

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Return of the Indian

by
Lynne Reid Banks

Book Information

Lynne Reid Banks, The Return of the Indian
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Book Level: 4.6
Interest Level: MG

In this sequel to *THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD*, Omri brings Little Bear to life again and begins a spellbinding adventure.

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

Main Characters

Adiel and Gillon Omri's older brothers, who do not know about Omri's little friends

Boone the easily affected cowboy, brought back by Omri and Patrick, who helps Little Bear

Bright Stars Little Bear's wife, who delivers her baby in the midst of a crisis

Corporal Fickits the British soldier who helps train the Indian braves to use modern weapons

Little Bear the Indian chief Omri and Patrick bring back, who demands help in defeating his enemies

Matron a demanding nurse Omri transports to help heal Little Bear's wounds

Mum and Dad Omri's parents, who are unaware of Omri's adventures

Omri a young boy who brings his little friends back from another time and helps them solve a crisis

Patrick Omri's friend, who returns to visit and participates in the adventure

Vocabulary

omen a sign indicating what is to happen

orenda the life-giving strength believed by the Iroquois to be within all beings and objects

quid one pound of British sterling

sporrán a pouch, usually fur-covered and tasseled, which is worn in front hanging from a belt

Synopsis

As *The Return of the Indian* begins, Omri has just been notified that the story he wrote about his adventures with Little Bear, Boone, and the cupboard has won first place in a creative writing contest. This news gives him the perfect excuse to use his magic key in the cupboard to bring his favorite toy figures to life as miniature people.

When Little Bear arrives with his wife, Bright Stars, he is seriously wounded. An army consisting of French soldiers and rival Indians had attacked his village and shot him in the back. Omri, along with his visiting friend, Patrick, manage to get medical treatment for Little Bear.

Little Bear wants desperately to return immediately to his embattled village, but his injuries are too severe. Omri is fearful that when his friend returns home, he might be killed. Along with Patrick and his little cowboy friend, Boone, Omri gathers a large number of Indian brave figures to go back with Little Bear. The stubborn chief also demands some weapons to help defeat the Algonquins.

Omri realizes that Indians from two hundred years ago should not be allowed to use modern weapons, but eventually Omri gives in to Little Bear's demands. Unfortunately, despite some hasty instructions on using their weapons, the braves end up shooting each other as well as the enemy.

Patrick and then Omri transport themselves back to the battle by using the magic key and Omri's trunk. Omri witnesses firsthand the horrors of war and escapes back to his room with minor injuries to his head. To add to his troubles, Omri's house is robbed by the neighborhood skinheads, and he and Patrick, with help from Little Soldiers, must fight them off.

Little Bear wants Omri to get more guns for him, but Bright Stars opposes this. She wants her newborn son to be raised in the traditional Indian way. Surprisingly, Little Bear acquiesces.

The story ends with Little Bear speaking proudly of

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the story Omri wrote about him and thanking his friend for giving him his "orenda," or life force, back.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Examine closely the workings of the magic key and cupboard. What questions do you have that the story may not answer? Try to think up your own answers to develop a complete explanation for how the key and cupboard work.

Students may have questions about the nature of a character's death. When Omri tries to bring back Tommy, the WWI orderly, all that shows up is a pile of clothes and his medicine bag. Does this mean that there is a direct relationship between Omri's time and a toy's spirit's time? Does a spirit like Tommy's first have to be awakened by the key before it can die again, or will some toys already be dead when Omri first puts them in the cupboard? When Boone's horse dies in Omri's world, does it also die again in its own time?

Literary Analysis

Because he doesn't like "playing God," Omri shivers when Little Bear asks him to "make" many braves. But Omri does it anyway. What happens because Omri "plays God" by bringing many Indian figures to life? Is this good or bad?

The braves Omri "makes" end up injuring or killing each other because Omri also made weapons for them. Despite quick instructions on how to use the weapons, the braves do not understand their devastating power. Although they do manage to beat the Algonquins, the casualties are a high price to pay. Omri also encounters the moral dilemma of deciding who is "good" and who is "bad." He realizes that he is helping to kill people, and he ponders whether the people being killed deserve to die.

Inferential Comprehension

For the most part, Omri is cautious about using the cupboard and key. Discuss how the story might have been different if Patrick had taken charge of the situation, since he was anxious to use the cupboard without thinking about the consequences.

Patrick probably would have sent himself back into the battle with the Algonquins, where he might have been killed. He may also have sent modern British soldiers, which would not have done Little Bear any good.

Constructing Meaning

Do you think Omri did the right thing when he helped Little Bear to defeat the French and Algonquins? Why or why not?

Students' answers will vary. Many students will say Omri should not have interfered since Little Bear's own men wounded and killed each other with the "new" guns. Others may say it was honorable for him to defend his friend, and Little Bear's life would have been ruined without Omri's help.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization Very little insight is given into the character of Bright Stars in either this story or its prequel, *The Indian in the Cupboard*. Have your students elaborate upon Bright Star's personality and allow them to make assumptions and references about her character. Then have them write a scene involving both her and Little Bear in which the dialogue and action reveals her complete personality.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Little Bear is a proud member of the Iroquois Nation, which was a historically significant alliance of Indian tribes. Have your students research the Iroquois Nation to learn what it was and who its members were. Have them write a page summary of their findings.

Comparing and Contrasting *The Return of the Indian* is told from Omri's point of view. While he is the main character, Little Bear also plays a

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major role. Rewrite one of the scenes from the story from the perspective of Little Bear.

Understanding Sequence Lynne Reid-Banks has written three books about Omri and his magic key: *The Indian in the Cupboard*, *The Return of the Indian*, and *The Secret of the Indian*. Allow the students to read at least two sequential books and examine the ways in which one story is woven into another. What events in one story are necessary or significant to the plot of the other? In a one or two page essay, explain a specific example of how a change in the prequel could affect the sequel.