

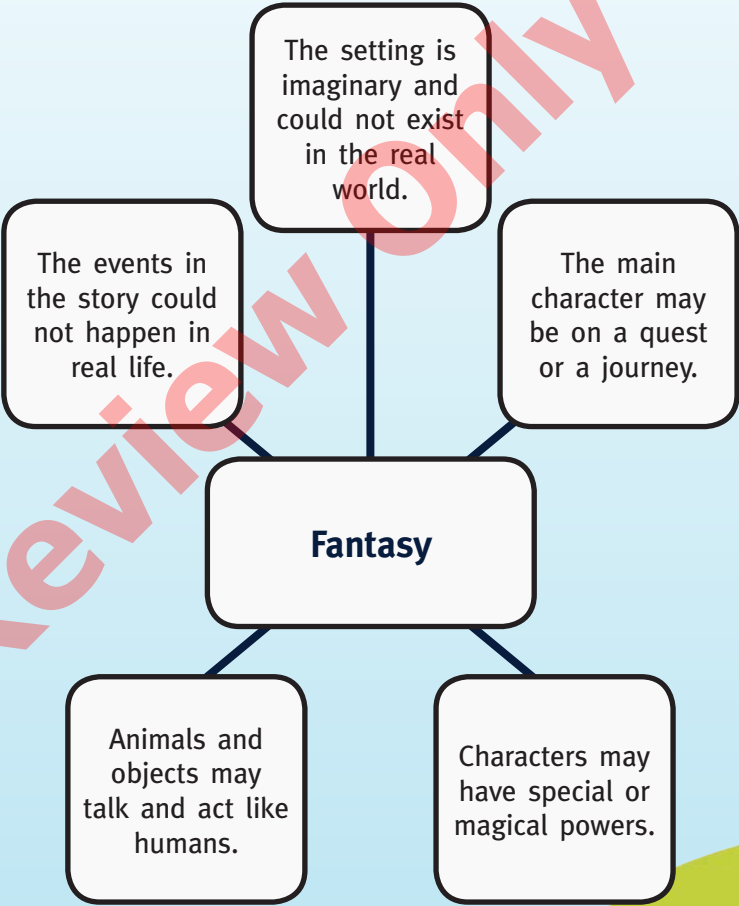
Menehune Castle



Level	W/60
Lexile®	750L

Fantasy

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



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Home

“You don’t live in a real house,” Jovie announced just loud enough for everyone in the pocket park to hear. She was so close to Kiana on the jungle gym that Kiana could see all the little colored rubber bands on Jovie’s braces.

“Our apartment is just as nice as a house,” Kiana declared, holding her anger in check.

Kiana Kahele lived with her little brother, Koa, and their dad in a small, two-bedroom apartment in Waikiki. The apartment was next to an abandoned lot, down the street from the Ala Wai Canal, a polluted waterway that dumped into the Pacific Ocean. It was nowhere near as posh as the luxury hotels lining the nearby beach, but it was home.

Kiana looked around the playground for her six-year-old brother to agree with her. Koa was hiding underneath the slide, pretending not to hear.

Jovie was one of Kiana's classmates, but not a friend. She constantly criticized Kiana: her clothes were outdated or her backpack wasn't a name brand. There never seemed to be anything good enough for Jovie.

"I live in a big house with six bedrooms and four bathrooms. It's like a mansion," she bragged. "And I have a tree house with a tire swing that goes right over a pool!"

Kiana looked at the ground. *Why is she always making me feel bad?*

"Kiana!"

Kiana turned, happy to be saved from Jovie's scrutiny.

"Kiana! Koa! Let's go," called their babysitter, Isabella, a high-school student. "It's three o'clock. It's time to meet your dad at the library."

Every day after school, Isabella, Koa, and Kiana took a bus from school to the library where Mr. Kahele worked part-time organizing the archives. He was also writing a book about the history of sugar cane in Hawaii. From the library, Kiana and her family would take another bus to their neighborhood.

"Hurry up, Kiana. You don't want to miss the bus," Isabella said.

Kiana looked up and sighed. Sure enough, Jovie had turned her nose up at the word "bus." *I'm sure her parents pick her up from school in a car, Kiana thought. A big, new one.*

“Jovie’s so mean and snobby!” said Kiana as they headed down the street.

Isabella shook her head and said, “I’ve known Jovie since she was Koa’s age, or younger. Our moms are old friends. True, Jovie can be prickly at times, even arrogant, but you should try to get along.”

“How?” Kiana asked.

“Ask a Menehune!” Isabella said with a sly smile.

“A men-eh-what?” Koa asked.

“MEH-NEH-HOO-NEH,” Kiana said. “I’m making a diorama about them for social studies.”

“Aren’t they a fast-food restaurant?” asked Koa. He began to sing and dance, waving his arms: “Menehune is the one! Menehune is so fun! Menehune tasty YUM!”

“That’s the TV commercial for the Menehune restaurant, silly. There’s Menehune coffee and lots of other businesses in Hawaii that put Menehune in their name,” Kiana said, clearly annoyed. “Because Menehune are so popular here. What they forget is that Menehune are characters in stories, like elves. They build things. They also like pranks and tricks!”



“Let me remind you,” said Isabella, “Menehune are also problem solvers. They might help you figure out how to get along with Jovie.”

The bus pulled in front of the library. Kiana and Koa ran up the stone steps and flung open the door. Their dad was sorting some books at the front desk. When he saw them, he pushed the books aside, scooped Koa into his arms for a big hug and kissed Kiana on the top of her head.

They all waved goodbye to Isabella and settled in to do homework or play games while Mr. Kahele finished work. On the ride home, Koa sat next to his father while Kiana peered out the window. It was rush hour in Honolulu, which meant cars jammed the streets of Hawaii’s capital. Kiana listened to horns honking and the wail of sirens as emergency vehicles pushed their way through the traffic.

“Ala Moana Center,” the bus driver finally announced, and the Kaheles got off. Ala Moana Center was a large outdoor mall. Kiana could hear the sound of crisp, brown paper shopping bags bumping together as shoppers scurried along with their packages. Even though Kiana saw the hustle-bustle outside the mall every day, they rarely ventured inside. Instead, they transferred to another bus.

Soon they were back in their own neighborhood of high-rises and hotels, a landscape of concrete that lined Waikiki Beach. They trudged up the long driveway, through the security gate, and climbed four flights. When they finally got into their apartment, sweat dampened their shirts and faces.

It had been a long day, but it was good to finally be home—even if the air conditioning was on the fritz again.

Menehune Dreaming

The next morning, Kiana ate her oatmeal in front of her apartment's long front window. It was becoming a Saturday morning tradition to look out over the jungle of concrete and glass hotels. It made her feel like an ant, or a bee in a hive.

Across the street from the apartment was an abandoned lot, too small for another high-rise and barren except for the overgrown grass, construction rubble, and an enormous monkeypod tree. A chain-link fence surrounded the property. A heavily padlocked gate further kept trespassers at bay.



“Think Menehune could build us a house over there?” Kiana asked her dad as he sat down at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee and stack of bills. “That could be our mansion.”

“A mansion?” he scoffed, sounding more riled and defensive than Kiana could ever recall.

“Well, I’d like my own room,” Kiana said carefully. She didn’t want to hurt his feelings. “Koa snores sometimes.”

“I would like for you to have your own room, too,” he said, taking a sip. “But we’re here, for now. And it’s an improvement from before, right?”

Kiana followed her dad’s gaze to their living room. They had a secondhand sofa, a scratched coffee table, an overstuffed chair Kiana liked to nuzzle into for reading, and a TV. But no cable. Or bookshelves. Stacks of books leaned precariously against the walls.

“I liked it when we lived in the tent,” Koa said.

“You were so little then, I don’t think you can remember much,” Dad reminded him. “But now we’re in a real building, with real walls.”

Kiana thought about the report she gave last year about Honolulu. In the shadows of the glittering towers of Hawaii’s biggest and richest city was a large population of homeless people. It was just too expensive to live in “paradise.” They had never been homeless, but they had never lived in a house like Jovie’s, either.

After breakfast they all strolled into the sunshine of early morning Waikiki, doing errands. Tourists in brightly colored clothing browsed the souvenir shops, fingering garlands of nuts and plastic flowers, and spinning metal carousels filled with racks of postcards. The smell of coconut suntan lotion wafted through the air. An awning rose to reveal deli owners unpacking milk crates. Next to the bus stop, a woman called out from behind a wooden podium under a big rainbow umbrella: “North Shore snorkeling! Helicopter rides!” In the distance was the towering massiveness of the Diamond Head volcano.

On the way home, Koa rode piggyback on Dad while Kiana walked ahead, her eyes sweeping over the scenery, trying to take it all in. Then, something caught her eye.

“Dad, look!” she called.

On top of the empty lot’s chain-link fence teetered a giggling little man with a long, firm nose, dark eyes, and a welcoming smile. He looked just like the Menehunes that Kiana saw in the books she used while researching her diorama.



The Menehune pulled out a white flower and tucked it behind his ear.

“Look! A Menehune!” Kiana said, pointing at the fence.

“Where?” Koa said. “Where?”

“I see,” said Dad, with quiet alarm.

“You do?” Kiana asked. “Awesome, right?”

“Actually, I see *two* Menehune,” Dad replied, now chuckling. “They’re quite short. They like oatmeal on Saturday morning. They sometimes listen to their father, but mostly ignore him.”

“Dad! We’re not Menehune!” Koa protested.

Kiana looked back at the fence. No white flower. No Menehune.

“Dad, I saw a real one,” Kiana insisted. “At least, I thought I did.”

Back home for lunch, Koa helped Dad make *loco moco*—a hamburger topped with gravy and fried eggs—while Kiana worked on her diorama. She carefully cut construction paper and neatly glued twigs and pebbles into streams and paths. When Kiana started modeling the Menehune out of clay, she decided to sculpt them with long, firm noses, dark eyes, and toothy grins, like the little figure she saw earlier. *Or thought I saw.*

“Looks cool, Kiana,” Koa said, pointing to parts of his sister’s diorama.

“Watch where you’re putting your gravy-sticky fingers!” said Kiana. “But thank you. Now, if tomorrow morning you see a rock that moved, or a new path—Menehune made it.”