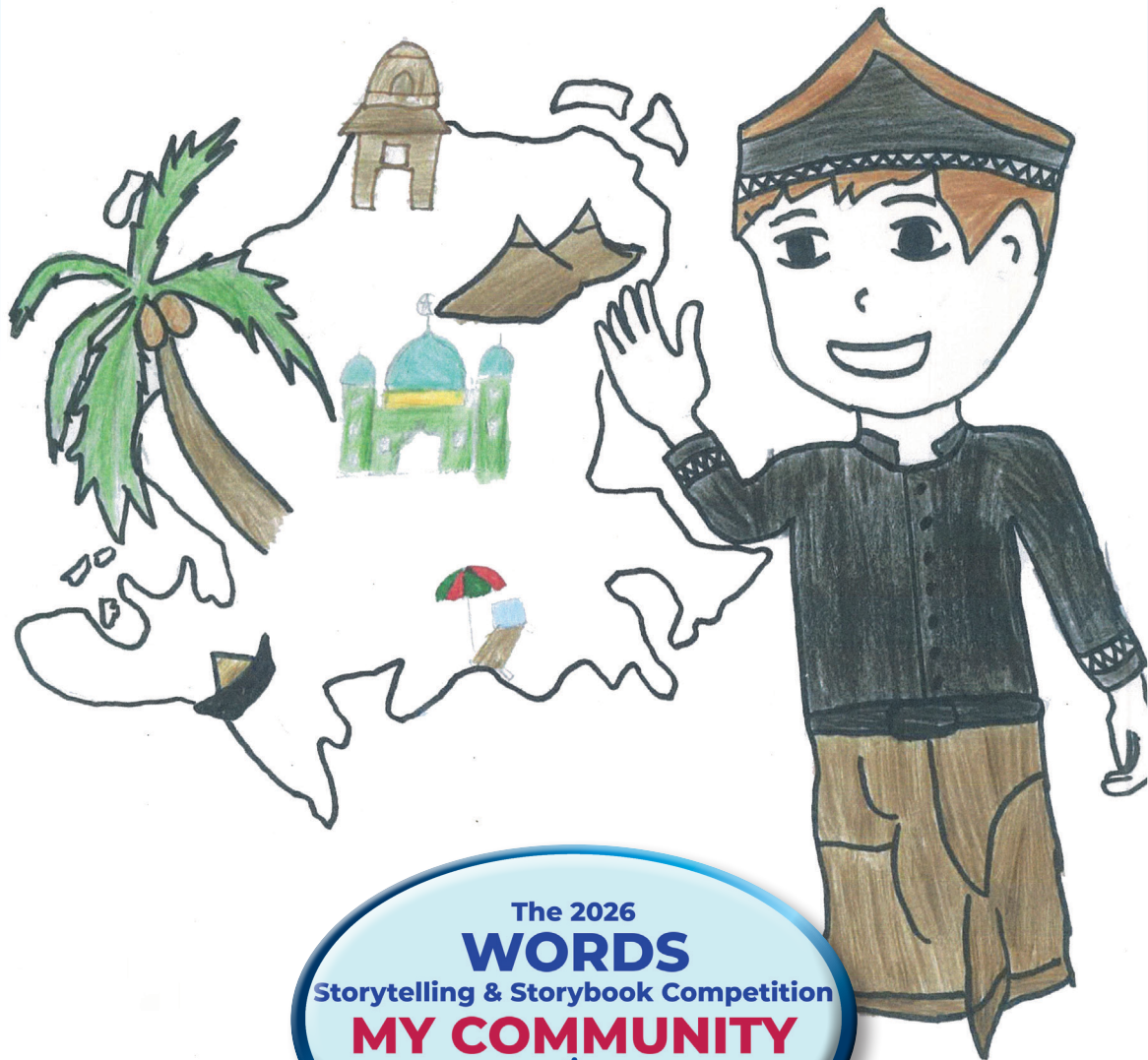


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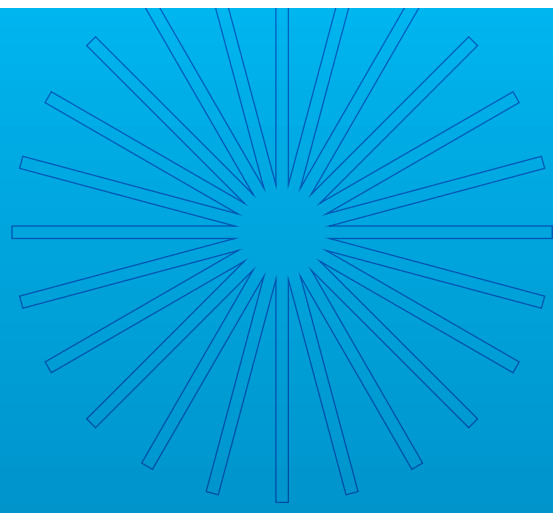
- BAJANG'S HOLIDAY -

Bajang's Holiday



The 2026
WORDS
Storytelling & Storybook Competition
MY COMMUNITY





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American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF)
Intiland Tower, 11th Floor,
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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.



Bajang's Holiday





Once upon a time, there lived a boy named Bajang who was returning home for vacation to his hometown in eastern Indonesia, commonly known as the island of Lombok. One day, when Bajang had just arrived in the village, he met a boy named Raden who was ready to take him on a tour of the village. "You rest first, okay? Tomorrow we'll start the village tour."



Subahnale Songket



The next morning, Bajang was excited for the village tour. They started by visiting the village weaving center. "Wow, this fabric is so beautiful, Raden," said Bajang. "Well, that's called songket fabric with a subahnale pattern," replied Raden. "Why is songket named after the subahnale pattern?" asked Bajang. "It's because the admiration and detail of the weaving motif makes people spontaneously say subhanallah when they see it. Over there, there are also many other songket motifs."

After touring the village for a long time, they took a break while eating a local snack called cererot and drinking fresh coconut water.

"Wow, this snack is delicious, Raden."



"Yes, that's right."

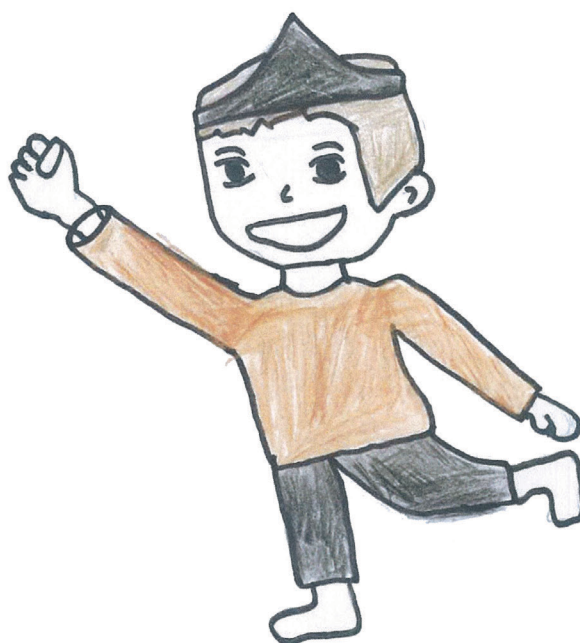


This snack is made from rice flour, brown sugar, and coconut milk, then wrapped in young coconut leaves."

The next morning, bad news came from Raden. His older sister had not returned home after leaving two days ago. Raden's family had called and left messages several times, but there was no answer. In the afternoon, Raden's family received information from the village head that his daughter had been eloped. That evening, the groom's family came to the bride's family to ask for their blessing. Since the bride's family agreed, the wedding ceremony would be held the next day, and a *Nyongkolan* ceremony would be held in the afternoon.



Bajang returned home feeling happy and excited to attend the series of events the next morning. When he arrived home, his mother told him that he would be returning to the city the next afternoon.



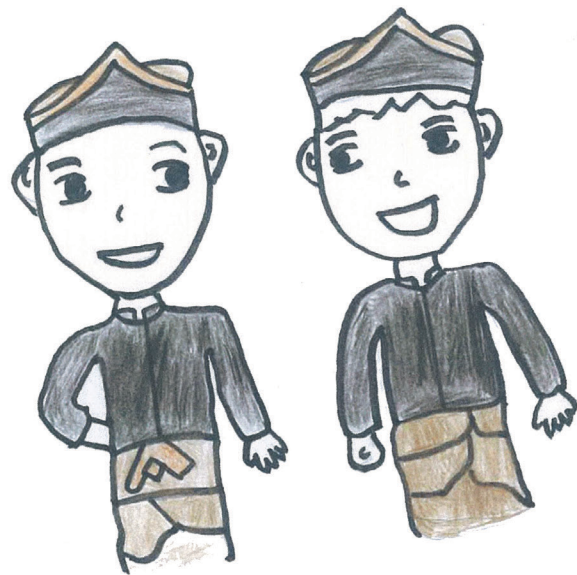
Bajang's face immediately fell. "Why can't we go back the day after tomorrow, Mom?" "Son, your father has already booked the plane tickets, so we can't postpone it," replied his mother. Bajang went to bed feeling sad.



The next morning, Bajang was awakened by his mother. "Bajang, the flight we booked has been delayed until tonight, so we will return to the city in the evening." Feeling happy, Bajang immediately jumped out of bed and headed straight to the event.

The event went cheerfully. During the lunch break, Raden's family prepared for the Nyongkolan. His aunt had prepared traditional clothes for Bajang. "You look handsome in traditional Sasak clothes, Bajang," she said.

Bajang smiled. *Nyongkolan* is a procession from the groom's house to the bride's house with the aim of introducing the bride and groom to the community. After the event, Bajang expressed his gratitude to Raden and his entire family, "This vacation was very memorable. See you again next time."



This story is not just about someone going on vacation; it teaches us to love our culture, make friends, and always be grateful. We must be proud of our culture, preserve it, and never forget it.



About the Author

**Muhammad Ziddanal
Barokatan**
SMAN 1 Praya



Hi! My name is Muhammad Ziddanal Barokatan, my friends usually call me Zidan. I am 15 years old and was born in Praya, Central Lombok on April 17, 2010.

I am the middle child of three siblings. I am in 10th grade at SMAN 1 PRAYA, and I am currently a member of the student council at SMAN 1 PRAYA. My hobby is playing soccer. I usually play soccer with my younger sister in our yard on holidays. I really like soccer, and I am also a fan of European soccer and the Indonesian national team. I would love to visit one of the top European club stadiums and meet the world's best soccer players. I enjoy eating fried rice and spicy food. I like watching Malaysian animations such as Ejen Ali and Boboiboy, and I also enjoy watching movies with good moral values. My dream is to travel around the world, learn many new things, and become a good person who makes my parents proud.

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.






AMINEF

Intiland Tower, 11th Floor
Jl. Jend. Sudirman Kav. 32
Jakarta 10220

T. +62 21 5793 9085/86
F. +62 21 5793 9089

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 infofulbright_ind@aminef.or.id