



From Books to Works: Building Students' Critical-Creative Thinking Culture at MTsN 1 Cilegon City

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Abstrak

Rendahnya budaya literasi serta keterampilan berpikir kritis dan kreatif di kalangan siswa SMP tetap menjadi tantangan besar dalam pendidikan Indonesia. Student Community Service (KKM) Thematic Literacy Group 44 dari Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa (UNTIRTA) bertujuan membangun dan memperkuat budaya literasi melalui pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis proyek yang berkelanjutan di MTs Negeri 1 Kota Cilegon. Metodologi layanan masyarakat mencakup empat langkah interaktif: (1) Sosialisasi dan pendidikan tentang peninjauan buku (resensi), (2) Panduan penulisan cerita berbasis buku, (3) Mentoring dalam menciptakan proyek literasi, dan (4) Pameran karya serta evaluasi partisipatif. Hasilnya menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam pemahaman siswa tentang struktur membaca, artikulasi ide kritis, dan kepercayaan diri dalam mempresentasikan karya kreatif mereka secara publik. Mengintegrasikan membaca, meninjau, menulis cerita, dan pameran karya secara efektif mengubah persepsi siswa bahwa membaca bukan sekadar menguraikan kata-kata, tetapi merupakan proses aktif dalam menghasilkan karya kreatif dan bernilai.

Kata kunci : Literasi KKM, UNTIRTA, Berpikir Kritis, Karya Kreatif, Pelayanan Masyarakat.

Abstract

The low culture of literacy and critical as well as creative thinking skills among junior high school students remains a significant challenge in Indonesian education. The Student Community Service (KKM) Thematic Literacy Group 44 of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (UNTIRTA) aims to build and strengthen literacy culture through a sustainable project-based learning approach at MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City. The community service methodology encompasses four interactive steps: (1) Socialization and education on book reviewing (resensi), (2) Guidance on book-based story writing, (3) Mentoring in creating literacy projects, and (4) Exhibition of works and participatory evaluation. The results demonstrated a significant enhancement in students' understanding of reading structures, critical idea articulation, and confidence in presenting their creative works publicly. Integrating reading, reviewing, story writing, and work exhibition effectively transformed students' perception that reading is not merely decoding words, but an active process of generating creative and valuable works.

Keywords : Literacy KKM, UNTIRTA, Critical Thinking, Creative Work, Community Service.

Introduction

Student Community Service (Kuliah Kerja Mahasiswa - KKM) is a tangible manifestation of the implementation of the Three Pillars of Higher Education (Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi) that bridges academic theory with the reality of societal



needs through community service programs based on collaboration among students, lecturers, and the community (Gandara et al., 2026). Through KKM, students are required to contextually identify and resolve challenges within society.

One strategic issue requiring intensive attention is the low level of literacy and critical thinking skills among adolescents and secondary school learners (Abidin et al., 2021). Literacy must not be narrowly defined merely as the ability to spell letters or passively read texts. In the context of modern education and the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), literacy encompasses the ability to evaluate, analyze, interpret, and re-express ideas critically and creatively to improve the quality of local human resources (Faiz & Kurniawaty, 2022). Low reading interest and limited variations in literacy learning methods in schools often result in weak student capabilities in critical thinking, articulating opinions, and producing written works (Abidin et al., 2021).

Answering these challenges, the KKM Thematic Literacy Group 44 of UNTIRTA took an active role in Kebondalem Village, Purwakarta Subdistrict, Cilegon City, with a specific focus on developing the School Literacy Movement at MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City. This school environment was selected as a strategic partner because it possesses a large student potential, yet requires encouragement through interactive methods to process reading materials into concrete works (Maulana, 2026).

The work program "From Books to Works" was presented as a structured and comprehensive approach to transform passive reading activities into active and productive creative processes. The primary objective of this community service program is to raise the literacy awareness of students at MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City, train their skills in reviewing and writing short stories based on reading books, and build students' courage to express and present works openly. Consequently, this program is expected to make a real contribution in producing a young generation that not only loves reading but is also critical, creative, and confident.

Implementation Method

Time and Location of Implementation

This community service program was implemented in stages during the 2026 UNTIRTA Thematic Literacy KKM period. The intensive school literacy activities at MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City took place from July 14, 2026, to July 17, 2026, preceded by observation stages, permit applications, and coordination with the school administration on July 13, 2026.

Target Audience

The primary targets of this community service program were the students of MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City. The activities were designed participatorily, involving students in small group dynamics and open classroom settings.

Method of Service

The methodology used in executing this program combined edutainment approaches, direct practice (learning by doing), and project-based learning. The service workflow stages include:

1. Socialization and Literacy Introduction Stage (July 14, 2026): Presentation of materials regarding the importance of literacy, cultivating reading habits, and critical thinking motivation, followed by the distribution of quality reading materials to trigger students' initial interest.



Gambar 1. Implementation of a reading culture awareness session and book review technique training with students from MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City.

2. Book Review / Resensi Learning Stage (July 15, 2026): Technical training in identifying book elements (characters, plot, setting, moral message), where students were guided to compose simple reviews using independent perspectives.
3. Reading-Based Creative Story Writing Stage (July 16, 2026): Training on composing short stories that adapt or are inspired by books read, developing imagination and story conflicts.
4. Project Completion and Exhibition / Work Fair Stage (July 17, 2026): Finalization of literacy projects concluded with a Work Fair (Exhibition) and presentations in front of the class and judging team.

Success Indicators

Program success indicators were measured through students' active participation during training sessions, accuracy in completing book review and short story writing projects, students' courage to perform and present works at the Work Fair, and improvements in students' self-confidence and interest in reading activities.

Results and Discussion

The execution of the UNTIRTA Group 44 Thematic Literacy KKM program at MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City proceeded in accordance with the planning flow compiled in the activity logbook. Student enthusiasm and full support from the school were the primary drivers for the success of the entire event series.

Tabel 1 Matrix of Literacy Work Program Implementation at MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City

Date	Activity Stage	Material Focus / Activity	Student Achievements & Outputs
July 14, 2026	School Literacy Socialization	Importance of reading, critical thinking motivation, and distribution of reading materials	Establishment of initial interest and understanding of literacy objectives

Date	Activity Stage	Material Focus / Activity	Student Achievements & Outputs
July 15, 2026	Book Review Training (Resensi)	Techniques for dissecting book structures (characters, plot, message), critical analysis	Draft book reviews authored independently by students
July 16, 2026	Book-Based Story Writing	Imagination development, short story structure, characterization, and plot	Creative short story manuscripts inspired by books
July 17, 2026	Work Fair & Project Presentation	Work exhibition, oral presentation, best group evaluation, appreciation	Literacy project products, classroom exhibition, and increased self confidence

Building Critical Understanding Through Book Reviews

In the initial book review training session, students were invited not merely to be passive readers, but critical observers. KKM students guided learners in recognizing story structures and evaluating messages conveyed by authors. Classroom discussions were interactive, with students daring to express disagreements or alternative viewpoints regarding the plots of the books read. This proves that a communicative approach can stimulate learners' critical thinking faculties.

Developing Creativity Through Story Writing

The subsequent stage encouraged students to take a step further—transforming from readers into writers. Armed with reading inspiration, students composed short stories with their own characters and plots. This process trained synthesis and creativity skills, where abstract ideas from books were processed into fresh new narratives. The success of students in completing short stories indicates that children possess vast creative potential that requires appropriate channels for expression.



Gambar 2. Intensive guidance provided by KKM Group 44 students during the process of mentoring the writing of short stories based on reading books.

Work Fair and Confidence Building

The peak of the event marked by the Work Fair (Exhibition) and literacy project presentations served as an essential momentum in building students' self-confidence. Students displayed their writings and visual projects and presented them before peers, teachers, and KKM students. Students who initially hesitated and felt shy proved capable of delivering oral ideas fluently and with full pride. Awarding the best groups and works provided positive motivational reinforcement for the sustainability of reading culture in schools.



Gambar 3. The atmosphere at the exhibition and presentation session for independent literacy projects by students of MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City.

Program Sustainability Impact for the School and Community Environment

Beyond direct activities at MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City, UNTIRTA KKM Group 44 also synergized this program with the management of the Ibnu Sina Community Reading Park (TBM) and community literacy mentoring in Kebondalem Village. The sustainability of this literacy culture is supported by providing reading materials and organizing the TBM space so that it continues to be accessed by surrounding students and children.



Gambar 4. Synergy of literacy programs through the management and provision of reading materials at the Ibnu Sina Community Reading Center (TBM) in Kebondalem Urban Village.

Conclusion

The UNTIRTA Group 44 Thematic Literacy KKM program entitled "From Books to Works" at MTs Negeri 1 Cilegon City was successfully executed with highly positive achievements. Through sustainable stages—ranging from socialization, book review training, creative story writing, to the Work Fair—this program proved capable of enhancing critical thinking skills, honing creative power, and generating students' courage and self-confidence in communication.

This program emphasizes that literacy can be packaged attractively, interactively, and enjoyably. This collaboration between higher education institutions and secondary schools is expected to trigger the birth of sustainable literacy movements, ensuring students not only love reading but are also capable of producing valuable works for their environment and the wider community.

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