The Unbreakable Code: Navajo Code Talkers

The Navajo language served as the basis to send messages critical to the war effort during WWII. This lesson stresses cross-cultural appreciation of language.

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Grade Level: 4
Duration: 3 class periods

National Geography Standards

ELEMENT ONE: THE WORLD IN SPATIAL TERMS
1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

ELEMENT TWO: PLACES AND REGIONS
4. The human and physical characteristics of places

ELEMENT FOUR: HUMAN SYSTEMS

Arizona Geography Strand

Concept 1: The World in Spatial Terms
PO 5. Describe characteristics of human and physical features:
   a. physical – (i.e., river, lake, mountain, range, coast, sea, desert, gulf, bay, strait, plain, valley, volcanoes, isthmus, canyon, plateau, mesa, oasis, dunes)

Concept 2: Places and Regions
PO 7. Locate physical and human features in Arizona using maps, illustrations, or images:
   a. physical (e.g., Grand Canyon, Mogollon Rim, Colorado River, Gila River, Salt River)
   b. human (e.g., Phoenix, Yuma, Flagstaff, Tucson, Prescott, Hoover Dam, Roosevelt Dam)

Concept 4: Human Systems
PO 4 Describe the cultural characteristics of Arizona’s diverse population.

Other Arizona Standards

STRAND 1: American History
PO3 Describe the impact of World War II on Arizona (e.g., economic boost, military bases, Native American and Hispanic contributions, POW camps, relocation of Japanese Americans).

ELA Common Core Standards

Reading

Literature
Key Ideas and Details
4.RL.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text

Writing
Production and Distribution of Writing
4.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
AZ.4.W.4

Language

Conventions of Standard English
4.L.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
a. Use correct capitalization.
Overview

Students are well aware that codes are used to keep secrets. In this lesson, students will understand how the language of one group of Americans was important in fighting a war. This lesson is to be used with The Unbreakable Code by Sara Hoagland.

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to inform students as to the role Navajos played in winning World War II. Through this lesson, students will understand historical aspects of reservation life, read maps to gain understanding, and apply geography to an historical event.

Materials

- Code Talker Locations map – one per student and teacher overhead
- Colored pencils for map work
- Copies of the code – pages at back of book - teacher overhead
- Photographs (included)
- Audio of spoken Navajo
- Arizona Landform Regions map – one per student and teacher overhead
- Arizona’s Indian Reservations map - teacher overhead
- Facts Sheet – one per student
- More Lesson Background for Teacher
- Translation of Navajo Language Audio
- Writing Prompt and Checklist – one per student
- Scoring Guide – one per 2 students

Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. List facts about reservation or boarding school life from the book
2. Identify the contributions of the Navajo Code Talkers in World War II
3. Locate positions where code talkers played a major role on a map of the Pacific Theater.
4. Locate the Plateau Region on a map of Arizona.
5. Describe the characteristics of a plateau, mesa, and canyon.

Procedures

Session One

1. Introduce the lesson by asking the students if anyone has a grandparent or an older person in their life who likes to share stories about their childhood. Try to elicit some group response from these stories then have the class discuss what the purpose of the stories might be.

2. Before the class reads the story, the teacher needs to frame the time period and location of the story and the story genre. The term for this type of story is historical fiction. Explain that the story you will be reading is historical fiction.

   **Historical Fiction can be described as a way to incorporate real history into a readable fictional story that contains a plot and characters**

   “Historical fiction is understood to refer to any novel whose subject matter deals with real, identifiable historical situations and/or personalities. The
period and culture described in a historical novel are assumed to be different from and prior to the novel’s author.

From www.histfiction.net/faq.htm

3. The teacher will read the book to the class, or all students can read their own copy if this is possible.
4. After reading the book ask students to share cultural and historical facts from the story. Explain cultural facts as those that come from living within a group of people—the things you learn from your family or community. Historical facts are those that relate to history. These usually include lists of events and dates that are remembered. These dates and events may be shared by many cultures.
5. Make a list of these facts on the board or in student notebooks.
6. Ask for examples of memory from the reading. Point out that memory is not always factual.

Session Two

7. Hand out the Code Talker map and display overhead.
8. Have the students label the map: 1) Pacific Ocean, 2) United States, 3) Asia, and 4) Australia
9. Highlight each of the battle spots indicated on the map and then ask the students to connect the dots to create a circle. This would be the "PACIFIC THEATER" of the war in which the code talkers played the biggest part. Label the Pacific Theater.
10. Explain that in warfare, a theater or theatre is normally used to define a specific geographic area within which armed conflict occurs. A war would have to occur over a large portion of the globe in order to be considered large enough to have separate theaters, and the term is not used in the singular. World War II was a big war. It had two theaters: European and Pacific. Show the European Theater on the map.
11. Show an overhead of the alphabet that created the code. It’s important to realize that Navajo is a spoken language, not a written language so written forms had to be created.
   Note: J is a jackass (good time for learning a synonym)
12. Share that there were also code talkers from other Native American tribes, although most code talkers were Navajos. Review the contributions of the code talkers and how they used their language to help the World War II effort.

Session Three

13. Hand out copies of the Arizona Landform Regions map. Review that the book they read was about a boy and his grandfather who lived on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. Locate the Navajo Reservation on an overhead of Arizona Indian Reservations map. Ask students in which of Arizona’s three landform regions the Navajo Reservation is located. (Plateau) Have the students color the Plateau Region in yellow on their map.
14. Hand out the student reading on the Landforms of the Plateau Region. Define the plateau region as a high, flat landform.
15. Read and discuss the Landforms of the Plateau Region handout. Have the students find Flagstaff on their map and put an X just north of Flagstaff where the San Francisco Peaks are located. Write the name of the mountains on the map.
16. On the back of the Arizona Landform Region map, have the students write a description of a plateau, a mesa, and a canyon.
17. Collect the map, if desired, for assessment.

Assessment

Pass out the Facts Sheet. Discuss the 3 time periods and have students add any other details that they might remember from the book that are not on the sheet.

Explain the writing prompt and checklist. Let students work individually or in groups to complete the writing assignment. Allow students to use the Fact Sheet while they are writing.

The journal writing is worth 13 points. A score of 10 or higher will be considered mastery.

Extensions

Students could use the Navajo code to write their name or write a simple message to each other.
Share the audio of spoken Navajo and the translation.

Sources


http://www.yiwiusdinyvnohii.net/history/usmccode.html


http://nrcprograms.org/site/PageServer?pagename=nrf_hist_boardingschools Navajo Relief Fund:

http://www.britannica.com/ebc/art-6114-IwoJima photo

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Johnston

laphaie.com/Sacred_Mts.ctm FOUR SACRED MTS

http://cali.arizona.edu/asm/

permission to receive for use of the audio Navajo language-

Al Durtschi <aldurtschi@gmail.com.

7/23/07

“Patricia, we’d be happy if you’d use, it and thanks for asking, Al”

Photos: www.netl.doe.gov

vulcan.wr.usgs.gov

www.werc.usgs.gov

3dparks.wr.usgs.gov

www.archives.gov

historyforkids.utah.gov