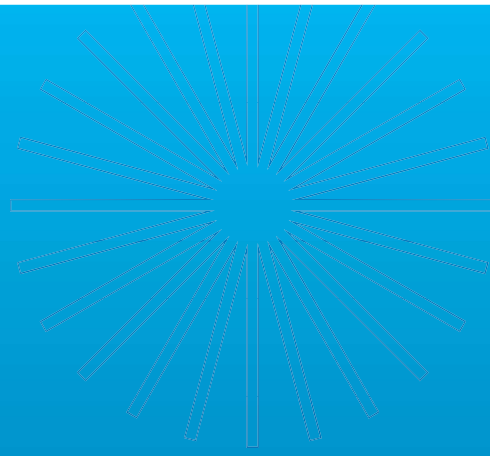


MUH. AKBAR AL-MANSHURIN

- LABU'S MAGIC PENCIL -





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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.





In a small medieval town, there lived a gray cat named Labu.

He was quiet, kept to himself, and loved drawing. Every day, he sat with worn-out paper and a simple pencil.

Labu said softly "This is going to be my best work. Alright... time to start drawing."





Labu finished his drawing, but something felt off. He stared at it for a long time. The lines never felt good enough to him. That makes him insecure.

He murmured, "This part feels wrong... that one too. Why does my work always feel strange? Maybe I'm just not good at drawing."

While Labu sat in silence, his friends suddenly showed up.

Wuku the owl, Dara the bat, and Bulo the chameleon.

Wuku asked gently, "What's wrong, Labu?"

With a sad face, Labu replied, "My work never feels good enough. I don't think I'm meant to draw."



Then, Dara stepped forward and said,

“Hmm... your drawing is actually pretty good. But maybe it could feel better if you used something we found.”

Then, Bulo stuck out his tongue, and on it lay a mysterious pencil.

Dara explained, “This is a magic pencil, Anything you draw with it will turn out perfect.”





At first, Labu hesitated. But then he started drawing with the pencil. And then, something happened. "Whoa... why does my hand feel so light? I feel like a pro right now!" He kept drawing, drawing, and drawing. "This is amazing! Is this really because of the pencil?"

Labu showed his drawing to his friends. Their expressions were something he had never seen before. They said, "Wow... this is incredible! We've never seen a drawing this good!" Labu's face lit up. For the first time, he felt proud.





Still amazed, Labu whispered, "Is the pencil really magic?" His friends smiled and laughed softly. And then they said "No, Labu, It's just a regular pencil." Labu froze. "So... this was all my work?" "Yes," Wuku replied. "Actually... We wanted to invite you to our drawing community, but you looked really frustrated earlier."

They all laughed together. From that day on, Labu joined his friends in their drawing community and kept learning with them.

Labu said confidently, "I want to grow with all of you, and become the best artist in this town."



Labu learned an important lesson.

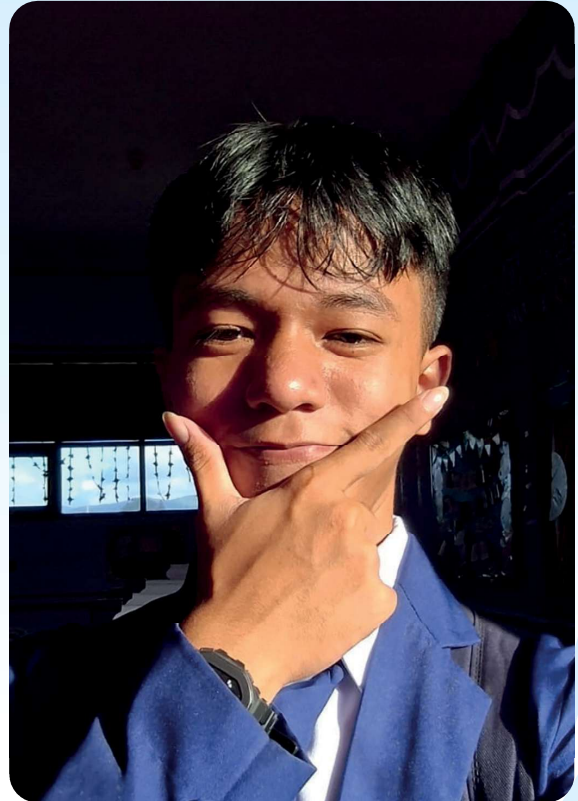
It's not magic that makes us better, but courage, self-belief,
and the support of the people around us.



The end

About the Author

**Muh. Akbar
Al-Manshurin**
SMKN 3 Kendari



Hey guys! My name is Muh. Akbar Al-Manshurin. Fun fact: my friends call me Wibu because of my scar that looks like a dimple, even though I don't watch anime or play video games.

I was born in Kendari, SE Sulawesi, on November 4. I am currently in grade 11 at SMKN 3 Kendari in the Computer and Telecommunication Network Engineering track. I enjoy drawing, painting, graphic design, editing animation videos, singing, moon-gazing, listening to music, and watching TikToks.

I have many interesting achievements, such as 1st place in the National Poster Design competition, 2nd place in a drawing competition held by the Navy, and 3rd place at the Rank #1, an academic competition. The clubs that I am in are Scouts, Red Cross, Rohani Islam, Social Media and Documentation Club, Student Council, and English Club. Sounds crazy, right?!

My dream is to visit Japan and New Zealand and become a designer and artist there. Thank you so much for this opportunity, and Wassalam!

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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