

## THE UNBREAKABLE CODE – All Ages

### DESCRIPTION:

Participants use declassified Navajo code to send messages to each other. In World War II, the United States Marine Corps (USMC) used Native Americans for tactical communications; the United States Army also made some attempts, though the scale of effort was much smaller. With Native American languages already being infrequently spoken, the USMC



Native American code talkers further secured the communications by devising code words in the native languages, thus achieving a code-within-a-code system.

Most of the USMC code talkers employed were of the Navajo tribe. Because Navajo is not a written language, the Axis forces could not learn the patterns from reading about the Navajo or reading their literature. When a Navajo code talker received a message to be decrypted, he would relay the message to the Navajo code talker on the other end by translating the English words into pre-defined code words. For example, the word for the warship "cruiser" would be spoken as "LO-TSO-YAZZIE." If the message was intercepted, however, even if the enemy had knowledge of the Navajo language, "LO-TSO-YAZZIE" would only mean "small whale." This two-level layer of complexity was the code-within-a-code system that made the code so difficult to break. While "cruiser" was coded as "small whale," there were many words that were not specifically coded. In those cases, words were spelled out by the letters of the alphabet, which was also coded. To prevent the enemy from deciphering the code by the frequency of each letter, multiple versions of each letter were introduced to thwart decrypting efforts.

### MATERIALS

- Navajo Code Talkers' Dictionary - partially included at the end of this document and also available on Naval History and Heritage Command website: <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/n/navajo-code-talker-dictionary.html>)
- Paper and pencils/pens, or braille slate and stylus

## STEPS:

1. Review the Navajo Code Talkers' Dictionary
2. Write a one-sentence message to translate into code
3. Using the Navajo Code Talkers' Dictionary, rewrite the message by translating the words that have a corresponding Navajo code. The remaining words that do not have a corresponding Navajo code must be translated letter-by-letter. (The encoded message will be LONG!)
4. Exchange messages to decode with a family member or friend
5. **Challenge:** Use the Navajo Code Talker Dictionary to decipher the answers to these questions, and then check below to see if you are correct.
  - a. Decipher the following code to find out who suggested using the Navajo language for secure communications: Ne-Zhoni-Lin-Tkin-Ah-Jad-Tkin-Ne-Zhoni Ah-Ya-Tsinne-A-Kha-Lin-A-Chin-Klesh-D-Ah-A-Kha-A-Chin
  - b. Decipher the code below to find out which battle the Navajo Code Talkers used their skills to help the U.S. achieve a victory: Tkin-Gloe-lh-A-Kha Ah-Ya-Tsinne-Tkin-Tsin-Tliti-Tse-Nill

## RELATED VIDEOS

How was the Navajo Code of World War II Developed? A code talker explains: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rjrZIBA4nQ>

Dallas Morning News: Navajo Code Talkers Explain Their Code Used in World War II: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqP7LqLYToY>

**ANSWERS:**

- A. Philip Johnston
- B. Iwo Jima

**RELATED BOOKS****Juvenile Nonfiction:**

CHESTER NEZ AND THE UNBREAKABLE CODE: A NAVAJO CODE TALKER'S STORY by Joseph Bruchac (DB 90917)

**Middle Grade Fiction:**

HEALER OF THE WATER MONSTER by Brian Young (DB 104419; BR 24124)  
CODE TALKER: A NOVEL ABOUT THE NAVAJO MARINES OF WORLD WAR TWO by Joseph Bruchac (DB 60312; LB 14683)  
RACING THE SUN by Paul Pitts (DB 53089)

**Middle Grade Nonfiction:**

UNSUNG HEROES OF WORLD WAR II: THE STORY OF THE NAVAJO CODE TALKERS by Deanne Durrett(DB 49188)  
NAVAJO CODE TALKERS by Nathan Aaseng (DB 36463)  
WHO WERE THE NAVAJO CODE TALKERS? by James Buckley Jr. (DB 114134)

**Young Adult Fiction:**

LAUGHING BOY by Oliver La Farge (DB 33829; BR 10379; LB 05201)  
HEARTBEAT, DRUMBEAT by Irene Beltran Hernandez (DBC 26929)

**Adult Fiction:**

CEREMONY by Leslie Marmon Silko (DB 13366)  
WINDTALKERS by Max Allan Collins (DB 57132)

**Adult Nonfiction:**

CODE TALKER by Chester Nez (DBC 04951)  
CODE TALKER STORIES by Laura Tohe (DBC 05873)  
WINDS OF FREEDOM: THE STORY OF THE NAVAJO CODE TALKERS OF WORLD WAR II by Margaret T. Bixler (DB 49954)  
NAVAJO CODE TALKERS by Doris A. Paul (DB 55315)  
COMANCHE CODE TALKERS OF WORLD WAR II by William C. Meadows (DB 59031)

## Navajo Code Talkers' Dictionary

<b>ALPHABET</b>	<b>NAVAJO WORD</b>	<b>LITERAL TRANSLATION</b>
A	WOL-LA-CHEE	ANT
A	BE-LA-SANA	APPLE
A	TSE-NILL	AXE
B	NA-HASH-CHID	BADGER
B	SHUSH	BEAR
B	TOISH-JEH	BARREL
C	MOASI	CAT
C	TLA-GIN	COAL
C	BA-GOSHI	COW
D	BE	DEER
D	CHINDI	DEVIL
D	LHA-CHA-EH	DOG
E	AH-JAH	EAR
E	DZEH	ELK
E	AH-NAH	EYE
F	CHUO	FIR
F	TSA-E-DONIN-EE	FLY
F	MA-E	FOX
G	AH-TAD	GIRL
G	KLIZZIE	GOAT
G	JEHA	GUM
H	TSE-GAH	HAIR
H	CHA	HAT
H	LIN	HORSE
I	TKIN	ICE
I	YEH-HES	ITCH
I	A-CHI	INTESTINE
J	TKELE-CHO-G	JACKASS
J	AH-YA-TSINNE	JAW
J	YIL-DOI	JERK
K	JAD-HO-LONI	KETTLE
K	BA-AH-NE-DI-TININ	KEY
K	KLIZZIE-YAZZIE	KID
L	DIBEH-YAZZIE	LAMB
L	AH-JAD	LEG
L	NASH-DOIE-TSO	LION

M	TSIN-TLITI	MATCH
M	BE-TAS-TNI	MIRROR
M	NA-AS-TSO-SI	MOUSE
N	TSAH	NEEDLE
N	A-CHIN	NOSE
O	A-KHA	OIL
O	TLO-CHIN	ONION
O	NE-AHS-JAH	OWL
P	CLA-GI-AIH	PANT
P	BI-SO-DIH	PIG
P	NE-ZHONI	PRETTY
Q	CA-YEILTH	QUIVER
R	GAH	RABBIT
R	DAH-NES-TSA	RAM
R	AH-LOSZ	RICE
S	DIBEH	SHEEP
S	KLESH	SNAKE
T	D-AH	TEA
T	A-WOH	TOOTH
T	THAN-ZIE	TURKEY
U	SHI-DA	UNCLE
U	NO-DA-IH	UTE
V	A-KEH-DI-GLINI	VICTOR
W	GLOE-IH	WEASEL
X	AL-NA-AS-DZOH	CROSS
Y	TSAH-AS-ZIH	YUCCA
Z	BESH-DO-TLIZ	ZINC