

Students learn to pen 'novels'

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With a kamikaze writing approach that forces writers to lower their expectations, take risks and write on the fly, 16 Indonesian children succeeded in writing "novels" with a combined total of 118,110 words in a month-long writing competition in November.

"The idea is that as an aspiring writer each child needs to set an individual target and meet it during a one-month period," the Indonesia-based National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) municipal liaison, Endah Soekarsono, told *The Jakarta Post* on Saturday.

Participants set goals of writing between 500 and 50,000-word stories, depending "on age and individual potential," said Endah.

Participants ranged between six and 15 years old, and were homeschoolers in Jakarta, Depok, Bogor and Singapore. Those who met the 50,000-word (approximately 175 pages) target were awarded "I'm a novelist" pins and certificates from the Indonesian organizer.

"It is important to encourage young writers in further coaching meetings. We have also discussed the possibility of publishing their writings," said Endah.

Participants were tutored by Endah, a writing coach who in 2006 established a cyber community for aspiring writers called *KelasMenulis.com*. She mentored each child on a weekly basis either in face-to-face meetings or email discussions.

"It is a competition between each child and him or herself," said Endah.

Muhamad Kunto Adi, 15, wrote a 51,000-word science-fiction fantasy about a group of junior high students on a mission to end crime on earth.

Adi said he took part because he wanted to try his hand at writing.

"I want to continue the story in seven sequels. Right now, I have done two," said Adi, adding he already had plans for the sequels.

"The 50,000-word challenge has a wonderful way of opening up your imagination and unleashing creative potential like nothing else," said NaNoWriMo director Chris Baty in a written statement on www.NaNoWriMo.org.

"When you write for quantity instead of quality, you end up getting both," said Baty, who

started the contest in 1999.

This year some 52 Indonesian aspiring writers above the age of 18 participated in the NaNoWriMo writing contest. However, only six managed to persevere all the way to the last day of the contest and wrap up their 50,000-word stories.

Around 18 percent of NaNoWriMo participants "win" every year by writing 50,000 words and validating their novels on the organization's Web site before midnight on the last day of the competition.

The winners receive no prizes.

This year more than 100,000 writers from over 70 countries participated in the program, up from 79,000 last year.