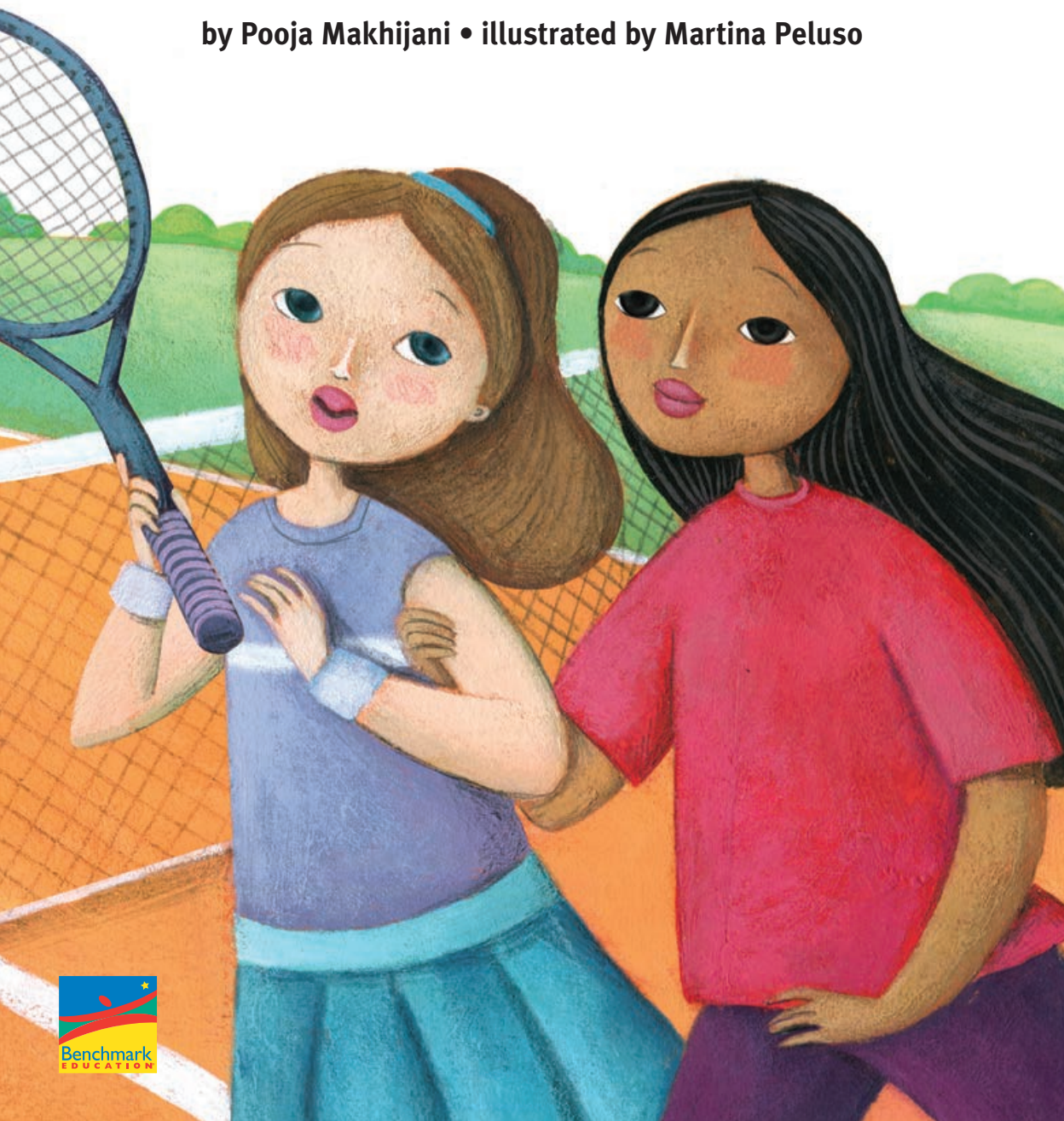


GAME, SET, MATCH!

by Pooja Makhijani • illustrated by Martina Peluso

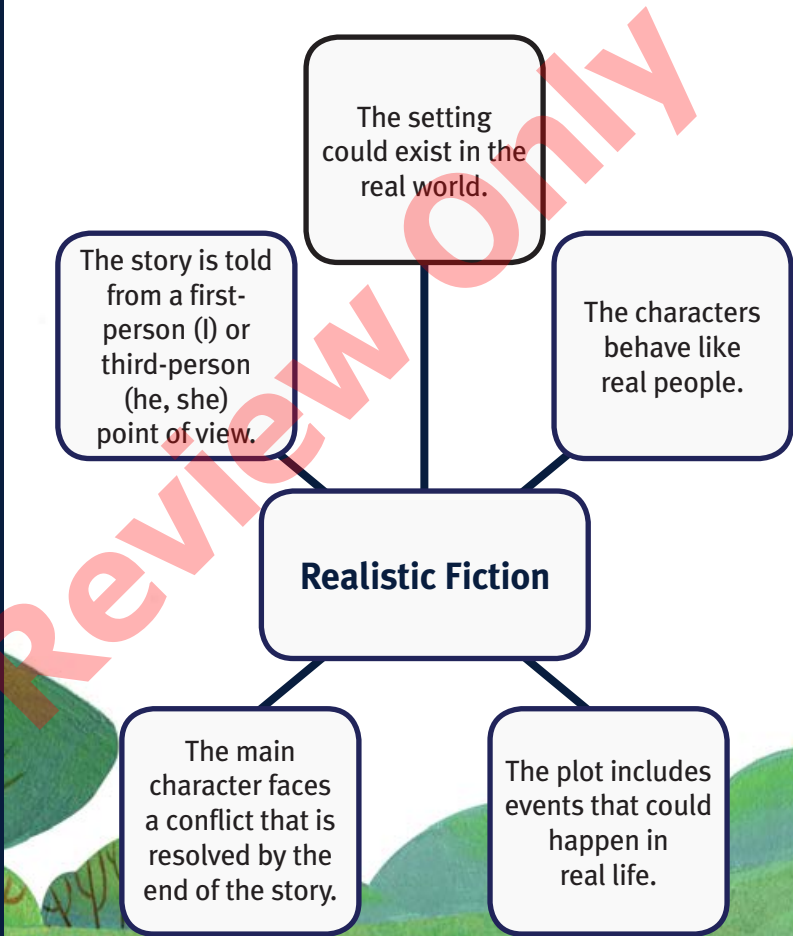


REALISTIC FICTION
LITERATURE

Level	W/60
Lexile®	670L

Realistic Fiction

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



© Benchmark Education Company, LLC. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Printed in Guangzhou, China. XXXX-XX-XXXX

LEXILE® is a trademark of MetaMetrics, Inc., and is registered in the United States and abroad.

E-books and additional digital resources available at benchmarkuniverse.com.

ISBN: 978-1-5322-8009-2

Toll-Free 1-877-236-2465
www.benchmarkeducation.com
www.benchmarkuniverse.com

BENCHMARK EDUCATION COMPANY
145 Huguenot Street • New Rochelle, NY • 10801

Love-Love

Thwack!

Sophia swung her tennis racket across her body and hit the tennis ball right in the sweet spot of the racket. She smiled as the ball zipped past her dad: a perfect forehand.



“Yes!” Sophia cheered as the ball bounced just inside the baseline.

Leela turned her head when she heard her friend’s raucous shout and smiled. *Way to go, girl*, she thought as she lowered herself from the jungle gym. The dark-haired girl dismounted with a nimble twirl, picked up her cane, and ambled over to the courts.

Leela was an expert climber and a fearless gymnast, despite her visual impairment. Things looked very far away, even when they were close up. And all she could really see were shadows. But that didn’t stop her from racing up and down the playground’s wall—faster than any of her friends.

Leela plunked herself down on the bench right outside the court. She listened to the squeak of Sophia’s sneakers on the asphalt and the springy, thudding pop of the ball being struck by the strings of the racket. *Ping!* Leela knew that sound. Her friend had just made a crisp volley at the net.

When Leela had moved to the neighborhood, back in kindergarten, she and Sophia had become fast friends. Even now, they were nearly inseparable, though they went to different schools. Leela was quiet yet determined; spunky Sophia liked how that complemented her own personality. Sophia made Leela laugh, but more important, Sophia believed Leela could do anything. And Leela cherished her for that.

Leela heard the thwack of the ball on the racket.

Another forehand down the line! “Yes!” Leela pumped her fist.

Sophia looked over at her friend and impulsively blurted out, “Want to play?”

Leela loved sports. Her school—Wilton Academy for the Visually Impaired—had a track team and a rock-climbing team, of which she was captain.

“Really?” Leela said softly, a departure from her usual can-do voice. *It’s kind of ridiculous, if you ask me*, she thought.

“I don’t know why we’ve never tried before,” Sophia said. *I know why*, Leela thought to herself. *I can’t see!*

And yet, here Leela was—standing in the middle of the court, holding Sophia’s dad’s racket. Sophia took her friend’s elbow and walked her to the short white line at the center of the baseline. “This is where each point begins,” she said. “You stand here and serve from behind this line.”

Then Sophia walked her friend to the net. Leela counted the number of steps in her head. “... thirty-seven, thirty-eight, thirty-nine,” she whispered. “Thirty-nine feet to the net, I think?” she asked.



"It is thirty-nine feet," answered Sophia's dad from the sideline. "It's twenty-one feet from the service line to the net, which is three feet high at its center."

"I never even thought about the court's measurements before," said Sophia.

"Because you don't have to!" Leela snapped, more anxious and defensive than she should have been. Leela flashed back to herself in second grade, stung by the memory of being stuck on the climbing wall, unable to see where to grab next and too embarrassed to ask for help. Then she forced a half smile to let Sophia know she wasn't mad at her and reached over to the net and gripped it. The net was wiry and taut and left an imprint on her palm when she unclenched her fist.

"Ready, Lee?" Sophia asked.

Leela took a deep breath. *I can do this*, she told herself. "I am," she yelled across the court. The racket felt heavy in Leela's hands, and the net felt far away. *I don't even know what direction it's in!* she thought.



From the other end of the court, Sophia served an underhand ball to Leela. The ball flew past Leela before she could even move.

“Sophia!” Leela shouted. “I can’t ...”

“I didn’t mean to,” Sophia said. She had hit the ball harder than she had intended. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking.”

Leela stepped closer to the service line. “Maybe move closer to the net?” Sophia suggested. Then she tossed the ball over, with a slight arc. Leela swung and missed again.

“Maybe let it bounce this time? Listen for the bounce.” Sophia tossed the ball over the net, and it bounced twice, lightly. Leela swung harder, and whiffed again.

Ridiculous! she thought, again, her face beginning to feel flushed.



Sophia held a tennis ball, poised to place it right in the line of Leela's racket. "One more time? C'mon, you can do it."

"I don't think so," Leela huffed. She tossed the racket aside, and it clattered as it hit the court.

"Hey!" Sophia picked up the racket and checked it for scratches. "What gives?"

Leela stopped in her tracks and her shoulders drooped. "Sorry. I'm ... tired from climbing." In reality, she was irritated with herself but didn't quite know why. She felt bad about throwing the racket, but instead of apologizing, she announced, "I'm out of here," then picked up her cane, walked off the tennis court, and headed home.





Mis-Match

Leela ran into her bedroom and slammed the door. “I don’t care about tennis! I don’t need tennis,” she declared. “I’m a good climber and I’m learning how to swim, and that’s fun....” she added, her voice trailing off. *And yet ...*

If she *were* to ask Mr. Vogel, her school's sports supervisor, about starting a tennis team ... he'd probably dismiss the idea.

I don't know why I even agreed to play with Sophia, Leela thought. *How many times have I heard Sophia's dad tell her to keep her "eye on the ball"? How could I, a visually impaired girl, ever play a sport like that?*

At that moment, her phone beeped. It was a text from Sophia. Leela pressed a button and the special software on her smartphone began to read her friend's text out loud:

"Sorry," Sophia texted. "I shouldn't have pushed you. I was being selfish. I didn't think how hard it might be for you."

Leela grumbled, "It's okay," and her phone translated her voice into a text that popped up on Sophia's phone.

"We can play again tomorrow?" Sophia texted back.

Leela grunted and didn't respond.

Sophia put aside her phone and turned on her computer. On a whim, she typed "blind tennis" into the search bar of the browser and clicked on the first video link—it was about a teenager named Miyoshi Takei, who had organized the first national blind tennis tournament in Japan.

Sophia watched video after video. She was enchanted by Miyoshi's smooth and powerful forehand, admiring the hop from his topspin. She texted a video link to Leela: "Check this out on your computer."

I owe her that courtesy, Leela thought as she opened the link on her computer, which also had special software. It enlarged the video, and although the images were darkly fuzzy shapes, she listened to the captions at the bottom of the clip.