



LESSON PLAN:

Code Talkers

Middle School (6-8) or High School (9-12)

OVERVIEW:

Students learn about the Code Talkers and make connections to their prior knowledge to explore the significance of this celebrated group of American Indian soldiers in historical and cultural context.

American Indians served in important military intelligence roles during World War I and World War II. Members of various American Indian nations, particularly the Navajo, used their native languages to transmit secret military messages on the battlefield. Their efforts proved crucial to U.S. military success during World Wars I and II.

Resources include a PowerPoint slide deck and a handout. Students use the handout to answer questions before, during and after the PowerPoint presentation.

Estimated time: 1 class period, 15-20 minutes total

STANDARDS:

- NCSS.D2.His.1.9-12: Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.3.9-12: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
- NCSS.D2.His.1.6-8: Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.3.9-12: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will describe who the Code Talkers were, what they did, and their legacy.
- Students will explain connections between the story of the Code Talkers and other topics discussed in class.

RESOURCES NEEDED:

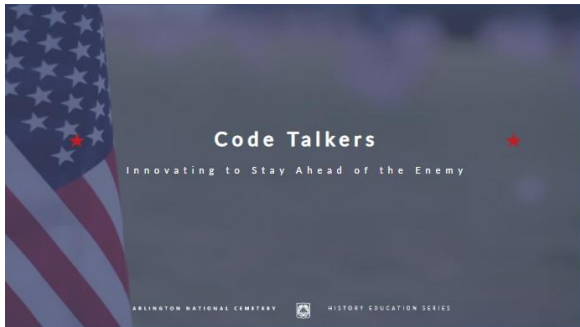
- Code Talkers PowerPoint presentation
- Copies of “Code Talkers” student handout (one per student)



LESSON ACTIVITIES

- Introduction/Anticipatory Set: 2 minutes
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 1
 - Instruct students to make a guess and write an answer for first question on their worksheet: “Who were the Code Talkers? What did they do?”
Encourage students to write anything they can think of – do they recognize any words on the screen? What do the words “code talkers” indicate to them? Does the American flag picture make them think of anything?
 - *It is likely most students will only be able to guess that the Code Talkers are related to military intelligence in some way – that they helped write and/or decrypt codes. Encourage students to write what they can, based on the limited information on the screen at this time.*

- PowerPoint Presentation: 10-15 minutes
Students should answer the questions on their worksheet while the teacher presents the information in the PowerPoint.

Slide:	Notes for Presentation
Slide 1: Code Talkers 	<p>Make a guess: Who were the Code Talkers? What did they do?</p> <p><i>Answers may include:</i> People who wrote codes, people who broke codes, spies, secret agents, military personnel</p> <p>Class brainstorm: Why might the military need codes and people who can write and break codes?</p> <p><i>Answers may include:</i> In a war, it is important that enemy nations don't know your plans.</p> <p>Ask: What would happen if your enemies can listen to your communications and know your plans?</p> <p><i>Answers may include:</i> They can defeat you, surprise attacks are no longer possible, they can send more troops than you have because they know your numbers, they can learn your weaknesses and target them</p>



Slide 2: Background

BACKGROUND

- U.S. military needed a way to send secret messages during World War I and II
- Enlisted American Indians who could speak English and their tribal language
- Called Code Talkers



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During World War I and World War II, the United States military needed a way to send messages that their enemies could not read. One solution was to enlist American Indians who were fluent in English and their native tribal language to send secret messages in battle. These American Indians were called Code Talkers.

Slide 3: What's in a Name?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?



Navajo: American Indian Nation currently located in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah



Code: a rule for substituting words or letters to create a secret message



Encryption: a process converting information into a code

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At least 15 American Indian nations served in World War I and World War II as code talkers.

One of the most famous groups of American Indian code talkers was the **Navajo** Nation. The Navajo Nation is currently located in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah.

A **code** is a rule for creating a secret message. It is a fixed relationship between two sets of things (words, ideas, symbols, etc.). For example, nodding is code for yes; the code word for "ship" might be "flower"

Encryption is the process in which a message is converted into a code to hide its true meaning. Encryption still happens on emails and software with sensitive information.

Slide 4: Beginnings

BEGINNINGS

- Started in World War I
- Transmitted sensitive messages as an unofficial policy
 - Translated messages into their native tribal language
 - Transmitted by telephone
- Referred to as Radio Talkers
- Members of nine different nations served during WWI



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American Indians began sending coded messages about troop movements and enemy positions during World War I.

They translated the messages into their native language to relay to another member of their nation. They transmitted these messages by telephone.

Members from nine different American Indian nations served in this unofficial intelligence role during World War I. Referred to as radio talkers, they set the stage for the larger official program that would emerge in World War II.

Slide 5: Complicated Relationship

Although American Indians had served with the United States in armed conflict since the



COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP

- Indian Wars: U.S. military fought American Indian tribes from 1862-1890
- U.S. wanted to promote and protect westward expansion
- American Indians massacred, forced onto reservations, and forced to assimilate
- American Indians did not gain U.S. citizenship until 1924



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country's founding, the relationship between the U.S. military and American Indian nations remained complicated.

One historical conflict that impacted the relationship between the United States and American Indian nations was the "Indian Wars." The Indian Wars, as the U.S. government called them, were a series of 19th-century military conflicts between the United States and various American Indian tribes or nations, including the Lakota, Comanche, Sioux, and Cheyenne. These wars started with the Dakota War of 1862 and ended with the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890.

The United States waged these wars to promote and protect American westward expansion, to the detriment of Native communities throughout the west. As a result of the Indian Wars, American Indians were massacred and forced onto reservations or to assimilate into U.S. culture and society.

Additionally, during World War I, not all American Indians were recognized as U.S. citizens. American Indians did not gain citizenship until 1924. Regardless, thousands of American Indians joined the military to serve in both World War I and World War II.

Slide 6: Military Service

MILITARY SERVICE

Why serve in the U.S. military?

- Warrior tradition to protect this land and their communities
- Military offered a stable job and access to education
- A sense of patriotism
- As a potential path toward equal rights


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Ask: Given the complicated relationship between the United States and American Indian nations, why might have American Indians chosen to serve in the U.S. military?

American Indians who served in the military each had their own motivations for their service. Some common motivations include:

- Many American Indian nations have a deep respect for warriors – people who are willing to fight and give their life to protect their community. This warrior tradition calls many American Indians to



	<p>serve in the military – to protect this land, on which they’ve lived for thousands of years, and their communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The military offers a stable job and access to education. • A sense of patriotism. • Many American Indians believed that military service would offer a path toward equal rights. <p>American Indians still serve in the military at a high rate. Since 2001, nearly 19% of all American Indians have served in the military. The average service rate for all other demographics is 14%.</p>
<p>Slide 7: WWII Code Talkers</p> <div data-bbox="207 913 776 1228"> <p>WWII CODE TALKERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1940: Army recruited Comanche, Meskwaki, Chippewa, Oneida, and Hopi to transmit coded messages • 1941: Marine Corps recruited Navajo • 29 Navajos developed a secret code within their language • Over 400 Navajo served during WWII as Code Talkers  <p>ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY HISTORY EDUCATION 228/23</p> </div>	<p>In 1940, the military began officially recruiting American Indians to transmit coded messages. The Army began recruiting Comanche, Meskwaki, Chippewa, Oneida, and Hopi.</p> <p>In 1941, the Marine Corps began recruiting Navajo. This program quickly took off. At the start, 29 Navajos developed a secret code within their language. They wrote a unique dictionary for writing and decoding secret messages.</p> <p>The Marine Corps then established a Code Talking school to train other Navajo in this code. Over 400 Navajo served during World War II as Code Talkers. Some were drafted and others volunteered.</p>
<p>Slide 8: How it Worked</p>	<p>There were two main types of code used by the Code Talkers. Many different American Indian languages used this model, but we will use Navajo as an example.</p> <p>In the first code, a Navajo word would be assigned to an English letter. This method allowed Code Talkers to spell out words or strategic points.</p>



HOW IT WORKED

- Type 1: Navajo word = English Letter
 - Ex. Tsah = N
- Type 2: Navajo word = English word = English meaning
 - Ex. Gini = Chicken Hawk = Dive Bomber Plane
- Many different American Indian languages used these types of codes



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The second type of code tied different Navajo words to different English words. For example, the Navajo word "Gini" translated into English as "Chicken Hawk" which stood for a dive bomber plane.

Slide 9: Try it Yourself

TRY IT YOURSELF

TKIN TSIN-TLITI DIBEH TSIN-TLITI
WOL-LA-CHEE GAH D-AH

Letter	Navajo Word	Literal Translation
A	WOL-LA-CHEE	ANT
B	NA-HASH-CHID	BADGER
C	MOASI	CAT
D	CHINDI	DEVIL
E	AH-JAH	EAR
F	CHUJO	FIR
G	AH-TAD	GIRL
H	TSE-GAH	HAIR
I	TSIN	ICE
J	AH-YA-TSINNE	JAW
K	JAD-HO-LONI	KETTLE
L	DIBEH-YAZZIE	LAMB
M	TSIN-TLITI	MATCH

Letter	Navajo Word	Literal Translation
N	TSAH	NEEDLE
O	A-KHA	OIL
P	CLA-GH-AH	PANT
Q	CA-YULITH	QUIVER
R	GAH	RABBIT
S	DIBEH	SHEEP
T	D-AH	TOOTH
U	SIB-DA	UNCLE
V	A-KEH-DU-GLINI	VICTOR
W	GLOE-TH	WEASEL
X	AL-NA-AS-DI-OH	CROSS
Y	TSAH-AS-ZIH	YUCCA
Z	BESH-DO-TLIZ	ZINC

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Try solving a Type 1 code yourself:

Coded Message:

TKIN TSIN-TLITI DIBEH TSIN-TLITI WOL-LA-CHEE GAH D-AH

English Translation: I'm smart

(*Students can also complete this using their handout.)

Slide 10: World War II Big Moment

WORLD WAR II BIG MOMENT

- Navajo Code Talkers participated in nearly every major Marine Corps battle in the Pacific
- Could translate, transmit, and decode a message in minutes (versus hours)
- During the Battle of Iwo Jima, they transmitted over 800 messages with zero errors
- "Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima"



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Navajo Code Talkers played an essential role in World War II and participated in nearly every major battle involving the Marines in the Pacific. During a test, the Code Talkers successfully translated, transmitted, and decoded a message in 2.5 minutes – something that would've taken a soldier hours if not using Navajo code.

During the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945, one of the most important battles of World War II, Navajo Talkers transmitted over 800 messages without a single error, helping lead to an American victory. Major Howard Connor later said, "Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima."

Throughout the war, American Indian Code Talkers served in every major theater of the war. Navajo and Hopi primarily served in the Pacific. The Comanche fought in Europe and the Meskwakis in North Africa.



Slide 11: Legacy

LEGACY

- Code Talkers and their sacrifices stayed largely unknown until 1968
- Congress awarded the Code Talkers Congressional gold and silver medals in 2000





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After the war, however, the Navajo Code Talkers were not recognized for their important service because the Code Talker program was secret and classified. After the program was declassified in 1968, they started to receive recognition and honors for their service.

In 2000, Congress awarded special gold and silver Congressional Medals to the Navajo Code Talkers. The 29 Navajo who created the secret code were awarded the gold medal, while everyone else was awarded the silver medal.

The Navajo phrase on the medal translates to, "With the Navajo language they defeated the enemy."

Slide 12: Legacy

CONNECTIONS

Does the story of the Code Talkers remind you of anything else you have learned?
What connections can you make to your prior knowledge?




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Now that you've been introduced to the Code Talkers, what connections can you make to other things you have learned in class?

- Conclusion: 3 mins
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 11
 - Encourage students to consider how the diversity that American Indians bring to the United States made this program and their important service possible. This program could not have existed if American Indians did not have their own native languages and cultures.
 - Instruct students to complete their worksheet by writing a few sentences about connections they can make between the story of the Code Talkers and other topics you have covered in class. Encourage students to share as time allows.



LESSON EXTENSIONS:

- Explore the National Museum of the American Indian's online exhibit, "[Native Words, Native Warriors](#)."
- Visit Arlington National Cemetery to learn more about military intelligence:
<https://education.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Themes/Military-Intelligence>.
 - School Military Intelligence Walking Tour
 - Children's Military Intelligence Activity Packet



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PHOTOS:

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