

Classroom Lesson Plan — Navajo Code Talkers Day

Provided by [National Day Classroom](#)

Subject: U.S. History / Social Studies

1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain who the Navajo Code Talkers were and why their work was important during WWII.
- Understand how the Navajo language helped the U.S. military keep messages secret.
- Recognize August 14 as Navajo Code Talkers Day, honoring their service.
- Appreciate the value of language, culture, and teamwork in history.

2. Short Story: Cal Learns the Secret Code

Cal slumped in his chair as Mr. Jenkins pulled down the projector screen. “Class,” Mr. Jenkins began, “today we’re traveling back in time to World War II.”

On the screen, a black-and-white photo of young Navajo Marines appeared. “These brave men were called Navajo Code Talkers. They used their language — which was very rare and difficult to learn — to send secret military messages the enemy could never figure out.”

Cal leaned forward. “So, like secret agents?”

Mr. Jenkins smiled. “In a way, yes. But their code was faster and more secure than any machine at the time. Not a single message was ever broken.”

Cal imagined sitting with a radio in the middle of a noisy battlefield, speaking in Navajo while soldiers raced to follow the message. He realized these men weren’t just soldiers — they were heroes whose culture helped win the war.

“That,” Cal whispered to his friend Mia, “is the coolest history lesson ever.”

3. Background Information (Teacher Talking Points)

- **Who they were:** A group of over 400 Navajo men who served as U.S. Marines during WWII.
- **Why their language was used:** Navajo is complex, has no written form, and was unknown to most outsiders.
- **How the code worked:** They created words in Navajo to represent military terms, then transmitted them over radios in battle.
- **Impact:** Their code was never broken, helping the U.S. win important battles in the Pacific.
- **Recognition:** August 14 was declared Navajo Code Talkers Day in 1982 by President Ronald

Reagan.

4. Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Navajo language made such an effective code?
2. How do you think it felt to be a Code Talker during a dangerous mission?
3. Why is it important to honor and remember their service today?
4. What can we learn from their teamwork and use of culture in helping others?

5. Activities

A. “Secret Message” Activity (10–15 min)

- Create a simple substitution code for students to decode a short message.
- Example: A = Dog, B = Cat, C = Bird, etc.
- Let students try to send short messages to each other, then “break” the code.
- Compare this to how hard it would be to break the Navajo code without knowing the language.

B. Code Talker Poster Project (15–20 min)

- Students design a poster showing:
 - A portrait or symbol of the Code Talkers.
 - A short explanation of their role in WWII.
 - One fact about the Navajo language.

C. Vocabulary & Language Appreciation (10 min)

- Teach students 3–5 simple Navajo words (with care for correct pronunciation).
- Discuss how every language is valuable and can be used in important ways.

6. Optional Extensions

- Show a short video interview with a surviving Code Talker (several are available through the Library of Congress or National Museum of the Marine Corps).
- Read excerpts from *Code Talker: A Novel About the Navajo Marines of World War Two* (by Joseph Bruchac, for older grades).
- Compare with other wartime codes like Morse code or the Enigma machine.

7. Closing

Explain that the Navajo Code Talkers not only served their country but also preserved and honored their language and culture. Their story is one of courage, teamwork, and the power of communication.

Visit [NationalDayClassroom.com](https://www.NationalDayClassroom.com) for more lessons and learning puzzles.