**Literary Text:** *The Indian in the Cupboard* by Lynne Reid Banks

**Organizational Patterns:**

The book jumps right into the action with an opening scene of Omri’s birthday. There are 16 chapters in the book and they following the rising action in chronological order, with no flashbacks. The book chronicles the changes that occur in Omri’s life and the way he sees other people due to the influence of Little Bear and Boone.

**Issues Related to the Study of Literature:**

**Theme:**

In this book dealing with the coming of age of the young protagonist, there are many themes dealt with including:

1.) **Loyalty:** In chapter 13, Omri and Patrick are not talking to each other because they had a huge fight. When Omri is accused of stealing two plastic figures, Patrick tells the storeowner the truth. Even though the two boys are in a fight, Patrick still remains loyal to his friend Omri.

2.) **Courage:** “More and more, he [Omri] found, he was able to see things from the Indian’s point of view. The little stones on the path became huge boulders that had to be dodged, weeds became trees, the lawn’s edge an escarpment twice the height of a man. As for the living things, an ant scuttling across the horse’s path, made him shy wildly. The shadow of a passing bird falling on him brought him to a dead stop, crouching and cowering as a full-sized horse might if some huge bird of prey swooped at him. Once again, Omri marveled at the courage of Little Bear, faced with all of these terrors” (38-39).

3.) **Decision-making:** “Omri liked him [Little Bear]. He wanted to keep Him. But he knew, now, that that was impossible. Whichever way he thought about it, the end was the same—disaster of some kind. Whatever magic had brought this strange adventure about must be put to use again, to send the little people back to their own place and time” (170).

4.) **Foreign Cultures:** “Listen,” he said excitedly. “I want you to come out out of there. I’ll find you a much more comfortable place. You said you were cold. I’ll make you a proper teepee—“ ‘Teepee!’ the Indian shouted. ‘I no live teepee. I live longhouse!’” (21)

5.) **Friendship:** “Omri let go of his arm and for a moment they looked at
each other as if they’d been strangers. But they weren’t strangers; they were friends. That counts for a lot in this life” (85).

6.) Responsibility: “Although the Indian felt strong, Omri could sense how fragile he was, how easily an extra squeeze could injure him. [He] was no longer a plaything but a person” (22).

Setting:

The story opens in Omri’s home, which located somewhere in England. It appears that the time period is late 1900’s. There are days in school as well as excursions to Yapp’s store; however, the bulk of the action takes place in Omri’s home and mainly in his bedroom.

Foreshadowing:

1. Omri’s mother says, “How very odd” (5) when the old key fits the cupboard.
2. Omri places the unwanted Indian into the cupboard (5).
3. “He thought he heard a little noise…but no. All was quiet. His eyes closed again” (6).
4. Little Bear “was no longer his plaything but a person who had to be respected” (22).
5. Patrick wants to turn whole armies of plastic figurines into real people, but Omri intervenes, saying “It’s not so simple…because they’d all—don’t you see—they’d be real” (69).
6. “It had been hard enough with only one little being to feed, protect, and keep secret. Much harder after Boone came. Now there’d be three—and one a woman” (170).

Point of View, Narrative Voice:

Throughout the entire book, the first person narrative of the young boy named Omri captivates the audience.

Tone:

The tone of this book is a light one, but overlaid with more serious moments. The descriptions and conversations are all true to life, making this book more believable. The tone shows the struggle the boys have in making the transition from childhood to a more grown-up way of handling situations.

Irony:

There is no irony in this book that I recognized.
Affective Issues Related to the Work:

- Have students ever had a best friend? Were there any arguments or fights that threatened to ruin the friendship? How were the issues worked out or were they never worked out?
- Have you ever played a trick on your sibling, like Adiel did to Omri? What are the usual outcomes? Is forgiveness easily given or is a grudge held?
- Do you collect something odd? For Omri, he collected cabinets. What were some of your favorite toys? Did you ever play with plastic figurines like Omri and Patrick did?

Vocabulary Issues:

The vocabulary in this book is sometimes beyond the reach of a middle school student. There are such words as:

- Agog
- Galvanized
- Magnanimously
- Burbled
- Goggled
- Mulish

Then there are words that are English slang words that American students might not know:

- Crumbs
- Pounds
- Pence
- Headmaster
- Lorry
- Biscuit
- Blokes

Terms that might also not be familiar are those having to do with horses and Native Americans such as:

- Astride
- Longhouse
- Halter
- Iroquois

Major Concepts:

A major theme in this book is that of responsibility. Omri knows that he can’t just bring tinfuls of plastic figurines to life because then they will become real men. He also makes decisions to feed Little Bear and provide him with whatever he needs to survive, such as a longhouse, bows and arrows, a horse, and even a wife. Omri is no longer a little boy playing with toys, but growing up into a responsible teenager who wants to do the right thing by other people. When Patrick shows the principal Little Bear and Boone, Omri reacts by saying, “You use them. They’re people. You can’t use people” (129). Omri gains a knowledge of the huge responsibility involved in caring for another person, as he has to feed, protect, and keep safe Little Bear, Boone, and Bright Stars.
Responsibility is something that students need to learn and this is a good book to help ease them onto a path of gaining a perspective on responsibility.

**Background Knowledge:**

To help students understand this book better, there would need to be background research on many subjects. There would need to be research done on the Iroquois Indians as well as the French-American war. To help the students understand Boone, research could be done on cowboys and the American west. What is was like to live in those ages, the culture, the medicine, the food, the technology, and the world events. For middle school students, research on England would also be a good idea, to help make the setting more realistic.

**Implications for Students of Diversity:**

- This book explores somewhat, the beliefs and practices of the Native Americans and the stereotypes that many non-Native Americans hold. Those students who have fallen under stereotypes may be able to share what it is like to have their culture mocked or to have people continually assume untrue things.
- There are also issues of other countries that could be addressed. For example, if there are international students, the slang words and culture of that country could be explored in class to broaden the understanding of the international community.

**Gender Issues:**

- The gender issue that can be seen in this book is how Native American women were seen during the time of Little Bear. For him, the woman would “grow corn, grind, cook, make clothes” (31). How have times changed since then? Are women still expected to do those particular duties? What are the differences in how Anglo-Saxons and Native Americans view the traditional roles of women today?

**The Central Questions/Enduring Issues:**

This is a good text to help middle school aged students make the transition from a child’s world into a more grown-up world.
- No longer is life just fun and games; there are responsibilities to deal with and other people to get along with. Just as Omri comes to a realization about how hard it is to take care of Little Bear and Boone, he also realizes how important his friendship with Patrick.
- There also comes a respect for other people and their ideas as he sees the stereotypes about Native Americans and cowboys. Cultural issues are explored and provide a good starting point for discussions on cultures.
Research Issues/Project Ideas:

1.) Research the Iroquois Indians including their culture, food, beliefs, tales, etc.

   Project: Have groups present in class using props. Some may research the mode of travel, the way the Iroquois dressed, etc.

2.) Research cabinet making.

   Project: Have the students build cupboards of their own out of cardboard boxes. Then have them place something in the cupboard and have the students write a story about what may happen to what they placed in the cupboard.

3.) Watch the movie The Indian in the Cupboard after completion of the novel.

   Project: Have the students compare the book to the movie. In what ways are the two different? In what ways are they the same?

4.) Research the American West. What the towns were like, who were the people Who lived in towns, how people made livings, etc.

   Project: Build a model of a Western town, like Boone did when he drew his hometown. The class can make the model as big or as small as they would like to. It could be a mural on the wall or it could be made out of boxes and as tall as the students, it is up to the students to plan and build the model.

Informational//Functional Texts:

1.) Research books about the Iroquois Indians and other Native Americans.
2.) Research books on the American west and cowboys.
3.) Research books on the French-American war.
4.) Research books on England.
5.) A class set of The Indian in the Cupboard.