

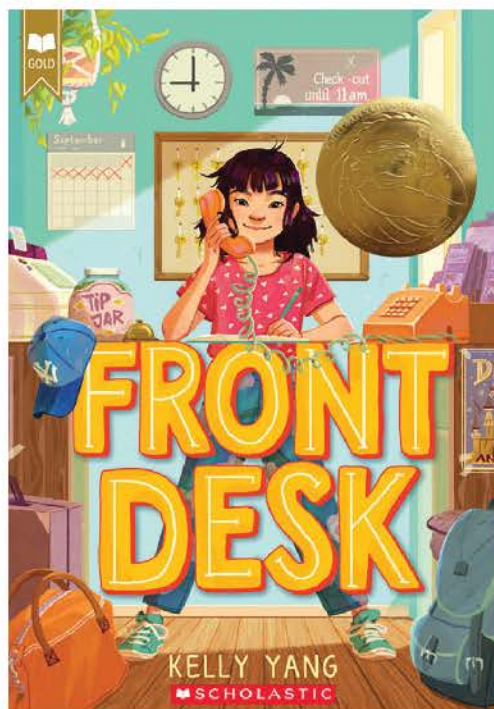
Reading ^{with} Relevance[®]

Building INDEPENDENT READERS and THINKERS

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

Front Desk

A novel by Kelly Yang



Recommended for:
Grade Levels
4-6

A tool to inspire change

This literacy curriculum is constructed around an authentically engaging novel that builds students' literacy skills and supports their social and emotional development. Students are motivated to read because they relate to the strong, diverse, and resilient characters featured in our selected novels and because each session gives them the opportunity to connect what they've read to their own lives.

Developed, field-tested, and refined in our own tutoring and mentoring programs, this standards-aligned curriculum has inspired persistently low-performing students to engage with literature, make meaning in their lives, and improve their English language arts skills. Now, *Reading with Relevance* is available to help you dig deep into the social, emotional, and academic needs of your students, whether in your classroom, after-school program, or youth development agency!

This teacher's guide includes:

- A facilitator's guide with tips and resources for implementing the curriculum
- A map of Common Core Standards addressed through this program
- 14 individual lesson plans, including vocabulary, discussion questions, journal prompts, extension activities, and all handouts
- Two assessments to monitor student progress throughout the program
- Regular checkpoints to help teachers assess their students' progress on ELA standards
- A culminating essay-writing unit
- An appendix with additional teaching resources and activities to continue exploring this novel

Why Front Desk?



Meet Mia Tang, a strong, resilient ten-year-old girl who uses her intelligence, determination, and heart to manage the challenges that come her way as a young immigrant working the front desk at her parents' motel. We chose this book for its powerful exploration of important social and emotional themes: injustice, racism, poverty, belonging, activism, family, and love. Students will find themselves relating to and being inspired by the story's characters; this guide will help students make connections between Mia's quest for social justice and the causes that inspire action in their own lives.

Session 1

pages 1-23

Vocabulary

rummaging (pg. 1): v., searching unsystemically and untidily

devoured (pg. 1): v., swallowed or eaten up hungrily

bickering (pg. 4): v., arguing or squabbling about petty or small things

savoring (pg. 8): v., tasting and enjoying something completely

hierarchy (pg. 21): n., a system in which people or things are ranked according to status or authority

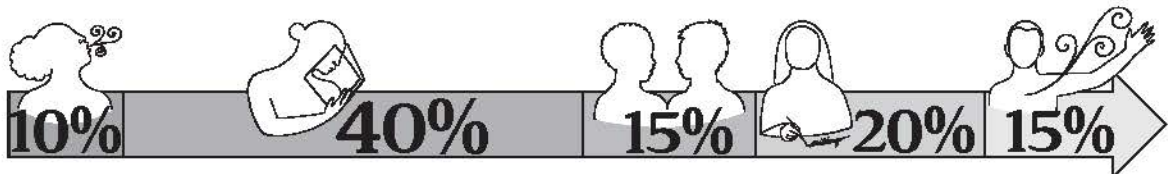
strategy (pg. 22): n., a plan or series of steps to help achieve a particular goal

Today's Theme

The theme of this opening session is **expectations**. In the first chapter of the book, we meet Mia, and learn that her family moved to the United States from China with hopes of gaining more freedom. However, since they've been in the US things haven't turned out quite as they'd imagined or expected. Your students have likely had their own experiences when reality didn't line up with their expectations. Ask: How do you respond when your expectations are different than the reality you encounter? What are some coping strategies that help you navigate these differences?

Story Setup

Front Desk is a story about Mia, a spunky ten-year-old-girl whose family immigrated to the United States from China because it is "freer." Mia's parents were professionals in China, but in the United States they barely have enough money to live. Despite how poorly they are treated by their employers, they work very hard to have enough for clothes, food, and shelter. Throughout the novel, Mia and her family work to make a positive difference in their community by doing what they can to protect and support their neighbors, including those who live at the Calivista Motel and fellow immigrants trying to make ends meet. Front Desk was written by Kelly Yang, and is based loosely on her life growing up as the child of immigrants.



During Reading

photobomb (pg. 2): to ruin a photo by appearing in the frame of a picture unexpectedly, often to be funny or dramatic

boarding (pg. 5): receiving regular meals and somewhere to live in return for payment; in this case, it means being able to live rent-free in the motel

quarters (pg. 9): the area/room(s) where someone lives; housing or accommodations

employment contract (pg. 12): a legally enforceable agreement which details the rights, expectations, and obligations of both a company and an individual who works for the company

Discussion Questions

- Mia's mom says that people in the United States are freer. What do you think freer means to her?
- Why do you think Mr. Yao keeps calling Mia "the girl"? What does this tell you about his character?
- Make a prediction: What do you think Mr. Yao will be like as a boss?
- How do you think Mia feels after Hank introduces her to the other weeklies?
- On the night they move into the Calivista Motel, why do you think Mia's parents "poured generously" from the special tin of jasmine tea they use on special occasions?
- What do you think Mia means when she describes the principal at her new school as a "powerful white lady"?
- What does the way the principal treats Mia foreshadow about what Mia might experience at her new school?
- Mia is excited to work at the front desk, and uses what she knows about mammal behavior to gain respect from the customers. What are some ways you gain respect from others when you need it?
- How do you think Mia and her family's lives will change now that they manage the Calivista?

EXPECTATIONS

- The book opens with Mia telling us about the things she and her parents imagined about living in the US before they moved. But their experiences have not exactly lined up with their expectations. So far, they have only done one thing they imagined—"the hamburger part."

Do you think Mia's expectations about life in the US are realistic? Why or why not?

- » What are some of the family's expectations that haven't been met?
- » What surprised you about Mia's list of American expectations and experiences?
- » Can you relate to Mia? Write about a time when your own expectations about a new situation were really different than the reality you encountered.

"BAD GUYS"

- In today's reading, Mr. Yao urges Mia not to let any "bad guys" into the Calivista Motel, saying that you can tell if someone is bad based on *writing* how they look.

What is Mr. Yao implying about who is a "bad guy"? What do you think a "bad guy" looks like to him?

- » What do you think about this? Do you think Mr. Yao is right? Why or why not?
- » How would you have responded to Mr. Yao if you were in Mia's position?
- » Has anyone ever made an unfair assumption about you? How did this experience impact you?

Checkpoint

- Students should demonstrate a command of the standard written conventions of English.
 - » Use capital letters appropriately: to start sentences, when referencing the book title, and when using proper nouns (like the names of characters or places). Remember to end every sentence with a period as well.
 - » For example, "*I* can always ask my mom or *Mrs. Anderson* for help."

Extension Activity

In the opening chapters of *Front Desk*, we learn that in China, photographers use the phrase "say eggplant" instead of "say cheese" when taking a photograph. Mia's mom says she thinks it's important to "take pictures of the nice moments of life, even if it's just in your head" (pg. 14). Today's activity asks students to "take a picture" by drawing and writing about a special memory or moment from their own lives.

Handout:

- » Say Eggplant!

Name: _____

Say Eggplant!



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Say Eggplant!

Appendix

Additional Activities

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Our Story

We are a collective of progressive educators on a mission: sharing and scaling the program we've built for (and with!) our students over the last decade, to inspire relevant reading experiences, heartfelt conversations, and instructional breakthroughs in classrooms across the nation. We wrote *Reading with Relevance* because we couldn't find the tool we needed to effectively teach our students. Most of the young people in our classrooms not only came to us two to four years below their grade level, but also with very real social and emotional struggles that sometimes felt more important than school. We came to believe that meeting students' social and emotional needs was the key to unlocking their academic potential.

Reading with Relevance leverages student interest in highly engaging social and emotional learning activities to develop crucial academic skills: reading fluency, comprehension, and critical thinking. We turn barriers to learning into the very tools that accelerate literacy.

Training and Professional Development Services

While lesson plans are designed to be easily facilitated by classroom teachers and after-school staff alike, our training and professional development services will ensure fully effective implementation of the literacy curricula. Additionally, we offer technical support, classroom observation, and program evaluation services to help your program be successful. Contact us for more information about these services.

Contact Us

Contact us today to learn more about how the Moving Forward Institute can support your students and staff!

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If your students liked *Front Desk* . . .

they might love some of our other book selections! We suggest that you check out *Ghost Boys*; *Inside Out and Back Again*; and *Esperanza Rising*. Please visit our website today to browse our full selection of socially and emotionally rich novel-based curricula.