and reels in my free time. Sometimes I feel lazy, but I still try to improve myself little by little.

When I was in junior high school (SMP), I participated in a provincial-level competition. It was an important experience for me because it helped me become more confident and brave. I believe everyone can grow step by step. I am still learning and trying to find my potential for the future.

About AMINEF

The American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF) is the binational Fulbright Commission for Indonesia. AMINEF's many educational exchange programs have increased mutual understanding between the United States and Indonesia and strengthened the ties that unite our two countries.

Since 1952, more than 3,500 Indonesians and 1,400 Americans have participated in exchanges. Annually, 80-100 Indonesians travel to the US through Fulbright grants for degree study, teaching, research, or non-degree professional fellowships. Similarly, up to 60 Americans receive Fulbright support to contribute their expertise in teaching, research, or as Specialists, offering insights to Indonesian institutions.

For detailed information on degree scholarships and non-degree fellowships available to Indonesians and Americans, visit the AMINEF website at www.aminef.or.id.

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

The Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program, one of the US State Department-funded Fulbright programs in many countries worldwide, places recent college graduates and young professionals as English teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools or universities overseas.

The program helps improve international students' English-language abilities and knowledge of the US while increasing the US student's language skills and knowledge of the many host countries worldwide.

In Indonesia, the Fulbright ETAs are placed in high schools (SMA, SMK, and Madrasah) that assist local English teachers. The program has been running for over two decades, since 2004, affecting thousands of Indonesian students and their communities across the archipelago. AMINEF works closely with the Indonesian Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education and Religious Affairs to administer the Fulbright ETA program in Indonesia.

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