

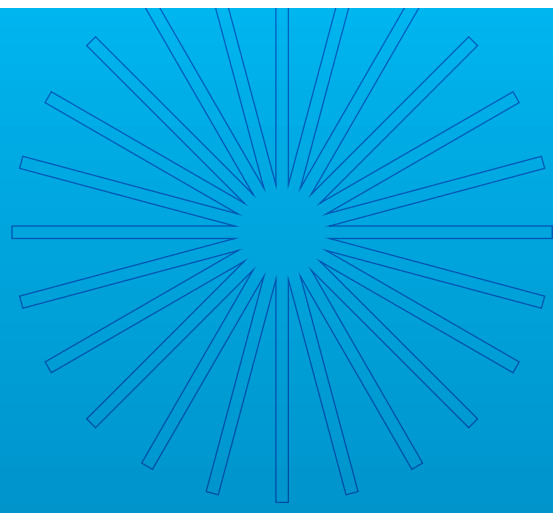
PRABARANA ZAYYAN ABHINAYA RANNO

- SHELA THE ICE DANCER -



The 2026
WORDS
Storytelling & Storybook Competition
MY COMMUNITY





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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.

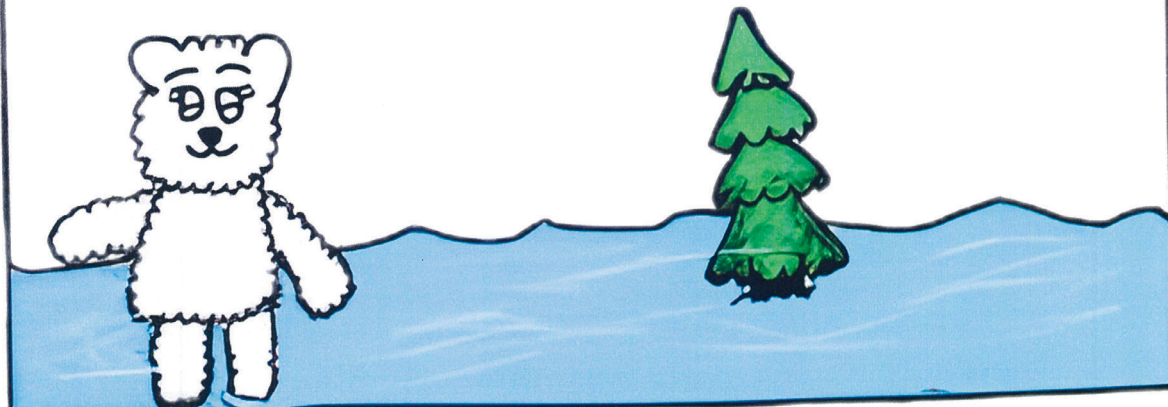
A highlight of the AMINEF year, the WORDS Competition allows 10th and 11th graders to showcase their storytelling skills, English proficiency, and cultural insights. In 2026, seventeen finalists will bring the theme **“My Community”** to life through their original stories.

Shela the ice dancer



Prabarana Zayyan Abhinaya Ranno

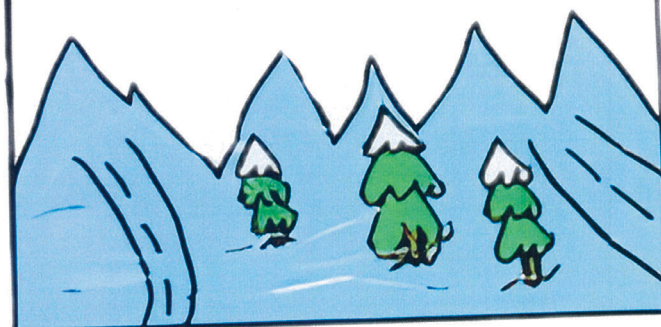
In the cold Arctic, where the world is quiet,
lived a young polar bear named Shela.



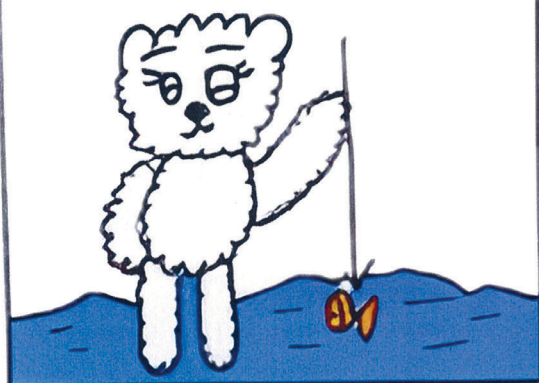
Shela lived alone.



Shela lost her parents when
she was very young.



Since then, she learned to
be strong by herself.

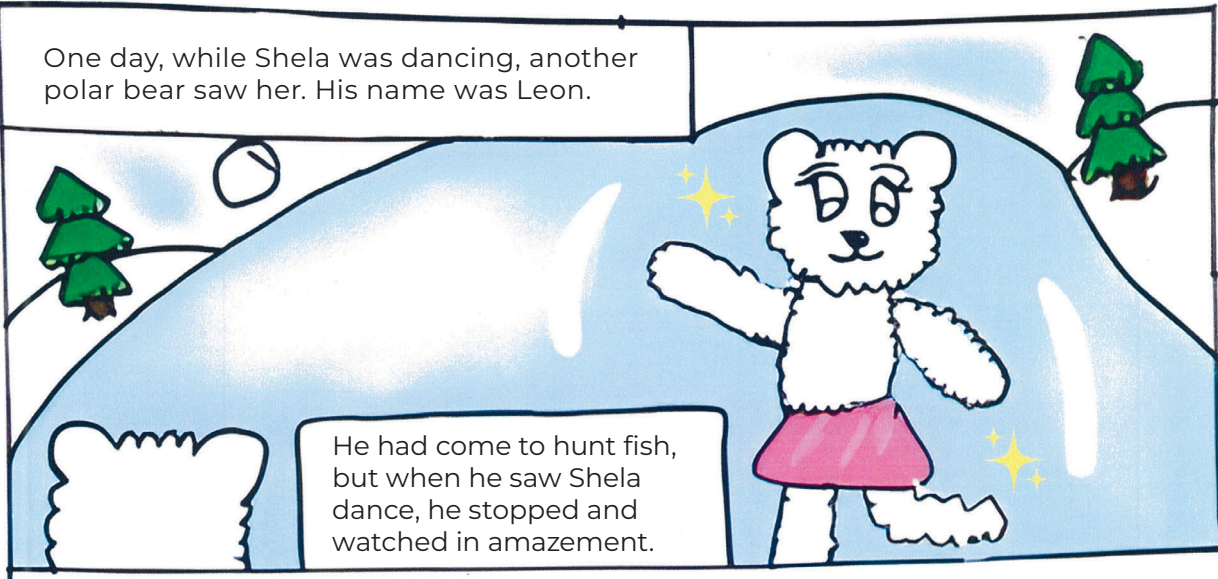


Shela found her own way to keep
herself company.



She danced.

One day, while Shela was dancing, another polar bear saw her. His name was Leon.



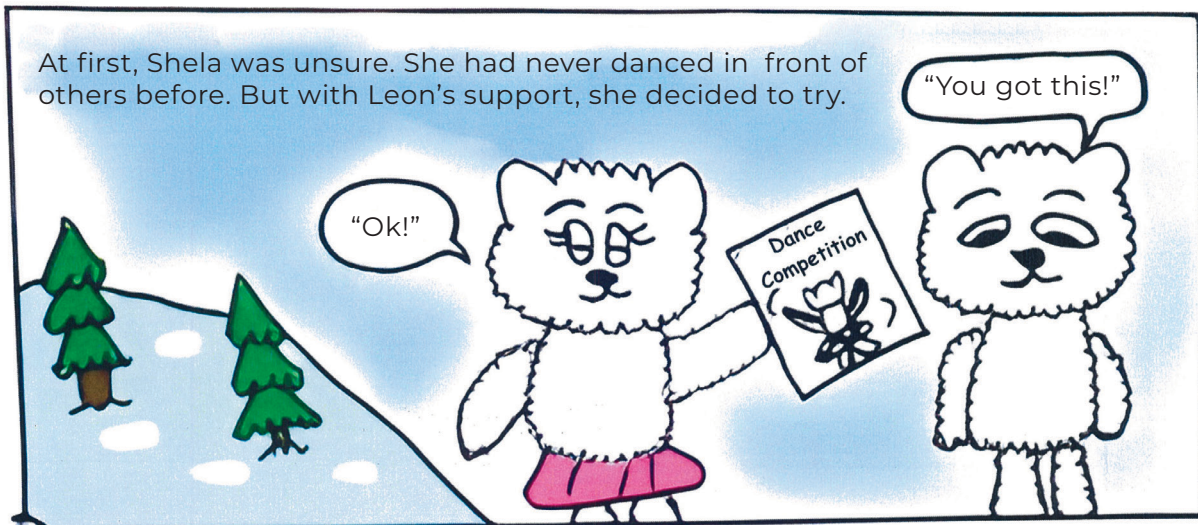
He had come to hunt fish, but when he saw Shela dance, he stopped and watched in amazement.

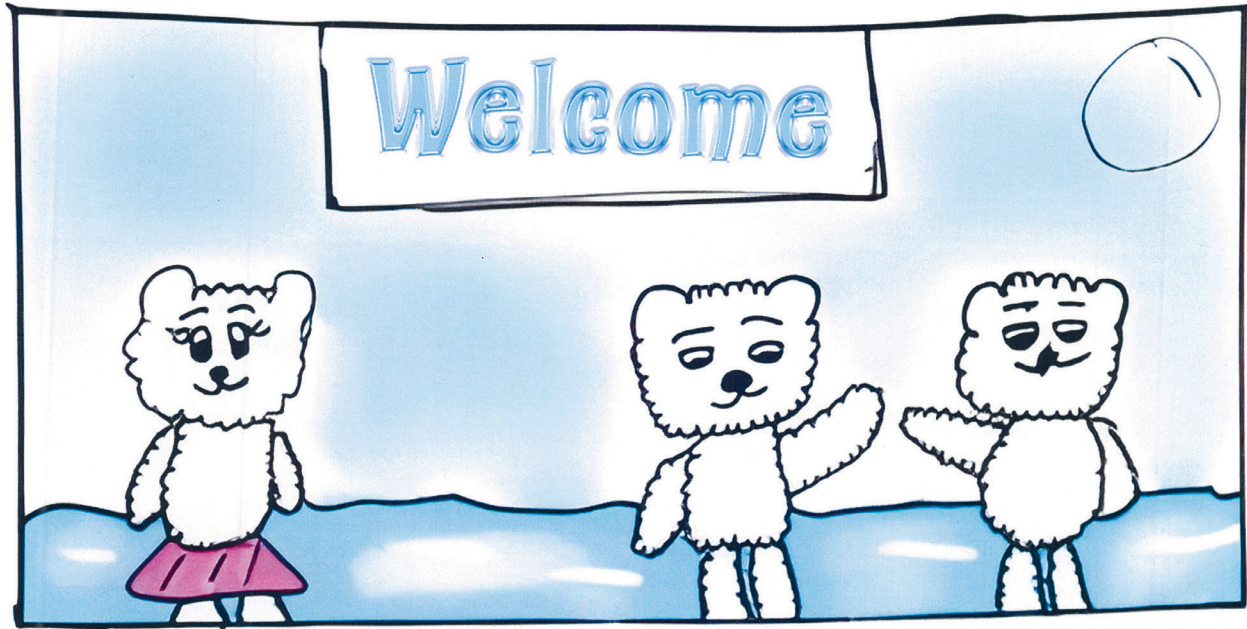
After many days, Leon finally spoke to her. He showed her a poster about a dancing competition held by the polar bear community. Leon believed Shela was talented and encouraged her to join.

At first, Shela's mind was filled with a thousand questions about Leon, but one by one, he answered them, gently putting her at ease.



At first, Shela was unsure. She had never danced in front of others before. But with Leon's support, she decided to try.

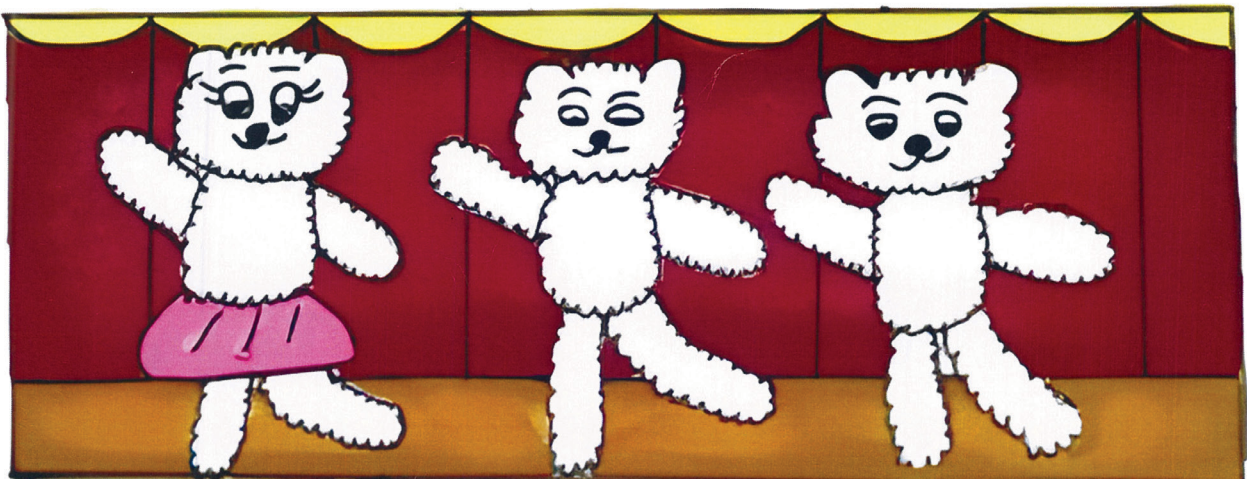




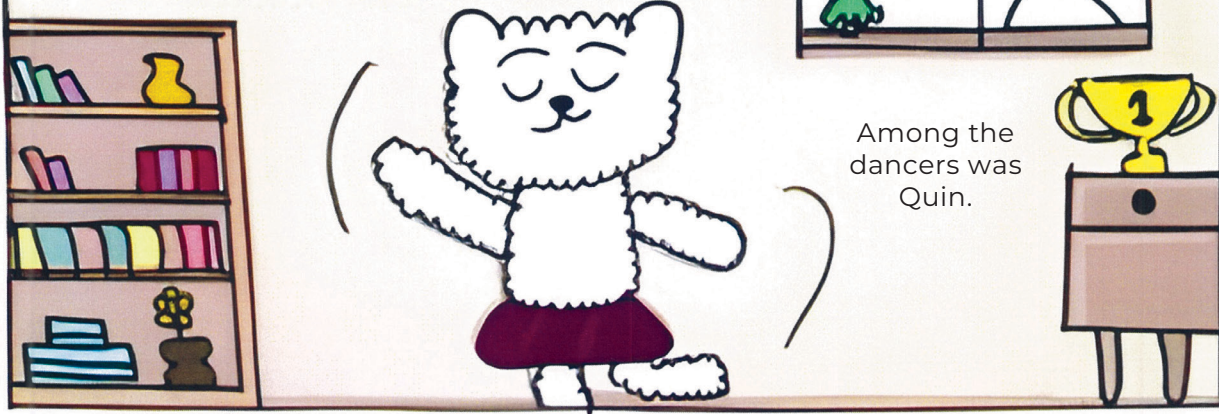
As Shela began practicing for the competition, she met many other dancers. She was not as shy as before, because she knew they shared the same passion. Shela was no longer afraid to say hello first, and slowly, she became friends with them.



They practiced together, shared tips, laughed at their mistakes, and supported one another. Little by little, Shela gained confidence. For the first time in her life, she felt like she truly belonged.

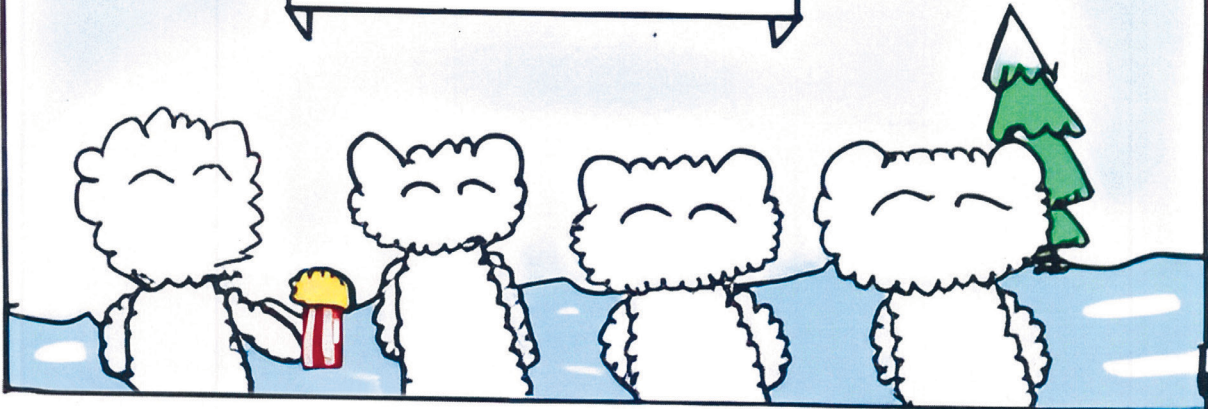


Quin was quiet and serious. She was a perfectionist who practiced alone in her own private ice studio. While others danced together, Quin focused on perfecting every movement by herself.



Among the dancers was Quin.

Dance Competition!



The day of the competition arrived. Polar bears from all over the Arctic gathered to watch.

Shela stepped onto the ice and danced with all her heart, with honesty, passion, and love, finally expressing the feelings she had kept hidden for so long.



The results will be announced in two days!!

One day before the announcement, Quin overheard the judges discussing the results.

Shela deserves first place. Quin will be second.

Quin froze... anger and fear filled her heart. She could not accept second place.

She ran to her father, Maryfat, crying and begging him to change the results. She demanded first place like a spoiled child, afraid of losing her perfect image.

Maryfat looked at her in silence...

"Do you understand?" She continued, tears falling. "If I lose, everything is ruined. My name, my image... everything!"

"Very well. I'll make sure you are first..."

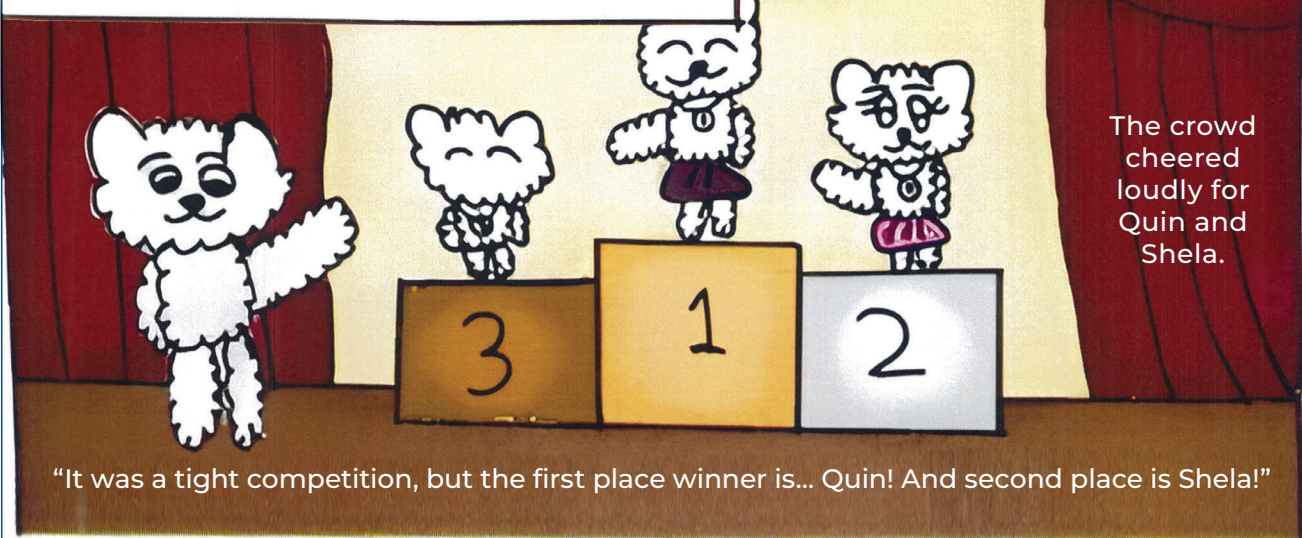
"Father!" She cried, rushing towards him. "You have to help me!" "I won't be second," her voice shaking but firm. "Change the results. I need to be first."

"How dare you make my daughter second!" Maryfat shouted, his anger burning through the room.

The night before the announcement, he went to meet the judge in secret, his mind filled with fury. He offered money, but at first, the judge refused, ashamed of the offer. But when Maryfat named the amount, ten million dollars, the judge fell silent. In the end, he agreed.

HOW DARE YOU MAKE MY DAUGHTER SECOND!

The day of the announcement arrived. Quin had a grin on her face knowing that she already secured first place. The judges stood up on the stage.



All of the other participants congratulated Shela. At first, she was disappointed. She thought second place meant failure. But as she saw that others who didn't win were just as happy, she realized something important. Dancing is an art and something that she pursues because she is passionate with it. And dancing is even better when it's done together with a community that supports each other. It's not a prize to win, but it's a way to express herself in her own way and connect with her new community.



About the Author

**Prabarana Zayyan
Abhinaya Ranno**
MAN Insan Cendekia
Kota Kendari



Hi! Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Prabarana Zayyan Abhinaya Ranno, but I go by Naya. I was born in Kebumen, Central Java on the 10th of December 2010, and I am now a tenth-grade student at MAN IC Kota Kendari. I really like watching movies and reading articles, and my favorite movie genre is romance. My other hobbies include swimming and public speaking. At school, I am part of the debate team, and I love coming up with convincing arguments. In the future, I hope to attend my dream university and travel the world.

I also like to try everything! My motto is, "Try and fail, but never fail to try." This is one of the reasons why I was inspired to join this competition. I am beyond excited for you to hear my story.



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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