

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Secret of the Indian

by

Lynne Reid Banks

Book Information

Lynne Reid Banks, The Secret of the Indian
Quiz Number: 5044
Avon Books, 1989
ISBN 0-380-71040-4; LCCN
147 Pages
Book Level: 5.2
Interest Level: MG

In this third book about Omri and his magic cupboard, Omri and his friend Patrick must risk grown-ups discovering their secret when they find themselves in need of a friend whose toy plastic doctors can be brought to life to save wounded people.

Topics: Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; People, Native American; Series, Indian in the Cupboard

Main Characters

Billy Boone an overly sensitive, nineteenth-century Texas cowboy who is brought to life by the magic key

Emma Patrick's younger cousin, who helps the boys save the tiny people and send them home

Little Bear an Iroquois Indian chief brought to life by Omri and his key

Matron a miniature nurse who helps the boys save the wounded Indians

Mr. Johnson the sinister headmaster at Omri's school

Omri a young English boy who has a magical key that can bring plastic figures to life

Patrick Omri's friend who shares Omri's adventures and travels back in time

Ruby Lou a nineteenth-century woman from Texas who helps Patrick and falls in love with Boone

Vocabulary

longhouse a type of home used by the North American Indians that has an elongated shape and can house many families at once

matron a woman who is responsible for the affairs of an institution

quid the slang term for a pound, the basic unit of the British monetary system

skinheads a rebellious group of people in England who shave off their hair in order to make a statement against society

Synopsis

In the first book of this series Omri and his friend Patrick made an amazing discovery. On Omri's birthday he received a magical key and cupboard. They found out that when a miniature plastic figurine is locked inside the cupboard, it is transformed into a miniature-sized human from the past. In the previous two books, Omri and Patrick have used the cupboard to bring alive toy figurines of various Indians, soldiers, medics, and a cowboy.

In this book, the third of the series, the story begins when Omri's parents return from a late-night party to discover Omri and Patrick unsupervised and the house looking like a battle zone. Burglars had broken into the house that night after the baby-sitter failed to arrive. Omri and Patrick had used the magic cupboard to create an army of little soldiers and had frightened away the criminals. Omri and Patrick, however, do not wish to reveal their magic and instead make up a story about how they chased the burglars away.

Omri has befriended an Iroquois Indian named Little Bear whose warriors were severely injured when Omri and Patrick supplied them with modern firearms from the cupboard. The Indians were poorly trained to use the powerful weapons, and they nearly destroyed themselves during a battle. Omri's bedroom now serves as a makeshift hospital for the recovering miniature warriors, and he and Patrick struggle to keep the little people a secret.

To help assist the tiny caretaker of the war victims, a miniature nurse named Matron, Patrick and Omri decide to try to buy a set of medical plastic figures from Patrick's disagreeable cousin, Tamsin. As they formulate their plan for approaching Tamsin, her twin sister Emma arrives to tell Patrick he is being sent back to his home in the country. In a deliberate

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Secret of the Indian

by

Lynne Reid Banks

attempt to delay his departure, Patrick allows Omri to lock him in a trunk with the magic key and send him back into the past, thereby transporting a tiny cowboy from Texas into the present. Patrick hopes to visit his friend Boone, the overly sensitive cowboy from the past, but Patrick accidentally crushes Boone as the plastic figurine clenched in his hand comes to life when the key is turned. To make matters worse, Emma enters the room and witnesses the little living Indians and the unconscious, yet real miniature cowboy.

Emma proves to be a valuable ally, as she is able to retrieve the set of plastic surgeons from her sister and helps to make excuses to the adults for Patrick's disappearance. Meanwhile, Patrick is having his own adventures as a miniaturized person in nineteenth century Texas. Patrick finds himself standing on the full-sized body of Boone, which now seems massive to Patrick's tiny self. He realizes that Boone is unconscious and travels into town on the hoof of Boone's horse to seek help. There Patrick meets a bold woman named Ruby Lou, who is a friend of Boone, and she agrees to help bring the cowboy to safety. They carry Boone's limp body back to town, but Ruby Lou becomes worried when she notices the weather is ripe for tornadoes.

Back in twentieth century England, Omri goes to school without Patrick, and he is asked to read his award winning "fictional" story about the little people. The school principal, Mr. Johnson, suspects that the story is real, and the sinister man interrogates Omri to make him reveal the truth. Mr. Johnson drives Omri home, where his and Patrick's families are panicking over Patrick's disappearance. Omri escapes to his room with the intention of returning Patrick to his normal body. After Emma places a plastic girl into the trunk and Omri turns the magic key, a tornado rips through his bedroom and causes massive destruction to the house and surrounding neighborhood. Luckily, Patrick is returned to his body safely, but unfortunately he has brought a tiny Ruby Lou, in the place of the plastic girl, and a Texas tornado with him. The massive blast from the tornado causes the key to disappear, and Omri is unable to send any of his remaining little people

back to their own times. The miniature Boone and Ruby Lou get married and live in a dollhouse until Omri happens to chance upon the magical key. Omri returns all of the little people to their respective times and locks the key in a bank vault to be given to his children upon his death.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why are the children afraid of other people discovering their secret?

The children do not want to let other people know about the little people for several reasons. First, the magical key and cupboard would probably be taken from them by adults. Second, they probably feel that the adults might exploit both the magic and the tiny people for their own personal benefits. They would most likely wish to study and test the phenomena and probably would not be as respectful to the people as the children are. As Omri puts it, "Everything would be ruined."

Literary Analysis

What are the clues in the story that tell the reader it is set in England?

Besides the characters' periodic references to the city, there are many clues that identify the story's setting. The way the children and their parents speak and the terminology they use tell the reader that they are not American. Other clues include the English tradition of drinking tea; the children riding what they refer to as a "train" to school; the reference to a prize of three hundred pounds, which is English currency; and the reference to the principal as the headmaster.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Secret of the Indian

by

Lynne Reid Banks

Inferential Comprehension

How do Omri, Patrick, and Emma treat the little people? Do they respect them as humans, or do they treat them like pets?

The children, especially Omri, feel a strong sense of responsibility and duty towards their small friends. They recognize that each person has a life, destiny, and problems of his or her own. Despite this, the children do feel a sense of ownership of the small people. There are clues to suggest that Omri feels that Little Bear belongs to him, just as Boone belongs to Patrick and Ruby Lou belongs to Emma. This is probably because the little people come from and resemble toys that the children possess. They do not, however, abuse their power over the little people, but instead treat them like friends.

Constructing Meaning

If you could switch places with any person in history, who would you choose and why?

The students' answers will vary. Students may choose an individual, such as Benjamin Franklin or Cleopatra, or they may choose a general type of character such as a medieval knight or princess. Their reasons will be based on what intrigues them most about the figure selected. They may desire adventure, fame, wealth, power, or they may just be interested in learning about a certain time period.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors When the Indians die, Omri shows that he is sensitive by sending their bodies back to their own time so that they can receive proper burials according to their cultures. Have the students choose a plastic figurine from the story, such as Boone, Ruby, Matron, or one of the soldiers or Indians, and have them research that character's historical traditions and culture. They may then either write a report on their findings or give an oral presentation to the class.

Making Predictions At the end of the story, Omri says he is planning to lock up the key in a bank vault, whereupon his children will inherit it when

he dies. Initiate a class discussion about whether the students agree with Omri's plan or not, what they would choose to do instead, and why. Then have the students write an additional chapter to the book detailing what happens to the key in the future. The story could describe what Omri's children discover about the key, or it could describe the events that would take place if Omri does something differently with the key.

Understanding Dialogue Throughout the story, there are times when Little Bear repeats a word with which he is unfamiliar and the author spells it differently to show Little Bear's pronunciation of the word. Many American dialects run words together until whole sentences become short words or grunts. Have the students think of phrases they use often but do not pronounce well, such as "Jeetyit?" which translates to "Did you eat yet?" Then let them try to guess each other's phrases, either individually or as separate teams.

Responding to Literature Many problems are caused by Patrick and Omri experimenting with the key and cupboard. Have the students imagine that Omri and Patrick have turned the key and cupboard over to a group of scientists. Then split the students into two different groups to debate the ethics and dangers of using the key and cupboard. Have one group brainstorm and advocate the advantages of using the key and cupboard for scientific purposes, while the other group brainstorms and advocates the possible reasons for destroying the key and cupboard.