

The opening of the novel

Discuss the following questions with a partner and then prepare a presentation for the class which incorporates the answers in your talk:

1. Why does Tyler set the opening scene in the evening? Think about the number of other people in the airport and how loud or quiet the Donaldsons and Yazdans seem in this environment.
2. Why does she set the scene in the airport and bother describing characters who aren't involved in the main story?
3. What sort of impression does Tyler create with the introduction of her first three characters, 'an overexcited child spinning herself into dizziness in the center of the corridor, and then a grownup popping forth to scoop her up and carry her, giggling and squirming, back into the waiting area. And a latecomer, a woman in a yellow dress, was rushing toward the gate with an armful of long-stemmed roses.'? Examine the details of the language carefully.
4. Do you think Tyler makes the Donaldsons' group of family and friends seem quintessentially American and, if so, how does she do this?
5. How does she make this group appear faintly ridiculous?
6. How does Tyler change the tone once Jin-Ho arrives and what do you think of the Donaldsons at this point?
7. Compare the descriptions of Jin-Ho and Sooki. Why do you think Tyler depicts them in this way?
8. In what ways is the Yazdan family different to the Donaldsons as they greet Sooki? What is Tyler's purpose in making them so different to the other family?
9. Why does Tyler describe the departure from the airport in such detail? What sort of impression do we get of the two families from this?
10. Overall, after reading this first chapter, what do you think the novel will be about, who will it focus on and how will the characters be presented?