

Lesson Plan

6th Grade

Navajo Code Talkers



Wreaths Across America

Lesson Plan

Teacher:	Date:
Grade: 6 th Grade	Lesson: American Indian Heritage Month, The Code Talkers, or Veterans Day

OBJECTIVES: National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: 1. Culture 4. Individual Development & Identity 5. Individuals, Groups & Institutions 6. Power, Authority & Governance 10. Civic Ideals & Practices	STRATEGIES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing/Coloring <input type="checkbox"/> Writing <input type="checkbox"/> K-W-L <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Questions <input type="checkbox"/> Small Groups <input type="checkbox"/> Large Group
MATERIALS:	Computer/laptop; internet (with access to YouTube); Smart Board; Copies of the Navajo Code Talkers K-W-L; Copies of the Navajo Code Talkers World War II Fact Sheet Reading Activity; Copies of the Navajo Code Talkers World War II Fact Sheet Questions; Copies of the Terms in English and Navajo Language for Navajo Code Activity; Copies of the Navajo Code Activity.
Engage: Hook the students	Handout copies of The Navajo Code Talkers K-W-L. Tell students to complete the What I Know and the What I Want to Know sections of the K-W-L (parts 1 and 2). Explain to the students that a code talker is “the name given to American Indians who used their tribal language to send secret communications on the battlefield.” These American Indians both enlisted and were drafted into the United States military forces to help spread intelligence faster than using an encrypted coding machine. Play the YouTube read aloud book, <i>Navajo Code Talkers</i> , Author: Andrew Santella https://youtu.be/3elvnCAIP0Y
Explore: Students make sense of a concept through observations.	Handout copies of the Navajo Code Talkers World War II Fact Sheet Reading Activity, and the Navajo Code Talkers World War II Fact Sheet Questions. Students will read and answer questions. Handout copies of the Terms in English and Navajo Language for Navajo Code Activity and the copies of the Navajo Code Activity. Students will decipher the code in the activity. Students will complete the third part of the Navajo Code Talkers K-W-L. Answer any questions the students may still have about the Code Talkers.
Explain: Teacher introduces formal vocabulary and language to students.	Code Talker syntax dialect decipher tonal quality Pacific Theatre simulate encrypted stymied
Elaborate: Students apply what they have learned.	Students will develop a greater understanding of the Navajo Code Talkers, and their contributions to the success of United States military operations in the Pacific Theatre during World War II.
Evaluate: assessment.	Teachers should choose which activities to use as formal/informal assessment.
Enrichment/Service-Learning Project	Students will brainstorm a way to serve their local community in honor of the Navajo Code Talkers. See a list of potential projects on the last page.

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Navajo Code Talkers K-W-L

What I **KNOW**

What I **WANT** to KNOW

What I **LEARNED**



Remember-Honor-Teach

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[Naval History and Heritage Command](#)

Navajo Code Talkers

World War II Fact Sheet

Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Peleliu, Iwo Jima: the Navajo code talkers took part in every assault the U.S. Marines conducted in the Pacific from 1942 to 1945. They served in all six Marine divisions, Marine Raider battalions and Marine parachute units, transmitting messages by telephone and radio in their native language a code that the Japanese never broke.

The idea to use Navajo for secure communications came from Philip Johnston, the son of a missionary to the Navajos and one of the few non-Navajos who spoke their language fluently. Johnston, reared on the Navajo reservation, was a World War I veteran who knew of the military's search for a code that would withstand all attempts to decipher it. He also knew that Native American languages notably Choctaw had been used in World War I to encode messages.

Johnston believed Navajo answered the military requirement for an undecipherable code because Navajo is an unwritten language of extreme complexity. Its syntax and tonal qualities, not to mention dialects, make it unintelligible to anyone without extensive exposure and training. It has no alphabet or symbols and is spoken only on the Navajo lands of the American Southwest. One estimate indicates that less than 30 non-Navajos, none of them Japanese, could understand the language at the outbreak of World War II.

Early in 1942, Johnston met with Major General Clayton B. Vogel, the commanding general of Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, and his staff to convince them of the Navajo language's value as code. Johnston staged tests under simulated combat conditions, demonstrating that Navajos could encode, transmit, and decode a three-line English message in 20 seconds. Machines of the time required 30 minutes to perform the same job. Convinced, Vogel recommended to the Commandant of the Marine Corps that the Marines recruit 200 Navajos.

In May 1942, the first 29 Navajo recruits attended boot camp. Then, at Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, California, this first group created the Navajo code. They developed a dictionary and numerous words for military terms. The dictionary and all code words had to be memorized during training.

Once a Navajo code talker completed his training, he was sent to a Marine unit deployed in the Pacific theater. [They were not sent to the European front, because Hitler knew about the successful use of code talkers during WWI. He sent a team of anthropologists to learn Native American languages before the outbreak of WWII. The many languages and dialects made it too difficult for them to learn much, but because of Hitler's attempts, the U.S. Army did not implement a large-scale code talker program in the European Theatre. The majority of code talkers were used in the Pacific Theatre against the Japanese.] The code talkers' primary job was to talk, transmitting information on tactics and troop movements, orders and other vital battlefield communications over telephones and radios. They also acted as messengers and performed general Marine duties.

Praise for their skill, speed and accuracy accrued throughout the war. At Iwo Jima, Major Howard Connor, 5th Marine Division signal officer, declared, "Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima." Connor had six Navajo code talkers working around the clock during the first two days of the battle. Those six sent and received over 800 messages, all without error.

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The Japanese, who were skilled code breakers, remained baffled by the Navajo language. The Japanese chief of intelligence, Lieutenant General Seizo Arisue, said that while they were able to decipher the codes used by the U.S. Army and Army Air Corps, they never cracked the code used by the Marines. The Navajo code talkers even stymied a Navajo soldier taken prisoner at Bataan. (About 20 Navajos served in the U.S. Army in the Philippines.) The Navajo soldier, forced to listen to the jumbled words of talker transmissions, said to a code talker after the war, "I never figured out what you guys who got me into all that trouble were saying."

In 1942, there were about 50,000 Navajo tribe members. As of 1945, about 540 Navajos served as Marines. From 375 to 420 of those trained as code talkers; the rest served in other capacities.

Navajo remained potentially valuable as code even after the war. For that reason, the code talkers, whose skill, and courage saved both American lives and military engagements, only recently earned recognition from the Government and the public. [The Navajo Code was not declassified until 1968, the code was used sparingly in the Korean Conflict and Vietnam.]

The Navajo Code Talker's Dictionary

When a Navajo code talker received a message, what he heard was a string of seemingly unrelated Navajo words. The code talker first had to translate each Navajo word into its English equivalent. Then he used only the first letter of the English equivalent in spelling an English word. Thus, the Navajo words "wol-la-chee" (ant), "be-la-sana" (apple) and "tse-nill" (axe) all stood for the letter "a." One way to say the word "Navy" in Navajo code would be "tsah (needle) wol-la-chee (ant) ah-keh-di- glini (victor) tsah-ah-dzoh (yucca)."

Most letters had more than one Navajo word representing them. Not all words had to be spelled out letter by letter. The developers of the original code assigned Navajo words to represent about 450 frequently used military terms that did not exist in the Navajo language. Several examples: "besh- lo" (iron fish) meant "submarine," "dah-he- tih-hi" (hummingbird) meant "fighter plane" and "debeh-li-zine" (black street) meant "squad."

Department of Defense Honors Navajo Veterans

Long unrecognized because of the continued value of their language as a security classified code, the Navajo code talkers of World War II were honored for their contributions to defense on Sept. 17, 1992, at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Thirty-five code talkers, all veterans of the U.S. Marine Corps, attended the dedication of the Navajo code talker exhibit. The exhibit includes a display of photographs, equipment, and the original code, along with an explanation of how the code worked.

Dedication ceremonies included speeches by the then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Donald Atwood, U.S. Senator John McCain of Arizona, and Navajo President Peterson Zah. The Navajo veterans and their families traveled to the ceremony from their homes on the Navajo Reservation, which includes parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.

Prepared by the Navy & Marine Corps WWII Commemorative Committee.

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Navajo Code Talkers
World War II Fact Sheet
Reflection Questions

1. When were Code Talkers first used by the United States military during a war?

2. Which native language was used?

3. Who came up with the idea to use the Navajo as Code Talkers during World War II?

4. Why was he familiar with the Navajo language?

5. Why did he think the Navajo language would be a good fit?

6. How did Johnston convince Major General Vogel of the value of the Navajo language as code for the Marine Corp?

7. Who created the Navajo Code?

8. Where were the Navajo Code Talkers sent after training?

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9. Why weren't the Code Talkers sent to the European front of the war in large numbers?

10. What was the primary job of the Code Talkers?

11. According to Major Howard Connor, what impact did the Navajo Code Talkers have on the war?

12. Why was the Navajo Code considered to be such a success during World War II?

13. How did the Navajo Code Talkers decode and encode the messages they sent?

14. When was the Navajo Code declassified?

15. In what year were the contributions of the Navajo Code Talkers recognized?

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Answer Key

Navajo Code Talkers

World War II Fact Sheet

Reflection Questions

1. When were Code Talkers first used by the United States military during a war?

World War I

2. Which native language was used? **Choctaw**

3. Who came up with the idea to use the Navajo as Code Talkers during World War II?

Philip Johnston

4. Why was he familiar with the Navajo language?

Johnston was the son of a missionary; he was raised on the Navajo reservation. He was one of the few non-Navajos who spoke their language fluently.

5. Why did he think the Navajo language would be a good fit? **Johnston believed Navajo answered the military requirement for an undecipherable code because Navajo is an unwritten language of extreme complexity. Its syntax and tonal qualities, not to mention dialects, make it unintelligible to anyone without extensive exposure and training. It has no alphabet or symbols and is spoken only on the Navajo lands of the American Southwest.**

6. How did Johnston convince Major General Vogel of the value of the Navajo language as code for the Marine Corp? **Johnston staged tests under simulated combat conditions, demonstrating that Navajos could encode, transmit, and decode a three-line English message in 20 seconds, it took the machines 30 minutes to decipher the same message.**

7. Who created the Navajo Code? **The first 29 Navajo recruits created the Navajo code.**

8. Where were the Navajo Code Talkers sent after training? **Marine Units in the Pacific.**

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9. Why weren't the Code Talkers sent to the European front of the war in large numbers? **Code Talkers were not sent to the European front, because Hitler knew about the successful use of code talkers during WWI. He sent a team of anthropologists to learn Native American languages before the outbreak of WWII.**

10. What was the primary job of the Code Talkers? **The Code Talkers' primary job was to talk, transmitting information on tactics and troop movements, orders and other vital battlefield communications over telephones and radios. They also acted as messengers and performed general Marine duties.**

11. According to Major Howard Connor, what impact did the Navajo Code Talkers have on the war? **Major Howard Connor attributed the success at Iwo Jima to the Navajo Code Talkers.**

12. Why was the Navajo Code considered to be such a success during World War II? **The Navajo Code was considered a success because the Japanese could not decipher the code.**

13. How did the Navajo Code Talkers decode and code the messages they sent? **When a Navajo code talker received a message, what he heard was a string of seemingly unrelated Navajo words. The code talker first had to translate each Navajo word into its English equivalent. Then he used only the first letter of the English equivalent in spelling an English word.**

14. When was the Navajo Code declassified? **1968**

15. In what year were the contributions of the Navajo Code Talkers recognized? **1992**

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Terms in English and Navajo Language

Alphabet (English)	Code language (English)	Code language (Navajo)
A	Ant	Wol-la-chee
B	Bear	Shush
C	Cat	Moashi
D	Deer	Be
E	Elk	Dzeh
F	Fox	Ma-e
G	Goat	Klizzie
H	Horse	Lin
I	Ice	Tkin
J	Jack	Tkele-cho-gi
K	Kid	Klizzie-yazzi
L	Lamb	Dibeh-yazzi
M	Mouse	Na-as-tso-si
N	Nut	Nesh-chee
O	Owl	Ne-ash-jsn
P	Pig	Bi-sodih
Q	Quiver	Ca-yeilth
R	Rabbit	Gah
S	Sheep	Dibeh
T	Turkey	Than-zie
U	Ute	No-da-ih
V	Victor	a-keh-di-glini
W	Weasel	Gloe-ih
X	Cross	Al-an-as-dzoh
Y	Yucca	Tsah-as-zih
Z	Zinc	Besh-do-gliz

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Code Talker Activity

1. Directions: Using the Navajo Code Words, decipher the following message. New words are capitalized in the message and it does contain some punctuation. If a word has a dash (-), then the connected words are one Navajo word.

EXAMPLE:

Navajo code language- Than-zie lin dzeh

Code language English- Turkey horse elk

English alphabet- The

Than-zie lin tkin dibeh Tkin dibeh Than-zie ne-ash-jsn bi-sodih
Dibeh dzeh moashi gah dzeh than-zie. Than-zie lin zeh Dzeh
nesh-chee dzeh na-as-tso-si tsah-as-zih Tkin dibeh Wol-la-chee
bi-sodih bi-sodih gah ne-ash-jsn wol-la-chee moashi lin tkin
nesh-chee klizzie Ma-e gah ne-ash-jsn na-as-tso-si Than-zie lin
dzeh Nesh-chee ne-ash-jsn gah than-zie lin Shush gah tkin be
klizzie dzeh. Wol-la-chee tkin gah Dibeh than-zie gah tkin
klizzie-yazzi dzeh dibeh Wol-la-chee gah dzeh Ne-ash-jsn Nesh-
chee Than-zie lin dzeh Gloe-ih wol-la-chee tsah-as-zih.

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Answer Key

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Code Talker Activity

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EXAMPLE:

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Than-zie lin tkin dibeh Tkin dibeh Than-zie ne-ash-jsn bi-sodih
Dibeh dzeh moashi gah dzeh than-zie. Than-zie lin zeh Dzeh
nesh-chee dzeh na-as-tso-si tsah-as-zih Tkin dibeh Wol-la-chee
bi-sodih bi-sodih gah ne-ash-jsn wol-la-chee moashi lin tkin
nesh-chee klizzie Ma-e gah ne-ash-jsn na-as-tso-si Than-zie lin
dzeh Nesh-chee ne-ash-jsn gah than-zie lin Shush gah tkin be
klizzie dzeh. Wol-la-chee tkin gah Dibeh than-zie gah tkin
klizzie-yazzi dzeh dibeh Wol-la-chee gah dzeh Ne-ash-jsn Nesh-
chee Than-zie lin dzeh Gloe-ih wol-la-chee tsah-as-zih.

Answer: This is top secret. The enemy is approaching from the North bridge. Air strikes are on the way.

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Find a Way to Serve

- Help an elderly neighbor with yard work.
- Volunteer at your local library.
- Create “Survival Back-Packs” for the homeless with socks, caps, gloves, toothpaste, a toothbrush and other toiletries to be distributed to homeless people in your community.
- Organize a Checkers, board game or card game tournament at your local nursing home. Coordinate with the nursing home staff and plan a fun afternoon for the residents and students alike!
- Write letters to be included in soldier care packages. [Operation Gratitude](#) sends over 250,000 packages to Servicemen and Women, and First Responders annually, the link above provides guidelines for participation in their program.
- Collaborate with teachers, students, administration, and parents to create a food “Back-Pack” pantry at your school for students who may have food insecurities at home. Twenty-two million children receive free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program and the National School Breakfast Program. For many of these children, school meals may be the only meals they eat during the day.
- Make a “New Student Kit” for students who are new to your school. Create a list of school clubs, a calendar of events, school lunch menus, map of the school, and something with the school mascot to help the student feel like they are welcome.
- Organize a Zoom Meeting between your class at school and local nursing home residents. Discuss what their childhoods were like growing up, what kind of classes they took in school. Did they live in town or in the country, what kinds of chores and activities did they participate in when they were your age. Document their responses and share with other classes in your school. If some of your interviewees have a talent like singing or playing the piano, maybe they could share those talents with the class the next time you Zoom. Once you have met the residents, select a “pin-pal” you can correspond with by letter every few weeks.
- Be a companion to a senior citizen in a local nursing home. Make cards, surprise them with visits around their birthday or sing carols for them around the holidays.
- Organize a coat drive in your school/community that collects new and slightly used coats as part of [ONEWARMCOAT.org](#)
- Use AARP’s [Create the Good Guide](#) to start recycling events in your community.