A Lesson Plan for 8th Grade
MISSION POSSIBLE: DECODING WWII NAVAJO MARINE CODE

Code Talker: A Novel About the Navajo Marines of World War Two
by Joseph Bruchac

“One book may be the key to many doors.”
—Joseph Bruchac

Created by Kelli L. Jones and the Arizona Geographic Alliance for the Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records

A Lesson Plan for 8th Grade, Mission Possible: Decoding WWII Navajo Marine Code • Code Talker by Joseph Bruchac • Page 1
Students learn about the Navajo culture and use the Navajo Code to decode and locate places of significance.

**Author:** Kelli L. Jones  
**Affiliation:** Arizona Geographic Alliance, Teacher Consultant  
**Grade Level:** 8th Grade  
**Duration:** 2-3 class periods (depending on length of class period)

**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS**

- **Essential Element I**  
  The World in Spatial Terms  
  **Standard 1.** How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

- **Essential Element II**  
  Places and Regions  
  **Standard 4.** The physical and human characteristics of places.

- **Essential Element VI**  
  The Uses of Geography  
  **Standard 17.** How to apply geography to interpret the past.

**ARIZONA SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARD**

- **Grade 8**  
  **Strand 4: Geography**  
  **Concept 1: The World in Spatial Terms**  
  **PO 4.** Locate physical and cultural features throughout the world.  
  **PO 5.** Interpret thematic maps, graphs, charts, and databases depicting various aspects of the United States and world regions. (Apply to regions studied.)

- **Concept 4: Human Systems**  
  **PO 3.** Describe the characteristics and locations of various cultures throughout the world.

- **Concept 6: Geographic Applications**  
  **PO 1.** Describe ways geographic features and conditions influence history.

**OTHER STANDARDS**

- **SOCIAL STUDIES (Grade 8)**  
  **Strand 1: American History**  
  **Concept 1: Research Skills for History**  
  **PO 1.** Construct charts, graphs, and narratives using historical data.

- **Concept 8: Great Depression & World War II**  
  **PO 5.** Describe Arizona’s contributions to the war effort:  

- **ELL IV (Correlates with Grades 6-8)**  
  **Comprehending Text**  
  **8.** Navigates text that includes factual information with many unfamiliar names and events.  
  **12.** Comprehend some content area words, including grade-level social studies vocabulary.

- **READING (Grade 8)**  
  **Strand 1: Reading Process**  
  **Concept 4: Vocabulary**  
  Acquire and use new vocabulary in relevant contexts.  
  **PO 2.** Use context to identify the meaning of unfamiliar words.

  **Strand 2: Comprehending Literary Text**  
  **Concept 2: Historical and Cultural Aspects of Literature**  
  **PO 1.** Describe the historical and cultural aspects found in cross-cultural works of literature.
OVERVIEW

The novel, *Code Talker*, by Joseph Bruchac provides an insight into World War II that is often overlooked. Navajo code talkers were called upon to help create a unique military language to discreetly transmit top secret messages without fear of enemy decoding. This novel not only speaks to the heroism of WWII Navajo marines, but also offers an understanding of the Navajo culture and a unique geographic perspective with rich reference to terrain and locations encountered.

PURPOSE

Students will gain a better understanding of how the Navajo language and people played a significant role in the U.S. strategy to win World War II. In this lesson, the code names of several places involved in the conflict will be identified and examined.

MATERIALS

- *Code Talker* by Joseph Bruchac
- Navajo Culture vocabulary cards
- Decode: Place Locator worksheet—one per student
- Navajo Code Talkers’ Dictionary, Names of Places key
- World map, centered on Pacific Ocean
- Atlas or map of world with latitude and longitude
- Colored pencils

OBJECTIVES

The student will be able to:

1. Analyze the Navajo code to help identify places involved in the WWII conflict.
2. Examine elements of traditional Navajo culture.
3. Apply geographic skills to gain a better understanding of the past.
4. Evaluate *Code Talker* by Joseph Bruchac for its historic, cultural, and geographic contributions.
PROCEDURES

Prerequisite Skills: Students should have some background knowledge of World War II, such as cause/effect and Allied/Axis Powers.

Note: Students should be in the midst of reading or have completed reading Code Talker by Joseph Bruchac.

SESSION ONE (85 minutes)

1. Anticipatory Set
   Write the word “Navajo” on the white board. Ask students what the word is and what it means. Engage the class in a discussion to gauge prior knowledge of this group of people.

2. Go over Navajo Culture cards to build academic vocabulary necessary for better understanding of the story Code Talker by Joseph Bruchac.

3. Distribute Decode: Place Locator worksheet. Tell students they are on a mission to crack the Navajo code used during WWII.

4. Have students work individually for about five minutes and ask them to try filling in as much of the worksheet as possible (preferably in pencil), using only the information provided (do not offer any further instructions or clarifications).

   Ask students to share their findings—answers, patterns, confusions, complications, etc.

5. Distribute Navajo Code Talkers’ Dictionary, Names of Places key. Go over and clarify what each column represents (1- English place name, 2- Navajo code place name, 3- Navajo meaning).

   Explain they will use this and their atlas or world map to complete the Decode: Place Locator worksheet, now that the code has been “broken”.

6. Closure
   Have students compare answers and complete any “un-decoded” fields. Remind students to hold on to this.

SESSION TWO (85 minutes)

1. Anticipatory Set
   Tell students they have only completed half of their mission by decoding the Place Locator worksheet. Ask them to “retrieve” for today’s mission.

2. Distribute World map, centered on Pacific Ocean. Students may need to be oriented to the non-traditional view of the world, with East longitude on the left and West longitude on the right.

3. Ask students to add an 8 point compass rose to the lower right corner. Next direct them to label the five major world oceans (Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Arctic, and Southern). NOTE: Having students use a blue-colored pencil to label waterways may make it easier for them to differentiate land from water.

4. Explain to students that they will need to identify each of the 16 places from the Decode: Place Locator worksheet on the Map, using numbers only. Example: United States, “1.” Remind students that if they are having trouble identifying a place, to use the latitude/longitude coordinates.

5. Once students have finished identifying the 16 countries, write Allied and Axis on the board. Using the countries identified, call on students to try and identify them as either Allied or Axis (Axis: Germany, Italy, Japan; Allied: all others).

6. Using the list from the board, have the students shade all Allied powers purple and all Axis powers red. Lastly have them add a map key/legend to the bottom of the map with this distinction.

7. Ask students to look back at the Navajo meaning for Japan, France, etc. and to make guesses as to why the Navajo gave those descriptions to those places. Have a discussion: Would these descriptions be used today?

8. Closure
   Ask students to discuss which side the Navajo Code Talkers belonged to, as members of the U.S. Marines, and who had the advantage/numbers/support. Collect the map along with the Decode: Place Locator worksheet.
ASSESSMENT

- Decode: Place Locator worksheet (1 pt for each of 48 open fields; 39/48 fields correctly labeled equals 80% or mastery).
- World map (4 pts- compass rose, 5 pts- oceans, 16 pts- places, 5 pts- map key/legend, 5 pts Allied/Axis powers shaded; 28/35 labeled correctly for 80% or mastery).

EXTENSIONS

- **Language Arts- S3, C5, PO 1.** Write a response to literature that: a. presents several clear ideas. Write a literary response to the book, *Code Talker.*
- **Math- S4, C4 PO 11.** Determine the actual measure of objects using a scale drawing or map. Use scale on the World map to determine distances traveled by Code Talkers from base in U.S. to islands of the Pacific.
- **Music- S3, C1 PO 4.** Classify musical examples by culture. Listen to the traditional sounds of Navajo culture.
- **Art- S2, C1, PO 305.** Make connections between art and other curricular areas. Assign vivid geographic terrain descriptions of various locations in the book to create a visual imagery that will be compiled into a class gallery.
- **Arizona Connection- S1, C8, PO5.** Describe Arizona’s contributions to the war efforts. Locate the Navajo Reservation in Arizona and discuss its relevance to the narrator’s journey, *Arizona Atlas,* p. 25, ISBN 978-1-4236-1799-0. Also note state gemstone (page 4) and relate back to Navajo Culture vocabulary cards.

SOURCES

- Navajo Code Talker’s Dictionary,
  http://www.history.navy.mil/faq61-4.htm
- Arizona Geographic Alliance map, The World (centered on the Pacific Ocean),
  http://alliance.la.asu.edu/maps/World-pa.pdf
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Navajo Culture Vocabulary Cards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adorn Navajo Jewelry</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turquoise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(tur-koi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Navajo (Ná-vá-ho)**: a member of a Native North American people living mainly in northern New Mexico and Arizona.
- **Hogan (ho-gan)**: a traditional Navajo dwelling made of logs and mud.
- **Moccasins (moccasins)**: Native North American shoes made of soft leather.
- **Turquoise (turquoise)**: a semi-precious blue-green stone commonly used to adorn Navajo jewelry.

Resources:
- [http://www.nps.gov/archive/hutr/travel.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/hutr/travel.htm)
- [http://www.nm.blm.gov](http://www.nm.blm.gov)
- [http://www.nps.gov/tont/photosmultimedia/Artifacts.htm](http://www.nps.gov/tont/photosmultimedia/Artifacts.htm)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English Place Name</th>
<th>Navajo Code Place Name</th>
<th>Navajo Meaning</th>
<th>Latitude/Longitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>United States/America</td>
<td>BEH-NA-AL-TSOSIE</td>
<td>Beard</td>
<td>42°N, 12°E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>BEH-NA-AL-TSOSIE</td>
<td>Rolled Hat</td>
<td>0°, 30°E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>KE-YAH-DA-NA-LHE</td>
<td>South Our Mother</td>
<td>40°N, 4°W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>BESH-BE-CHA-HE</td>
<td>Ice Land</td>
<td>35°N, 105°E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>BESH-BE-CHA-HE</td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>42°N, 12°E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>BESH-BE-CHA-HE</td>
<td>Rolled Hat</td>
<td>0°, 30°E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>KE-YAH-DA-NA-LHE</td>
<td>South Our Mother</td>
<td>40°N, 4°W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>KE-YAH-DA-NA-LHE</td>
<td>South Our Mother</td>
<td>40°N, 4°W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>KE-YAH-DA-NA-LHE</td>
<td>South Our Mother</td>
<td>40°N, 4°W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>United States/America</td>
<td>BEH-NA-AL-TSOSIE</td>
<td>Beard</td>
<td>42°N, 12°E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>BEH-NA-AL-TSOSIE</td>
<td>Rolled Hat</td>
<td>0°, 30°E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>KE-YAH-DA-NA-LHE</td>
<td>South Our Mother</td>
<td>40°N, 4°W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>BESH-BE-CHA-HE</td>
<td>Ice Land</td>
<td>35°N, 105°E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Place Name</td>
<td>Navajo Code Place Name</td>
<td>Navajo Meaning</td>
<td>Latitude/Longitude</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States/America</td>
<td>NE-HE-MAH</td>
<td>Our Mother</td>
<td>38°N, 97°W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>BEH-NA-AL-TSOSIE</td>
<td>Slant Eye</td>
<td>36°N, 138°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>DOH-HA-CHI-YALI-TCHI</td>
<td>Stutter</td>
<td>42°N, 12°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>BESH-BE-CHA-HE</td>
<td>Iron Hat</td>
<td>51°N, 9°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>DA-GHA-HI</td>
<td>Beard</td>
<td>46°N, 2°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>SILA-GOL-CHI-IH</td>
<td>Red Army</td>
<td>60°N, 100°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>CEH-YEHS-BESI</td>
<td>Braided Hair</td>
<td>35°N, 105°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>TOH-TA</td>
<td>Between Waters</td>
<td>54°N, 2°W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>DEBA-DE-NIH</td>
<td>Sheep Pain</td>
<td>40°N, 4°W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>KE-YAH-DA-NA-LHE</td>
<td>Blackies</td>
<td>13°N, 122°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>SHA-DE-AH-NE-HI-MAH</td>
<td>Floating Island</td>
<td>70°N, 160°W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>ZHN-NI</td>
<td>With Winter</td>
<td>0°, 30°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Our Mother</td>
<td>BESH-BE-CHA-HE</td>
<td>Our Mother</td>
<td>51°N, 9°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Clothes</td>
<td>AH-LE-GAI</td>
<td>Rolled Hat</td>
<td>27°S, 133°E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackies</td>
<td>CHA-YES-DESI</td>
<td>South Our Mother</td>
<td>65°N, 18°W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Lesson Plan for 8th Grade, Mission Possible: Decoding WWII Navajo Marine Code • Code Talker by Joseph Bruchac • Page 8