

Movie:

The Indian in the Cupboard

Rated PG

.....
Approximately 100 minutes

.....
25 scenes to work through —
about 12–15 sessions

.....
Available at libraries and as a
movie rental



Advantages of this movie include:

- It really engages students — there are some action packed scenes.
- Even though there’s some great action, it’s a slower paced movie without lots of rapid jump cuts and quick dialogue. The movie takes place primarily in Omri’s room, with some scenes around his house, in the community, and at school.
- It provides rich material for Social Thinking work.
- The excellent script and acting make it easy to work on empathic reactions.
- It carefully explores feelings and relationships between male characters.
- It takes children through some intense subject matter (for example, death, control over the lives of others, parental deceit) in a child-friendly way.

Based on the first in a series of children’s books by Lynne Reid Banks, *The Indian in the Cupboard* takes viewers on a fantastical journey in the heart of Manhattan. Omri, an eight-year-old boy, gets a magical cabinet for his birthday that enables him to bring to life an American Indian as well other characters from the past.

The movie allows us to witness the development of a number of relationships between imaginary and real characters. Some of the scenes are surprisingly intense for a children’s movie — be sure to preview the scenes so you know what to expect. It took me years to watch the whole movie without needing a tissue!

The Indian in the Cupboard brings emotions directly into the therapy room in a way even the most nonempathic child will notice. Taking children through the social complexities and rewards of this movie will be a moving experience for everyone. While the earlier scenes set up the story, they aren’t as rich as the ones about the relationship between Omri and Little Bear (beginning in Scene 5).

Using the Lesson Plan

This feature-length movie is broken down into shorter scene portions. The beginning action of the scene is identified as the “scene start.” As with other movies for older children, the scenes tend to blend into each other, so it may be difficult to know when the scene changes. As you watch one scene, read ahead in the lesson plan so you can watch for the next scene start.

The scenes are divided into the three different Movie Time Social Learning tasks: Spy Eye, Detective Head, and Me Too! For each category of tasks, the lesson plan provides goals (the first column), suggestions on how to generate discussion about Social Thinking concepts (the second column), and tips or other ideas for mediating strategies (the third column). You don’t need to use all of these suggestions for any one scene: for example, you may find you switch among types of tasks quickly or focus on just one category of task.

The movie contains a number of cautionary moments or times when a scene may include a slightly inappropriate moment, indicated by an alert symbol in the lesson plan. Many of these scenes also include critical relationship moments, however, so you may want to fast-forward through questionable parts but still show and work through others.

Not all scenes are equal. Particularly important scenes are identified with a star. ☆ Some scenes contain events that are less relevant to social thinking. You won't spend the same amount of time or work as hard on all scenes. Also, not every scene contains enough opportunities to make it worth watching: suggestions are included for where you may want to skip a scene and present students with a synopsis.

Suggestions for specific visual tools you can use to support the activities are included for some of the scenes, with references to the book's templates.

Moving Up Mindreader Capabilities

As you work with students on these activities, keep in mind that Moving Up Mindreaders are in the thick of developing their social thinking and complex language capabilities. Compared with peers, they still:

- Have difficulty developing organized, detailed narrative
- Require additional processing time to understand perspective and context
- Are just learning to use a broader feelings vocabulary that goes beyond "happy," "sad," and "mad"
- Are practicing relating feelings and experiences of characters to themselves

For more information about the capabilities of Moving Up Mindreaders, see the discussion in Chapter 2.



Scene 5: Indian in the Cupboard (scene start: Omri in bed, daylight)

Movie Time Social Learning task and goals	Questions to guide discussion	To keep in mind
<p>Spy Eye</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying thoughts, feelings, and plans of the characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When he wakes up, what are Omri’s thoughts, feelings, and plans as he walks toward the cabinet? When he’s at school, how is Omri feeling? What’s his plan? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use multiple freeze-frames as Omri walks toward the cupboard to show “caution” and “excitement.”
<p>Detective Head</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspective taking Generating personal opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track Omri’s many changes in feelings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When opening the cabinet When he thinks cabinet is empty When he sees the Indian When he tries to touch the Indian When the Indian stabs him When he’s talking to the Indian When Omri’s dad comes in How is the Indian feeling? Why is he feeling that way and calling Omri “demon” and “giant”? Why does this confuse Omri? Even though the Indian isn’t speaking English, can you tell what he’s saying? Do you think it’s a good idea to try to touch someone who has a knife, even if the person is very small? What else might Omri have done? Why didn’t Omri show his dad the Indian — what do you think his dad would have done? As they walk to school, why does Omri’s mom ask him if he forgot something at home? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The scene has many good freeze-frame points, especially for Omri’s face. Be quiet; allow kids to think when you freeze-frame. If needed, use hand gestures to remind children of the Indian’s size. Let children offer different “translations” of what they think the Indian is saying — emphasize tone of voice reflecting emotional state. Start visual tracking of the relationship of Omri and Little Bear across scenes. I’ve heard lots of different ideas about what the dad would have done. Cognitively, this is a challenging question, so aim for discussion rather than changing minds.
<p>Me Too!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making personal connections Generating empathic comments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How would you feel if Omri’s experience happened to you? What would you do? If you were Omri, would you have shown the dad? If you could say something to Little Bear as a friend when he’s scared, what would you say? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasize understanding of how Omri feels. Encourage cross talk about suggestions.

Visual Support

You could use an Event and Feelings Tracker to make it easier to explore how Omri’s feelings change during the scene.

Scene 6: Vanishing American (scene start: Omri coming through front door)

Movie Time Social Learning task and goals	Questions to guide discussion	To keep in mind
<p>Spy Eye</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying thoughts, feelings, and plans of the characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does the way Omri arrives home tell you about what he’s thinking and feeling? What causes these feelings to change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasize how quickly Omri’s feelings change between when he gets home to when he realizes the Indian is plastic again — write feelings on sticky notes and line them up to show how many feelings there were. Build complex sentences on dry-erase boards explaining cause and effect of feelings — write a leading conjunction and give students time to think.
<p>Detective Head</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspective taking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does Omri’s mom think he’s upset about during dinner? Omri says he’s sick and tired. What has him upset? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrast what Omri knows with what his mom knows — record on a dry-erase board or sticky notes so students can remember and see the different opinions.
<p>Me Too!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making personal connections Generating empathic comments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What might make you feel as excited as Omri is when he gets home? What happened? If you were Omri’s friend, what could you say to him when he sees that Little Bear has turned back to plastic? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Omri’s feeling state. Emphasize empathic comments, not opinionated explanations (e.g., “Well I think. . .”). Use your facial expressions to let students know when they’re on the right track.

Scene 16: Huge Responsibility (scene start: Omri’s dad talking to him)

Movie Time Social Learning task and goals	Questions to guide discussion	To keep in mind
<p>Spy Eye</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying thoughts, feelings, and plans of the characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does Omri’s experience in the previous scene affect how he’s feeling in this scene? As he wraps up the Mohawk, what are Little Bear’s thoughts and feelings? After the bully takes his money, what are Omri’s thoughts and feelings? Out on the street, why does Patrick’s mom think Omri is upset? As Omri comes down the hall, what does he see happening in his room? What are his feelings and thoughts? When we see the brothers’ faces, what do you think they’re looking at and talking about? Why is Omri so upset about the rat being in his room? What are his concerns? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review prior knowledge — Omri’s previous experiences affect him, even when he isn’t with Little Bear. Multiple freezes allow processing and description of the event as it unfolds.
<p>Detective Head</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspective taking Generating personal opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did Omri really bury the saw blades? Why does he lie? Why does Omri say “I’m not a baby”? Is he thinking only about his dad? What does his dad think about what Omri says? Omri walks to the hardware store through a very urban scene. Would your parents let you do that? What does Omri mean when he says “You don’t deserve that hair!”? Describe the feelings that occur in the interaction between Omri and his brothers. How do all of Omri’s feelings in the last two scenes culminate in how he treats the rat? Is it justified? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage discussion of what would have happened if Omri had told the truth. Make sure to consider the feelings of Omri’s brother when he says he found his stuff in Omri’s room. Many children find the rat rolling down the stairs funny; wait for the laughs to subside before you get to work on the reasons behind Omri’s reaction.
<p>Me Too!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making personal connections Generating empathic comments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have any kids at your school who are like that bully? What do they do? Omri doesn’t say anything to defend himself. If you were there, what could you say to the bully? What might you say to Omri if you saw him sitting by the sidewalk? What makes a really bad day? What do you do when you have one? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As children share their experiences, encourage empathy from others in the group. Start with identifying how the child who told the experience feels.