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 were born with a disadvantage which 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, according to a study by Central Connecticut State University. I was restless when I got the data. I wanted to improve Indonesians’ reading interest. I decided to start with children from low-income families.

That was when I, along with two friends, founded *Cerita Mentari*, a literary program in Jakarta. Cerita Mentari, “the story of the sun” in Indonesian, aims to improve children's imagination, to help them discover their inner selves, to acquire 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.

Hey Elysa!

It’s us again. Cute nod to Orwell! Love it.

Here’s some advice for the next-level revision, if you choose to take it.

I think you have a really great experience here that you’ve not milked for all its worth. This is similar to what we’ve said about the other essays, but basically, the admission board, through your essays, does not need a lecture about Indonesia’s literacy rate, just as it does not need a summary of your novel. What it needs is a better understanding of who you are as a person. So remember to focus on that. Even as you’re thinking about revising this, then you want to think: what does this paragraph say about me? What does this sentence reveal about who I am?

With that said, here, you can talk more about the human aspect of Cerita Mentari. I might want to spend probably one sentence summarizing all the essential facts of what the company is, but really, I’d spend most of my efforts painting a picture about all the amazing children that I’ve helped through this company/organization I’ve founded.

For instance, here’s an example of a structure that I might use.

1. Brief intro of the company + motivation (Orwell. UNESCO stats, what is Cerita Mentari)
2. The struggles in starting Cerita Mentari (if any, and only very briefly)
3. Snapshots of the children. Think of this as a documentary-style camera just following the lives of a few children and how Cerita Mentari has impacted their lives. See, this is where we get to see the human side of you. We don’t care as much about you philosophizing about Orwell. If we want that, we can just go into an international high school and grab a bunch of essays by tenth graders and have enough supply to last us a few lifetimes. Instead, we want to see the people. The human-interest perspective of the story.   
     
   Another way to do this is to trail the camera on one student. Show us Fatimah’s tentative look as she first struggles to read a sentence. Show us her family, knee-deep in poverty, living in a house smaller than some people’s bathroom. They think it’s really stupid for Fatimah to go to school and learn how to read. How’s that gonna help her earn money for the family? For her five younger siblings?

Fatimah perseveres anyway. The other children laugh at her. Fatimah perseveres. Her mother tries to drag her home. Fatimah perseveres. Her younger brother pushes her down, her only blouse now covered in mud. Fatimah perseveres.

Five months later, her father puts his foot down and pulls her out of Cerita Mentari. You’re sad to see her go, but the tentative look in her eyes is gone, replaced by a slightly more confident, lopsided smile as she squeezes your hand as she says goodbye. Somewhere deep inside your heart you know even though you’ll never see her again, she’ll continue to be a reader and there’s nothing that can take that away from her.

Tell us that kind of story!

1. Philosophize on the big picture, the importance of literacy, yadda yadda (optional).

Thanks!

Matahari Kinanti and Paul Edison

All-in Essay Editors