

# Front Desk



By  
Kelly Yang

A Novel Study  
by Nat Reed

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**About the Author:** Nat Reed, a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years, served as a full-time instructor at Trent University's Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, please visit [reednovelstudies.com](http://reednovelstudies.com).

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## Suggestions and Expectations

Each chapter of the novel study focuses on several chapters of *Front Desk* and is comprised of four distinct sections:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (page 7) as well as a **Checklist** (page 6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

**Every activity need not be completed by all students.**

### Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to:

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases... including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story... **and many others.**

**Themes** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include friendship, compassion and community, hope and perseverance, racism and prejudice, poverty and economic struggle, the power of writing.

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## List of Skills

### Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Identify *similes*
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *anagrams*
7. Listing compound words
8. Identifying parts of speech
9. Identify *personification*

### Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

### Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Five W's and an H Chart
3. Create a synopsis
4. Identify the climax of the novel

### Character Activities

1. Compare characters
2. Identify the protagonist
3. Relating personal experience

### Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Create a poem
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Write a description of personal feelings
6. Write a book review
7. Create a journal entry
8. Opinion writing

### Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a movie poster
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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### Synopsis

Mia Tang has a lot of secrets.

- #1: She lives in a motel, not a big house. Every day, while her immigrant parents clean the rooms, ten-year-old Mia manages the front desk of the Calivista Motel and tends to its guests.
- #2: Her parents hide immigrants. And if the mean motel owner, Mr. Yao, finds out they've been letting them stay in the empty rooms for free, the Tangs will be doomed.
- #3: She wants to be a writer. But how can she when her mom thinks she should stick to math because English is not her first language?

It will take all of Mia's courage, kindness, and hard work to get through this year. Will she be able to hold on to her job, help the immigrants and guests escape Mr. Yao, and go for her dreams? (Courtesy of the Publisher)

### Author Biography Kelly Yang

Kelly Yang was born in Hong Kong and emigrated to the United States with her family when she was young. She skipped several grades and attended University at the age of 13 and graduated with a bachelor's degree. She then went on to graduate from law school but decided not to practice law. Yang's first book, *Front Desk*, published in 2018, is for children and is based on her experience helping her parents manage motels while growing up. It was followed by five (soon to be six) sequels, *Three Keys* in 2020, *Room to Dream* in 2021, *Key Player* in 2022, and *Top Story* in 2023.



Yang has three children and now spends her time between California and Hong Kong

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## Student Checklist

Student Name

# Front Desk



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Name:

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### Chapters 1-6



#### Before you read this section:

It is important for an author to create an interesting **protagonist** (main character) for any work of fiction. *Front Desk* features ten-year-old Mia, who moved with her family to America from China a few years earlier. Why do you think such a character might be especially appealing to readers?




#### Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

module	photobomb	pulsated	humongous
refund	vending	reassured	receptionist

1. "Yes sir!" I said. Excitement \_\_\_\_\_ in my ear.
2. It was a \_\_\_\_\_ amount of money.
3. One of the duties of a \_\_\_\_\_ is to greet people entering the office.
4. Later on, they decided to give Mr. Stein a \_\_\_\_\_ for Mia's error.
5. If I could do it all over again, I would not \_\_\_\_\_ my mom's picture.
6. I hopped off the stool, opened up the \_\_\_\_\_ machine and helped myself to a soda.
7. You need to install this software \_\_\_\_\_ before running the program.
8. "We want the job," he quickly \_\_\_\_\_ Mr. Yao.

## Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story for much of the first six chapters?


2. What were three very difficult things about Mia's move to America?

1	
2	
3	

3. **Foreshadowing** is defined as a literary device *in which the author gives you a hint of events to come*. What sentence in the concluding paragraphs of Chapter One might be an example of foreshadowing?


4. Describe one event in this section that shook Mia's confidence and one event which helped build her confidence?


5. The names of the five weeklies were \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_.

6. Which character warned Mia's family about Mr. Yao? What did he/she say?


7. Would you like to have Mrs. Fletcher as a teacher? Why or why not?

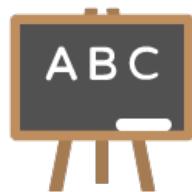

8. A **cliffhanger** happens when the author leaves the reader in suspense at the end of a chapter. Read again the last paragraphs in each of these six chapter and pick out the best cliffhanger. Explain why you made this choice.


## Language Activities



### A. Alliteration

Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Alliteration is usually seen as a series of words beginning with the same consonant (i.e. *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers*). The following from this section also serves as an example: ... *As the rich chocolatey smell swirled up my nose.*



Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

Disneyland.	
A pond filled with frogs.	
Your choice.	

## B. The Good Old Indispensable Adverb!

An **adverb** is a part of speech defined as *a modifier (or helper) of a verb* (usually an action word). Often an adverb will end in the letters *ly* (i.e. *slowly*). Our novel features a good many creative adverbs.



1. *My parents smiled nervously while I tried to stay as still as I could...*  
→ In this sentence, which verb does **nervously** modify? \_\_\_\_\_
2. *I immediately decided I liked our little motel the best.*  
→ In this sentence, what verb does **immediately** modify? \_\_\_\_\_
3. *I saved them for Shen for months in the fridge until it finally sank in that we weren't going back.*  
→ In this sentence the adverb \_\_\_\_\_ modifies the verb \_\_\_\_\_

**C.** A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. We find an example of a simile in this section: *... and the chocolate notebook became as reachable as the moon.* What is being compared in this example?

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) a run-down motel

b) your choice

## D. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



- a) read the clue in the right-hand column.
- b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in this section of *Front Desk*.

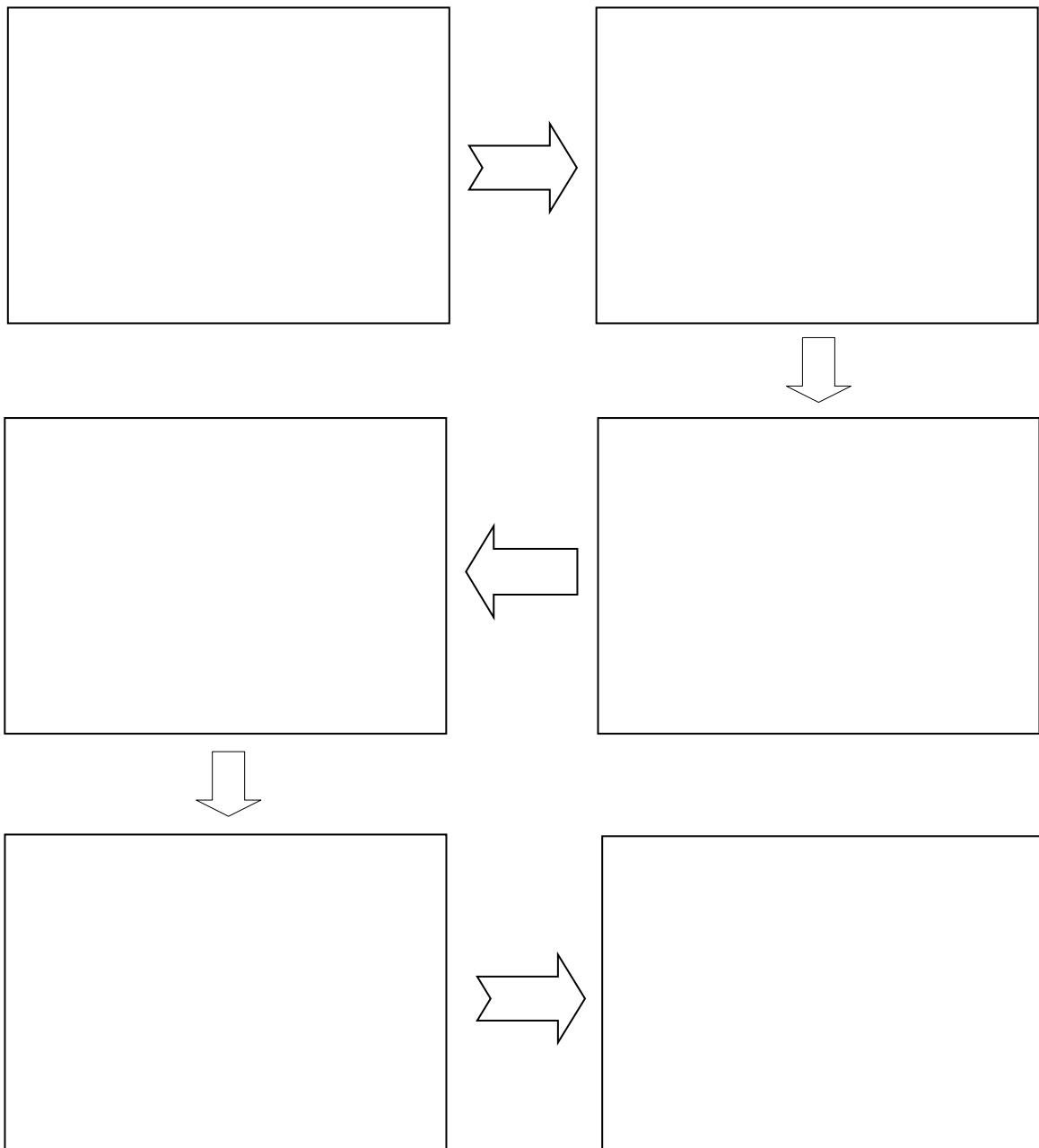
Word	Anagram	Clue
tried		Exhausted.
screw		Workers on a ship.
smile		Fruits.
cared		Sped.
parent		Snared.
shook		Hangers.
towels		Very short.

**E.** A number of fascinating characters have already appeared in the novel. For each of the four characters below think of three adjectives which would accurately describe him/her. Consider both appearance and personality.

Character	1	2	3
Mia			
Mr. Yao			
Mia's mom			
Mia's Dad			

## F. Sequence Chart

Choose what you consider to be the six most important events in this section. In each of the six boxes below list the six events that you have chosen, describing what happened and telling why you consider this to be an essential part of the story.



## Extension Activity



### A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words

Use the three boxes to describe and illustrate the beginning, middle and end of this section.



Beginning Picture:	Beginning:
Middle Picture	Middle:
Concluding Picture:	Concluding: