

Unit Plan: Code Talker by Joseph Bruchac	
Grade	8
Duration	Approximately 8 weeks
Edition (ISBN)	0-439-89100-0

Unit Overview

High level overview of the text at the core

A Navajo (Diné) boy, Kii Yazhi, is taken away from his family at the age of six and sent 100 miles away to a mission boarding school. While at school, he is stripped of his “Indian name” and becomes “Ned Begay.” For the next ten years, “Ned” is forced to abandon any sign of his culture and heritage, particularly his native language, but after the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor, Ned longs to join the fight and convinces his parents to allow him to enlist. Ned thrives in boot camp and after graduation learns he will be part of a special unit of fellow Navajo recruits whose mission is top secret. Ned’s unit transmits critical messages across the Pacific theater of war using a Navajo-based code language and is crucial to the success of the Allied efforts. But, while Ned feels pride in the contribution of his language and role, he continues to experience the discrimination and lack of acceptance of many of his fellow marines. After the war ends, the Code Talkers and their role in the Allied victory remain classified, and Ned feels keenly the unfairness suffered by Native Americans. However, he refuses to give up and continues the fight to tell his story about the strength of the “Dine’.”

Big Ideas

Conceptual understandings from the unit

- *Identity is shaped by cultural and social influences as well as the decisions we make about those influences.*
 - *Subordinate ideas:*
 - a. *Being stripped of one’s language and one’s name is a way to strip one’s identity.*
 - b. *Language is an essential part of one’s identity and one should retain their language.*
 - c. *The groups we belong to influence our identity.*
 - d. *Our traditions and customs shape our identity.*
- *There is value in knowing and honoring one’s heritage.*
 - a. *In order to find “balance,” we must value and hold onto our cultural roots even when the majority try to strip them away.*
- *Forced assimilation often devalues the contribution that exposure to and incorporation of another culture brings.*
- *Courage is refusing to conform to societal expectations when it requires a denial of culture and personal belief systems.*
- *Our history is communicated through the stories we tell, and our stories help us understand who we are and where we come from.*
- *War, though sometimes necessary, is not a good thing, it causes not only physical but also spiritual injuries.*

Essential Questions

Questions driving the Big Ideas

- What is in a name? Why do names have meaning?
- How does language contribute to identity? What is the significance of a shared language?
- What is the impetus behind power structures? Acculturation?
 - a. What/Who determines the dominant race?
 - b. What causes one to assimilate?
- Why is it important to tell our stories to those who come after us? How do oppressive narratives influence us and redefine our collective identity and memory?

Culminating Task

Assessment that demonstrates mastery of unit content

Throughout the novel, Ned shares things and events that are important to him. His “medal” prompts the telling of his story as both a Navajo and a marine. His description of the “Blessingway” reveals his journey from young boy to a young man going off to war. In Lesson 3, students drafted a story about an “artifact” that meant something in their life. In Lesson 9, students drafted a story about a “rite of passage” or ritual. Both of these stories told of things that shaped who they are. Students will build upon one of these two formative assessment tasks to write a chapter in one of these stories.

Or

Throughout the novel, Ned has consistently referenced his Navajo roots and how this has shaped him. Although this is Ned’s story, it is so much more than the story of one person. It is the story of Ned’s Navajo buddies, it is a story of Smitty & Georgia Boy, it is a story of Ned’s white teachers and fellow soldiers, and it is a story of the Japanese people. In Lessons 22 & 23, students were asked to consider Ned’s story from a different perspective: as a grandchild or as a citizen of Japan. Students will build upon one of these two formative assessment tasks to write a chapter in one of these stories.

Key Background Knowledge

Core knowledge that students will build throughout this unit

Contextual Knowledge

- *Treatment of Native Americans over the course of American History*
- *Navajo (Diné) culture and traditions*
- *Native American naming conventions*
- *The role of Code Talkers during World War I and II*
- *The War in the Pacific (World War II)*
- *Area Map of the Pacific Islands*
- *Timeline of Navajo (Diné) History from the 1830 Indian Removal Act to the Present*

Literary Knowledge

- *First-person narration (e.g., tone, irony, reliability)*
- *Motif*
- *Figurative Language (metaphor, simile)*
- *Imagery*
- *Diction (Word Choice)*

Historically Responsive Literacy Framework

Dr. Gholdy Muhammad's Five Learning Pursuits

Identity

- *Students will learn:*
 - *That language is an important part of a person's cultural identity*
 - *A person can identify with multiple groups of people*
 - *Cultural and societal influences shape our actions and perspectives*

Skills

- *Students will...*
- *ELA: Analyze the craft and structure of a fictional first person narrative.*
- *Math: Gain an understanding of navigational distances*
- *Science:*
- *Social Studies: Gain an understanding of the War in the South Pacific and the history and contributions of the Navajo.*

Intellect

- *Students will...*
 - *Recognize that stories can be told from multiple perspectives and viewpoints*
 - *Appreciate that language is an essential part of building community*
 - *Realize that it is possible to belong to multiple communities. For example, indigenous peoples are citizens of their indigenous communities and also of the U.S.*

Criticality

- *Students will consider how forced assimilation and conformity to a majority culture often devalues the contribution that exposure to and incorporation of another culture brings.*

Joy

- *Students will learn how staying true to themselves and honoring their heritage contributes to their happiness and well-being.*

Connections to Core Instructional Resources

Click [HERE](#)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Alignment between unit content and SEL goals

Skill Objectives: Students will learn to...

- predict others' feelings and perspectives in a variety of situations
- analyze how one's behavior may affect others
- explain how individual, social, and cultural differences may increase vulnerability to oppression and identify ways to address it
- analyze the effects to oppose oppression based on individual and group differences

Career Education and Work (CEW) Connection

13.3.8 Career Retention and Advancement

G. Identify formal and informal lifelong learning opportunities that support career retention and advancement.

Naviance Task

Goal Setting- *Students will consider how making SMART goals play a role in their present and future. Students will identify two SMART goals that speak to their truth and will help to define who they are and would like to become as an individual. (Adversity)*

Unit Development

Jennifer Donohue, Patrice Bertotto, Therese Nolan-Mazzarella (Lead)

Unit Supports

Vocabulary	English Language Development (ELD)	Multi Level Student Supports (MTSS)	Special Education	Career Work and Education/ Naviance	Social Emotional Learning
Jennifer Donohue	Trish O'Neill	Stacey Edwards	Denise Baumbach and Jenn White	Cathey White	Jaimie L. Piotrowicz