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Winners from every state

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Hall, Lee, and Farah (second, third and fourth from left) posing for a photo with the top six winners (foreground from left) Avril, Asfa Nisha, Muhammad Luqman (represented by his grandfather Dr Wan Idris Wan Yaacob), and Arianna, Harvynna, and Ariana Carmel.

BURSTING into tears when her name was called out, Avril Yong Zhi Ying, 16, couldn't hide her joy and disbelief.

The eloquent SMK Ken Hwa (CF) student from Keningau, Sabah, was among the country's best young essayists who made their schools proud at the Sunway-Oxbridge Essay Competition prize-giving ceremony on July 27.

"This is so big for me and my family. I'm the only Sabahan in this competition.

"To be in the top two and to represent my school and my state is already the highest honour. Winning is beyond my imagination."

Avril and Asfa Nisha Basheer Ali from SMK Seksyen 4 Bandar Kinrara, Selangor, were joint second prize winners for Category B of the competition.

Both walked away with RM3, 000 and a Sunway bursary valued at RM15, 000.

Third prize winner Muhammad Luqman Mohammad Nawar from Kolej Melayu Kuala Kangsar, Perak, won RM1, 000 and a RM10, 000 Sunway bursary.

Although she has participated in debates, this is Avril's first time joining an essay-writing competition.

"I could not hold back the tears because I felt an overwhelming sense of pride.

"To make my school and clan proud is above any other grace I could ever ask for.

“All the accumulated emotions throughout the competition just poured out in that moment when my name was called out.”

Her mum, aunt and grandaunt travelled with her from Sabah to lend their support but “my dad and sister could not come as the flight tickets were expensive”.

Category A first prize winner Arianna Saiful, 15, from Kolej Yayasan Saad, Melaka, received RM5, 000 and a RM26, 000 Sunway bursary.

Her winning essay was about her vision for Malaysia.

“We can be a nation where everybody understands each other, where there is no racial discrimination and no gender bias. We can be one, ” she said, adding that the older generation should also stop discriminating against youngsters because “we have passion, ideas and the willingness to achieve great things”.

She said the biggest challenge in the final came when she was deciding whether to include a poem in her essay.

“I wanted to sum up everything I was trying to convey in a poem but I wasn’t sure if it was allowed.

“It was a big risk but my creativity won me this trophy.”

Asked who her favourite poet was, the school debater said she looks for good writing rather than who writes it.

The joint third prize winners of this category were Harvynna Kaur Kler from Kolej Yayasan Saad, Melaka, and Ariana Carmel Ravi from SMK Methodist, Selangor.

Each bagged RM1, 000 and a RM10, 000 Sunway bursary.

There was no second prize winner for Category A, and no first prize winner for Category B.

The nationwide writing competition for secondary students saw winners taking home Sunway bursaries, cash and Sunway PALS (loyalty card) points worth over RM230, 000.

Organised by the Sunway Group, the Oxford & Cambridge Society Malaysia, Jeffrey Cheah Foundation, Sunway University and Monash University Malaysia with support from Sunway PALS, the prize-giving ceremony was held at Sunway University.

Ten consolation prizes, comprising a cash prize of RM500 and a RM5, 000 Sunway bursary, were also given out for each category.

All winners received 10, 000 Sunway PALS each.

A desktop computer worth RM3, 500 was awarded to SMK Infant Jesus Convent (M), Johor, for sending the most submissions.

The winners' accommodation and travel expenses to attend the ceremony were sponsored by the Sunway Group.

The competition was open to Malaysian students in Forms One to Five from all schools except those using the international syllabus.

The finals were held on May 25 in Sunway College Johor Bahru for Johor students, Sunway College Ipoh for students from Perak, Kedah and Penang, and Sunway University for students from Kelantan, Melaka, Negri Sembilan, Sarawak, Pahang, Putrajaya, Selangor, Terengganu and the Federal Territory.

The Oxford & Cambridge Society Malaysia panel headed by its executive committee member and past president Margaret Hall selected the winners of the competition.

"This is a really tough competition because all the finalists must write second essays on new topics under exam conditions, " said Hall.

All six top winners chose to write essays on their dream for Malaysia when competing in the second round of the competition.

She said the most heartening thing about the competition was that the winners were not all from big, urban centres.

"They are from every state and even from small towns. The strong students are everywhere and competitions like these help us to find them."

Advising students to be more diligent in reading and writing, she said these tips could lead to great improvements.

"Read more so that you have an example of how to write inspiring and to-the-point essays.

"And, then you must practice writing, " she said, reminding students to be conscious of plagiarism.

Sunway Education Group CEO Elizabeth Lee said a total of 382 schools took part in the competition.

A total of 2, 772 submissions were received this year.

"Since the launch of the competition in 2014, the total number of entries over the course of six years has reached 16, 512.

"We are thrilled because the whole idea is to get as many students as possible to participate. Lives are impacted through education when students make the effort to improve themselves.

"When they participate, they would have worked with their teachers and parents. The process itself builds confidence, " she said, adding that the competition could be expanded to include primary schools.

“We are very open to ideas as to how we can reach out to more and more students.”

The Education Ministry’s English Language Teaching Centre director Farah Mardhy Aman, who was present, said the competition has expanded the horizons of participants by enabling them to learn beyond the confines of a classroom.

“By choosing to be a part of this competition, you (students) have done us all proud.

“You have voluntarily chosen to be involved in reading astutely, thinking critically, writing persuasively, and speaking confidently in English.

“Therefore, I congratulate not just the 26 winners present, but all those who took the time to participate.

“Winners, I am proud of your accomplishments. However, do not be complacent just yet, as your potential is tremendous.”

Commending Sunway for enhancing the standards of English through this “successful and sustainable” initiative, she called on more corporations to do the same in helping our young become globally competitive and holistic individuals.

Read more at https://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2019/08/04/winners-from-every-state#we4xFrJfaqeAGmLl.99