



# Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

**About the Book of the Month:** This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

## Front Desk

Kelly Yang (Author)

Mia Yang has a lot of secrets. Number 1: She lives in a motel, not a big house. Every day, while her parents, who are immigrants, clean the rooms, ten-year-old Mia manages the front desk of the Calivista Motel and tends to its guests. Number 2: Her parents hide people who are immigrants. And if the mean motel owner, Mr. Yao, finds out they've been letting them stay in the empty rooms for free, the Yangs will be doomed. Number 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?

ISBN: 978-1338157796

Publisher: Arthur A. Levine Books

Year Published: 2018

Age Range: 8–12



## Book Themes

Asian-American people and culture, Family, Immigration and Anti-immigrant bias, Bullying, Racism, Collective power, Acting as an ally

## Key Words

Discuss and define these words with students prior to reading the book and remind them of the meanings as they come up in the book. See also ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

- |                  |               |                     |                     |
|------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| ■ accent         | ■ disheveled  | ■ insanity          | ■ reminisce         |
| ■ afford         | ■ empathy     | ■ interrogate       | ■ rigged            |
| ■ agonize        | ■ fake        | ■ luxurious         | ■ stereotypes       |
| ■ anxious        | ■ furiously   | ■ medical insurance | ■ supply-and-demand |
| ■ awkwardly      | ■ generous    | ■ native            | ■ sympathetic       |
| ■ citizens       | ■ hierarchy   | ■ offensive         | ■ temporary         |
| ■ deposit        | ■ hospitality | ■ pride             | ■ typhoon           |
| ■ desperate      | ■ humiliation | ■ protest           | ■ urgency           |
| ■ determination  | ■ immigrants  | ■ racist            |                     |
| ■ discriminatory | ■ infuriated  | ■ reasonable        |                     |

## Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in small groups or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. Some of these questions can also be used as writing prompts. When students have finished the book, choose from these questions to guide a group discussion:

- What is the book about?
- When you initially meet the main character, Mia, what do you think about her? How did she change and grow throughout the book?
- Before she came to the U.S., what did Mia think it was going to be like? How did her thinking change over time?
- How did Mr. Yao decide someone is a “bad guy?” What do you think about this?
- How does Mr. Yao treat the weeklies, the other customers, Mia and her family? How did you feel while reading about how he treats them?
- How does Mia feel about her responsibilities at the motel?
- How do you think Mia feels about being the “new girl” at school so many times? Have you ever been in that situation? If so, what was it like for you?
- When Mia’s teacher asks all the students to introduce themselves by sharing something “weird,” why does Mia decide not to talk about living and working in a motel?
- What is Mia and Jason’s relationship like? How did it change over time?
- Why do Mia and her family help to hide their family friends (e.g., Aunt Ling, Uncle Li, Uncle Ming), who were immigrants from China like them? Are any of their stories particularly interesting to you and if so, why?
- How do Mia and Lupe become friends? What happens when they tell each other the truth about themselves? Has something like that ever happened to you?
- What do Mia and Lupe have in common? In what ways are they different?

- How does Lupe describe the “two roller coasters in America”—one for rich people and one for poor people? What does the roller coaster symbolize? What is an example of how the rich and how the poor rollercoasters work?
- When Mia’s Mom says, “We’re immigrants. Our lives are never fair,” what does she mean by that?
- What are some examples in the book that show how life is unfair (and unjust) for people who are immigrants?
- When Mia tells her mother that she likes writing more than she likes math, what is her mother’s response? What does her mother mean when she says: “You just can’t be as good as the white kids in their language. It’s *their* language.” How does Mia prove her mother wrong?
- What happens with Mr. Lorenz’s car gets taken in the middle of the night? Who does Mr. Yao blame? How do Mr. Yao and the police officers treat Hank and what does this have to do with racism?
- When the police discover that Mr. Lorenz tried to sell his own “stolen” car, what happens with Hank? What does Hank mean when he says to the police, “Don’t be sorry. Be better. Next time you accuse a black man, stop and think.”
- In what ways do some of the students in Mia’s class, including Jason, tease and bully her about wearing the same pants all the time? What form of prejudice is this?
- When Mia’s teacher announces a math challenge, why do the students on Mia’s team cheer and say “Yes, we got the Chinese girl.” Why is that happening?
- Why does Mia’s mother refer to her as a bicycle and how does Mia feel about it?
- Why does Mia decide to write “Mia’s Book of American Phrases and pamphlet of American “phrases, gestures and idioms?”
- What happens when some people try to break into the motel and attack Mia’s Mom? Because her family doesn’t have health insurance, what happens at the hospital? What is your reaction to this situation?
- What are some ways that Mia tries to help people and stand up to injustice through the letters that she writes?
- Why does Mia decide to enter the essay competition to win a motel? What happens when she doesn’t win?
- Why does Mia organize others to buy the motel as a group? What does that show about how there is “power in numbers?” Have you ever been able to achieve something as a group that you weren’t able to do as an individual?
- What did you learn about Chinese and Chinese-American culture?
- What are some examples in the book about how certain groups of people are harmed by stereotypes?
- At the end of the book, what is the symbolism of Hank, Mia and the others jumping into the pool?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think will happen next?

## Extension Activities

Below are activities in which you can engage students in order to extend the learning from the book.

### 1. Reader’s Response Writing Activities

**Diary Entry of a Character:** Have students select one of the main characters (Mia, Lupe, Hank, Mrs. Yang, Mr. Yang, Mr. Yao, Jason) or a secondary character from the book. Then have students write

journal entries for their chosen character, writing 8–10 entries that the character might have written throughout the events in the book. (As an alternative, have students write 3–4 diary entries instead but with each, include drawings to go along with the entries that capture the characters' mood, thoughts and/or feelings). Remind students that for the journal entries, the character's thoughts, feelings and reflections are very important as well as their reaction to the day-to-day events including what happens to other characters as well as themselves. You may choose to have students engage in pre-writing discussions with a partner about their character in order to get some of their ideas fleshed out. After they have completed the assignment, have them share their journal entries with the class and consider creating an online collection of all the journal entries.

**Learn about the Author:** Have students read the back pages about Kelly Yang and her family's immigration story. Explain that students will be conducting more research about Kelly Yang that includes a writing project at the end. First, as a class, discuss possible things they want to know about her such as: where she grew up, her inspiration/motivation for writing the book, her cultural background and its relevance to the book, other books she has written, interests and hobbies, family life, relevant quotes, etc. Their research can include: (1) looking at her website (<https://kellyyang.edu.hk/about-kelly-yang/>), (2) checking her social media posts (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) and (3) conducting other online research. The final project could include one of the following ideas: an extended "author bio" that would be on the back of her book, a letter to the author (use her website's [contact page](#)) or a simulated interview between the author and a journalist.

**Write Your Own Collective Power Story:** Talk about the end of the book when Mia, along with family members, friends, customers, the "weeklies," neighboring store owners, people who they let stay with them and others pulled together and collected all the money needed to purchase the motel. Elicit from students that none of them individually would have been able to buy it on their own but together, they were able to raise enough money to purchase it. Ask students: *Has anything like that ever happened to you, in small or large ways? Have you ever been able to do something as a group that you weren't able to do by yourself? Have you ever heard about something like that happening either in history or in the news?* Have students explore that concept of collective power with each other and then write an essay that explains what happened.

## 2. Identity-Based Bullying

Talk with students about the role of bullying and how it is addressed in the book; Mia was teased and bullied by several classmates based on aspects of her identity (being Asian, being an immigrant, being poor).

Elicit a definition of **bullying** as follows: When a person or a group behaves in ways—on purpose and over and over—that make someone feel hurt, afraid or embarrassed.

(Note: This definition is for elementary students. For older students, use the definition in our [Glossary](#).)

Explain that bullying is not mean behavior that happens once; it is behavior that takes place over and over and that is meant to make the target feel badly. Ask students: *What is identity?* Elicit/explain a definition of **identity** as the qualities, beliefs and characteristics that make a particular person or group different from others. (You can provide an example using yourself such as "My identity includes being a woman, Muslim and an immigrant.") Explain that **identity-based bullying** is bullying that is related to the targeted person's identity such as race, gender, religion, disability, etc.

Elicit from students the different times and ways that Mia was teased and bullied in the book. Ask students: *Was it identity-based bullying and if so, how?* Explain that Mia was bullied based on her

race, economic status and being an immigrant. Have students talk in pairs or small groups about a time that they witnessed, heard about or personally experienced bullying based on an aspect of identity. They should share (1) what happened, (2) how they felt and (3) what they or someone else did or what they wish they or someone else did about it. When they are finished talking, ask a few students to share their reflections with the class.

### 3. Learn More about Immigrants and Immigration

**[Note:** Before discussing this topic, it is important to consider that you may have students in your class whose family members or they themselves are immigrants and/or undocumented immigrants. Be prepared and sensitive to those students and be mindful as to how you discuss this in your classroom. Students who may not have shared this previously may disclose it during the lesson and that information should only come from the student themselves.]

Engage students in a discussion about immigration. First, read the "Author's Note" in the back of the book (starting on page 287) about Kelly Yang's immigration story as well as some history about immigration from China over the years. Then, ask students: *What does it mean to be an immigrant? What is immigration?* Define **immigration** as the process of coming into a non-native or foreign country to live. You can share with students that 40 million people who live in the U.S. were born in another country and that the U.S. has more immigrants than any other country in the world. Read additional stories about immigration aloud (as suggested below) and find out what students know and don't know about immigration. You can also provide information about undocumented immigrants, sharing that people who are "undocumented" are foreign-born people who come to the U.S. without the legal papers to do so and who often have fled their home countries because of extreme poverty, danger or wanting to be with their families in the U.S. Some enter the country legally as tourists, students or temporary workers and become undocumented when their papers expire. Many have lived in the U.S. for a long time, have families here and feel like citizens. Explain that about 11 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States, which has been a stable number for the past five years.

After this discussion, you can have older students do a research project, investigating one country in particular with large groups of immigrants who have come to the U.S. (e.g., China, Mexico, India, Philippines, El Salvador, etc.). Their research, culminating in a project (PowerPoint presentation, timeline with photos/drawings, or a picture book that can be read to younger children) should explore background information about the country, why people are immigrating to the U.S., what they left behind and what life is like for them here. In order to foster empathy, you can encourage them to also find stories they find in the news that profile people with an explanation of their situations.

## ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and educational resources on immigration, identity, bullying and acting as an ally.

### Curriculum Resources

Huddled Mass or Second Class?: Challenging Anti-Immigrant Bias in the U.S., [www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/toys-and-gender.pdf](http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/toys-and-gender.pdf)

What Should be Done about DACA?, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/what-should-be-done-about-daca](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/what-should-be-done-about-daca)

Who Am I? Identity Poems, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems)

## Websites

Be an Ally: Six Simple Ways

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/be-an-ally-six-simple-ways](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/be-an-ally-six-simple-ways)

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying.

Education Resources on Immigration, Immigrants and Anti-Immigrant Bias

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/education-resources-on-immigration-immigrants-and-anti](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/education-resources-on-immigration-immigrants-and-anti)

This collection of resources includes lesson plans, children's books, teaching tips and strategies, discussion guides for parents/family members and civil rights resources to help educators and others provide background and address the topics of immigration, immigrants and anti-immigrant bias and discrimination.

Myths and Facts about Immigrants and Immigration

[www.adl.org/resources/fact-sheets/myths-and-facts-about-immigrants-and-immigration](http://www.adl.org/resources/fact-sheets/myths-and-facts-about-immigrants-and-immigration)

A list of common myths about immigrants and immigration and the facts.

Safe and Inclusive Schools for All

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/safe-and-inclusive-schools-for-all](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/safe-and-inclusive-schools-for-all)

Tips to foster a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment.

Ten Things Students Wish Teachers Knew about Name-Calling and Bullying

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/ten-things-students-wish-teachers-knew-about-name-calling](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/ten-things-students-wish-teachers-knew-about-name-calling)

A list of ten things students wish their teachers knew about name-calling and bullying to "feel" heard and supported.

## Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

People, Identity & Culture: Asian/Asian-American/South Asian/South-Asian American/Pacific Islander, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[203\]=203](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[203]=203)

People, Identity & Culture: Immigrants, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[207\]=207](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[207]=207)

Bias, Discrimination & Hate: Anti-Immigrant Bias, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[178\]=178](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[178]=178)