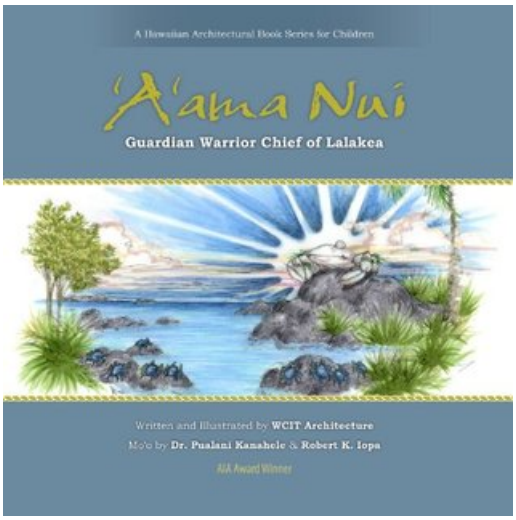

`A`ama Nui Guardian Warrior Chief of Lalakea
Written and Illustrated by WCIT Architecture
Mo`o Studio, 55 pp.
ISBN: 978-0986058806

This unique children's picture book, crafted by a team of architects and a cultural expert, is an innovative means of presenting disciplinary and cultural knowledge. Through the creation of an original children's legend, the history and culture of Hawai`i is skillfully interwoven with the technical and aesthetic aspects of architecture, providing readers with an entertaining and multifaceted view of the design process.

The book breaks the typical reader's schemata for reading a story from start to finish. There are four major sections within the book that support the focal story, *`A`ama Nui: Guardian Warrior Chief of Lalakea*. Each section is prefaced with an introduction by a well-known and respected cultural expert, Pualani Kanahele, or the architect, Robert Iopa, who provides the reader with subtle hints and elucidates the significance of the section.

The book opens with the mo`oku`auhau, lineage of generations of knowledge. Like an opening cultural protocol for a special event, a mele pana (legendary song) is introduced. Kanahele explains this particular mele pana, "initiated the breath," for the story and the song establishes the relevance of the particular site and the setting for the story.

The next section, mo`olelo, or lineage of generations of tales, is the central children's story, *`A`ama Nui Guardian Warrior Chief of Lalakea*. Written by architect, Robert Iopa, the story is told in legend form and embodies the deep historical and cultural significance of the place. Integrated below the written text of the story is a picture of some of the design features from an architectural sketchbook revealing a connection between architectural design features and an element in the story. Attractive illustrations using anime-like characters fill the pages with action. These contemporary and culturally authentic illustrations are both humorous and inviting for young readers.

The legend itself begins with a description of the place and quickly establishes the conflict between a rowdy group of pigs, Na Pua`a Kolohe, and warrior guardians of Lalakea, a group of crabs, Na Koa `A`ama. The crabs are no match for the pigs, but they are comforted by the promise of hope that a giant warrior crab chief, `A`ama Nui, will protect them. `A`ama Nui is born and two turtle helpers, Makana and Makali`i, keep his identity hidden until he is ready for battle. `A`ama Nui is tricked by the pigs and captured. His eyes are stripped from him, leaving his turtle helpers to rescue him by returning one of his eyes. `A`ama Nui then defeats the group of pigs and keeps watch over the ponds at Lalakea. Hence readers learn, `A`ama Nui, the giant crab, is the model for the design of the house at Lalakea.

Many legends are based on heroic individuals and such is in the case of the warrior chief `A`ama Nui. The tale weaves in cultural and experiential knowledge of the place, Lalakea.

For example it is common knowledge that the water at Lalakea is a blending of the icy cold freshwater from mountain fed springs and the warmer saltwater from the nearby ocean. The author plays upon that knowledge within the story and deems that the special water has "mystical powers to soothe and relax . . . but excess time could have an adverse effect." Words from the Hawaiian language are integrated throughout the story making a non-Hawaiian language reader work to translate meaning. Inclusion of language goes beyond superficial use of Hawaiian character names and includes language that describes concepts and phrases that might be humorous to insiders. Using his own experiences as a native Hawaiian who grew up in the town where the story is set, Iopa and team are able to weave their depth of knowledge of culture and architecture to the writing and illustrations, making this legend a culturally authentic story.

The third section is mo`oka`i, lineage of generations of journeys. Iopa and his team show readers how the story writing process for the `A`ama Nui legend guided the design process. At the top of each page on the left is a quote from the story and below that a color drawing of the house plan along with the cartoonish characters that are superimposed on a photograph of the site, giving a reader an image of the proposed house. Below the picture is a brief explanation of the story and design connection. On the adjacent right page is a real architectural drawing, connected to the quote and the photograph and includes a definition and explanation of the architectural term depicted. It shows how architects can integrate and use the cultural knowledge of the land and people of the place to inspire and inform.

In the final section, mo`owaiwai, the lineage of generations of valued practices, Kanahele encourages readers to reread and return to the images. She challenges readers to uncover the many layers of cultural and technical practices to discuss and provides a few examples. The section includes a "glossary" of sorts; however, it isn't presented in traditional western alphabetical order but rather in non-linear form. The Hawaiian words are paired with an illustration from the story and are presented around the illustration with the Hawaiian word and English translation below it. This makes it tricky for the reader, having to scan the written text around the pictures to find the translation and return to the text of the story again.

This book isn't intended to be read in one sitting from cover to cover. Readers must return to the text again and again to build meaning. The reader can do an aesthetic reading of the legend purely by itself or read the architectural sketchbook along and the design process section to better understand what it means to be an architect. The book thus might be paired with other informational texts about architecture such as, Under Every Roof – A Kid's Style and Field Guide to the Architecture of American Houses (Brown Glenn, 2009) or David Macaulay's Built to Last (2010) and Building Big (2000) to support and extend children's understandings of architecture. It can also be paired with other Hawaiian stories such as David Kawika Eyre's Kamehameha series beginning with White Rainbow, Black Curse (Eyre, 2007) or the Legend of the Gourd (Loebel-Fried, 2010) to explore Hawaiian cultural practices and draw intertextual connections between them.

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