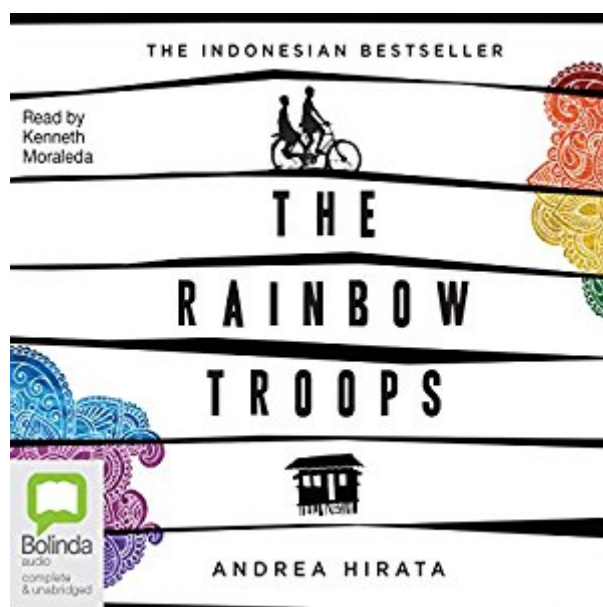


The book was found

# The Rainbow Troops



## Synopsis

Ikal is a student at Muhammadiyah Elementary, on the Indonesian island of Belitong, where graduating from sixth grade is considered a major achievement. His school is under constant threat of closure. In fact, Ikal and his friends - a group called The Rainbow Troops - face threats from every angle: pessimistic, corrupt government officials; greedy corporations hardly distinguishable from the colonialism they've replaced; deepening poverty and crumbling infrastructure; and their own faltering self-confidence. But in the form of two extraordinary teachers, they also have hope, and Ikal's education is an uplifting one, in and out of the classroom. You will cheer for Ikal and his friends as they defy the town's powerful tin miners. Meet his first love - a hand with half-moon fingernails that passes him the chalk his teacher sent him to buy. You will roar in support of Lintang, the class's barefoot maths genius, as he bests the rich company children in an academic challenge. First published in Indonesia, The Rainbow Troops went on to sell over 5 million copies. Now it is set to captivate listeners across the globe. This is classic storytelling: an engrossing depiction of a world not often encountered, bursting with charm and verve.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

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## Customer Reviews

The Rainbow Troops is a remarkable debut novel by a young man who once promised his schoolteacher he would write a book in her honor. Inspired by Hirata's own childhood experiences on the tiny, isolated island of Belitong, on the east coast of Sumatra, this is the poignant story of ten young children from among the islands poorest families, and their struggle to gain the education they are guaranteed under Indonesian law. On his first day at Belitong's only free school,

Muhammadiyah Elementary, Ikal breathes a sigh of relief when the tenth child the school needs to remain operational appears at enrollment at the last minute, saving him from being sent to work as a helper at the grocery market or a coolie (labourer) for the miners or fishermen to supplement his family's meagre income. As he takes his seat in the ramshackle building which contains not much more than a chalkboard and a few desks and chairs he marvels at the opportunity he has been given, ignoring the leaking roof, "...a roof with leaks so large that students see planes flying in the sky and have to hold umbrellas while studying on rainy days", crumbling concrete floors and missing wall planks. In front of Ikal stands fifteen year old Bus Mus, the new class teacher, and school supervisor, Pak Harfan. Beside him sits nine other children, the Rainbow Troops. Though simply written, this is an inspiring tale of struggle against adversity told with warmth, humour and tenderness. The children, the Rainbow Troops, will capture your heart as Ikal shares their stories, recounting his friends achievements, triumphs and tragedies as they struggle to claim their right to an education.

Quite a discovery. A modern Indonesian autobiographical novel about growing up among poor Malays in Sumatra. 'No matter how bad their circumstances, they always consider themselves fortunate. That is the use of religion.' (Does anybody feel reminded of a famous quote from another writer?) Belitong, or Billiton, is an Indonesian island to the east of South Sumatra. It is not a poor island, due to its tin mines (the company BHP Billiton originated here), but it has its share of poor people, the laborers, fishermen, and farmers. The book was a commercial success in a country not famous for widespread reading. It is well worth our time. (By the way, the island is also Conrad territory, see *The Rescue*.) The main theme is poor kids' struggle for schooling: a small elementary school of the Muhammadiyah persuasion, or rather, the story of a class of 10 students. One less and the school would have been shut down. Why did the kids enroll in a Muhammadiyah school? 3 reasons: first, the school charged no fees; second, the parents didn't want the devil to lead their kids astray; third, no other school would have accepted them. Muhammadiyah is a reformist Islamic organization in Indonesia, not a political party, but oriented towards education and charity. Motto: do what is good and prevent what is evil. It has 30 million members and runs thousands of schools. I know nothing negative about them, though I am not normally friendly towards religious organizations. However it is not as if they gave this school much in terms of resources... Apart from an heroic teacher, a 15 y old girl when it starts, who doesn't even get paid for the work, the school is little more than a shack.

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