

# *The Indian in the Cupboard*

by Lynn Reid Banks

Omri is given two gifts for his birthday that he thinks are useless—a small plastic Indian and an old wooden cupboard—but when he puts the Indian inside the cupboard and uses a key his mother gives him, something magical happens, something that changes his life forever.

## **THEMES**

adventure, history, problem-solving, friendship, responsibility, courage, compassion

## **I. PRE-TEACHING**

### **A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:**

shaft, rigid, coherent, miniature, ferociously, baffled, plait, miniscule, moccasins, intricate, astonished, tantalizing, astonished, wrestled, appalled, stark, ravenously, furiously, crestfallen, writhed, haughtily, wrenched, tourniquet, maize, commando, stability, lithely, seething, scuttling, foreboding, uncanny, chaos, stench, frenzied, scornful, non-plussed, raucous, truce, apt, infinitesimal, stupefaction, rashly, chasm, steely, prostrate, electrocute, dire, septic, flourish

### **B. Before beginning the story, discuss with the class the following questions:**

1. What would it be like to have one of your small plastic figures come alive? Would you tell anyone about it? Why or why not?
2. What happened to Native Americans when the Europeans came to North America?
3. Are cowboy movies an accurate portrayal of the settling of the West? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever had to make a difficult decision? What factors make some decisions hard to make?

## **II. PRESENTATION**

### **A. Understanding the Story:**

1. Begin with Chapters 1-5: What is Patrick's gift to Omri? What else does he get? Why does this gift please him? What is special about the key Omri's mother gives him? What does Omri discover when he opens the cupboard the next morning? How can he tell the Indian is alive? Describe the Indian. What worries Omri all day? What happens to the plastic teepee when he puts it in the cupboard? What kind of dwelling is Little Bear used to? How does Little Bear tame the horse? What does Omri marvel at as he watches Little Bear and the horse outside? What happens when Omri tries to make the doctor's bag real? How does he take advantage of his mistake?
2. Advance to Chapters 6-10: What does Omri learn from the book on Indians? What does Little Bear say when

Omri offers him another Indian friend? What happens when Omri brings the Indian chief to life? What has Patrick bought him? Why doesn't he want it? How does Patrick respond when he sees Little Bear? What does he want to do? Why does Omri say no? What does Patrick do when Omri is out of the room? What happens when the cowboy is brought to life? How does Omri convince Patrick not to take the cowboy home? What happens during the night? What does Omri imagine it would be like to take Little Bear to school?

3. Complete the story with Chapters 11-16: What happens when Omri takes Little Bear and Boone to school? How does the art teacher react when she sees Boone's drawing? How does Omri feel after that? What does Omri find when he gets home? How do the men feel when Omri tells them the magic is gone? What happens when Omri lets Little Bear and Boone watch a Western? How does Little Bear react to Boone's being hurt? How is the key found? What does Omri know he must do? How does Little Bear feel about it? What does Omri do with the key? What does he decide to do about the cupboard?

### **B. For Discussion:**

1. What happens when Omri begins to realize that Little Bear is a real person, not just a toy? How does this make it difficult to keep him? Why does Omri finally decide to let him go back to his own time?
2. Omri notices that Little Bear is courageous but not reckless. What is the difference?
3. Why does Omri try to keep the Indian a secret? What problems does this cause him? What happens when he tells Patrick about him? Why does Omri feel making others would be wrong? Why does Patrick disagree? At what point does Patrick seem to understand?
4. How are Little Bear and Boone finally able to accept each other?
5. In what ways does Omri grow up because of the experience?
6. Do you think Omri will ever call the Indian back? Why or why not?

### III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

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Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

#### INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

##### A. Language Arts:

1. Have students write a story about being a miniature person. They could set it at home or in the classroom.
2. Have students use a thesaurus and find every word meaning “small” and write sentences. How does the meaning of each word differ?
3. Have students write about a time when they had to keep a secret. What’s hard about keeping a secret?
4. Have students perform a dialogue between two characters in the story.

##### B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select background music that might be appropriate to some of the scenes. They might find a recording of Dvorak’s *Sonatina*, especially the second movement, or other music based on Indian themes.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They could design the cupboard out of a cardboard box, add an ornate key with a red ribbon, show Little Bear and his horse inside, show a giant face to represent Omri looking in. They might draw the miniature Western town that Boone draws, include a bow and arrow, a knife, a pistol, and other items mentioned in the story.
3. Have students make a miniature long house the way Little Bear does. They could add plastic figures to the scene. Have them decorate it with Indian symbols.
4. Have students watch a Western from the 1950s and a more current movie like *Dances with Wolves* and discuss how cowboys and Indians are depicted in each film. Which is closer to the historical fact? Why?

##### C. Social Studies:

1. Have students find out how horse trainers tame wild horses.
2. Have students learn about the Iroquois and their life style. Why don’t they live in teepees? How is their

civilization organized? Where did they live? What is their history?

3. Have students learn about the French and Indian War that Little Bear mentions. When was it fought? Where? What was the cause? What famous general made his name during this conflict?
4. Have students learn about the religious beliefs of Native Americans. What did they worship? How did they honor the dead? What did they believe about the afterlife?
5. When the doctor comes he is in the middle of a battle in World War I. Have students learn more about World War I. Why was it fought? How many were killed, wounded, or stricken with disease?
6. Have students learn about the attitude toward Indians during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier. What did the white men do to the Indians? What part did the building of the railroad have in destroying the Native American civilization?

##### D. Science and Math:

1. When Omri and the World War I doctor help heal Little Bear and later Boone, what methods do they use? How would a doctor in today’s time be able to help them?
2. Have students learn about penicillin. How was it discovered? How has it changed medicine?

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