7 . What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

*Things to consider:* Think of community as a term that can encompass a group, team or a place — like your high school, hometown or home. You can define community as you see fit, just make sure you talk about your role in that community. Was there a problem that you wanted to fix in your community? Why were you inspired to act? What did you learn from your effort? How did your actions benefit others, the wider community or both? Did you work alone or with others to initiate change in your community?

When I was ten, I read George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, which opened my eyes to understand the class system and social inequality. I started to disagree with people that believe the poor are poor because they don't work hard enough. It's never about effort, but it's about the unequal opportunities that are given. They're born with a disadvantage, thus limited their intellectual abilities. Intellectual ability stems from the ability to read books because books are the backbone of all knowledge. When knowledge is acquired, I believe that they’ll be able to break away from poverty.

UNESCO noted that Indonesia has a literacy rate of 99.67 as per 2016. However,

Indonesia ranks 60th out of 61 countries in terms of reading interest, a study by Central Connecticut State University. I was restless when I got the data, I wanted to improve Indonesian’s reading interest. I decided to start with children from low-income families.

That's when I, along with two friends, founded *Cerita Mentari* (Instagram: @ceritamentari), a literary program in Jakarta. Cerita Mentari means the story of the sun in Indonesian. Our vision is to improve the children's imagination, to discover their inner selves, to earn greater knowledge, and to develop their verbal abilities so that they could speak up their mind.

It began by introducing children ages 5-12 to books. The program includes a read-aloud session together, some quizzes, and fun games. I spent three years helping the kids to develop an in-depth understanding of themselves and to see the world from many different perspectives through books.

It started with a desire to help the children in poverty by teaching them to read, and I ended up being part of them. The kids that were once strangers become family to me. Orwell’s *Animal Farm* where there's the great discrimination between the powerful and the weak is always my reminder that it's important to change the conversations that we have about poverty and social class. In a corner in Jakarta, I break down the Orwellian wall that is still present in our world.