

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Indian in the Cupboard by Lynne Reid Banks

Book Information

Lynne Reid Banks, The Indian in the Cupboard
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Interest Level: MG

A young boy discovers that his magic cupboard and key can turn toys into live people and animals.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Misc./Other;
Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Family Life, Toys; Fantasy/Imagination,
Magic; Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other;
People, Cowboys; People, Native
American; Series, Indian in the Cupboard

Main Characters

Adiel the older brother of Omri who quarrels with Omri and accuses of him of taking his belongings

Boone an 1880s American cowboy whom Patrick brings to life in the cupboard; he frequently bursts into tears and often makes insensitive comments about Indians

Bright Stars the Indian maiden Omri brings to life for Little Bear

Dad Omri's father, who loves his garden and respects the privacy of his children

Gillon the older brother of Omri who gives him the cupboard and owns a rat that frequently escapes

Little Bear the Iroquois Indian brave who is brought to life in Omri's cupboard; he tends to be very bossy and anxious to fight others

Mr. Johnson the headmaster of Omri's school, who must go home when he sees Little Bear and Boone

Mr. Yapp the owner of a toy store; he is frustrated with children who shoplift from his store

Mum Omri's gentle mother, who is occasionally frustrated by her rambunctious boys

Omri a sensitive, young English boy who discovers he is able to transform his plastic toy figures into live characters by locking them into a cupboard

Patrick the impulsive and often selfish friend who gives Omri the plastic Indian figure that comes alive as Little Bear

Vocabulary

ancestors dead relatives

breechcloth a piece of cloth worn around the hips and between the thighs

football the British word for the game of soccer

longhouse style of Indian house made of sticks lashed together and covered with bark

stench a very bad smell

the Three Sisters beans, maize (corn), and squash grown as crops by Indians

Synopsis

Omri receives his birthday gift from his best friend, Patrick, with mixed feelings. Of course, he is grateful for the gesture, but after all, it is only a cast-off plastic figure, no more special than all the others already messing up his room. Or so he thinks.

That night, after his mother helps him find a special key to lock it, Omri places his Indian figure inside the cupboard he received from Gillon and closes his eyes to go to sleep. As he dozes off, he hears funny noises coming from inside the cupboard. When he opens it, he is startled to find the Indian is alive!

Omri and the Indian, whose name is Little Bear, get to know each other, and Omri does his best to accommodate the miniature Iroquois brave. He decides the world isn't yet ready for such an unbelievable sight and tries to keep the secret.

Omri eventually shows Little Bear to Patrick, who wants a person for himself. Omri tries to make his friend realize Little Bear is a real, live person and not a toy. While Omri is out of the room, Patrick puts a cowboy figure into the cupboard, and the battle that once took place between American cowboys and Indians is revisited.

The two boys manage to get through several close calls with Little Bear and Boone. Things truly turn

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serious, however, when Little Bear shoots an arrow into Boone's chest after Boone speaks disparagingly against Indians. Little Bear realizes the wrong he has done and risks his life to help Omri retrieve the lost cupboard key. Then Omri makes the orderly figure come alive to give medical help to Boone. During this trauma, Omri keeps his promise to provide Little Bear with an Indian maiden for his wife. Bright Stars helps nurse Boone, and she and Little Bear fall in love with each other. Little Bear and Boone then become blood brothers to please Omri.

Omri realizes his three little friends deserve to live their lives with their own people in their own times. So, with great emotion, Omri and Patrick say good-bye. Just before leaving, Little Bear makes their friendship more memorable by also becoming blood brothers with Omri.

The story ends with Omri and Patrick deciding to leave the cupboard empty, just in case....

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why does Omri obey Patrick's order to bring Boone to school?

He is frightened that Patrick will reveal his secret and jeopardize Little Bear's safety. He also has been friends with Patrick for a long time and is reluctant to lose Patrick's friendship.

Literary Analysis

Discuss how Patrick and Omri were "blood brothers."

Patrick and Omri were friends who stuck together and helped each other when times were bad. They also put their differences aside to work side by side to rescue their little friends and send them off to their rightful homes.

Inferential Comprehension

Omri scolded Patrick for using the little people, but when Omri was in art class, he also used them for his own gain. Was he justified? Give reasons for your answer.

While it's true Omri did let the art teacher believe Boone's drawing was his own, he didn't take advantage of Boone or Little Bear in any other way. One could argue that Omri was justified because he had taken great pains to look after the needs of his unusual guests. Patrick, on the other hand, did not spend any time or effort in caring for the two people.

Constructing Meaning

By the time the story ends, a number of the characters have used the word "nightmare" to describe their experiences caused by the magic of the cupboard. Discuss why some of the little people, as well as Omri, referred to what happened to them in such a fashion.

It is easy to see why the plastic-figures-turned-real-life people thought of their experiences as a nightmare. They were in a strange land, facing strange "giants." Omri thought having the little people was neat until he realized what a burden caring for them truly was. At this point, it became a nightmare for him, too.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization The characters who are brought to life in the cupboard each have a different explanation of what is happening to them. Have the students identify the reactions of the different characters and explain what each reaction appears to represent about that character.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Omri and Little Bear spend many hours painstakingly trying to create an Iroquois village for Little Bear to live in. Because of Little Bear's tiny size, helping is difficult for Omri. Make a diorama of an Indian village. Try to include as many historical details as possible. Also try to use materials as close to the originals as possible, e.g., real sticks for the

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longhouse, real leather for clothing. Then write a one-page description of your diorama.

Recognizing Cause and Effect Having the magic cupboard affects Omri's relationship with many people. Have the students make a chart that shows how Omri's relationships change with the important people in his life.

Making Predictions The author leaves this story somewhat up in the air when he has the two boys decide to leave the cupboard empty. This seems to invite the possibility of a sequel. Imagine you have been commissioned by the author of *The Indian in the Cupboard* to write that sequel. Under what circumstances would you have Omri use the magic cupboard again? Write one page summarizing the plot of the sequel.