



Teacher Inquiry Kit Merril Sandoval

Title	Merril Sandoval: Navajo Code Talker
Author(s)	Ellen Baumler
Grade Level	6-12
Soldier	Merril L. Sandoval
Tribal Affiliation	Navajo Red Cheek People Clan
Branch of Service	2nd and 5th Division, Marine Corps
Dates of Service	1943-1946
Essential Question	

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	How did service in WWII strengthen Merrill's pride in his heritage and impact his career path?
Contextual Paragraph	<p>Merril L. Sandoval was born in a traditional Navajo hogan near Nageezi, New Mexico, on April 18, 1925. He mother's clan is Naasht'e`zhi` Dine'e` (Zuni-Edgewater Clan) and his father's is Tl'aaschi'I (The Red Cheek People Clan). His father, Julian, raised sheep on the family ranch and his mother, Helen, was a blanket weaver. Helen died when Merrill was 6, leaving a newborn sister. Julian remarried and Merrill grew up with many siblings and half-siblings. His great-grandfather was a Navajo medicine man who taught him traditional ways.</p> <p>Merril and his older brother Samuel were attending high school at the Navajo Methodist Mission School at Farmington, New Mexico, in 1942. The recent attack on Pearl Harbor launched the nation into WWII and Marine recruiters were visiting the campus. Samuel, then 18, signed up. Although recruiters took soldiers as young as 16, Merrill, nearly 17, was still too young without parental permission. When recruiters again visited campus in 1943, Merrill was within weeks of his 18th birthday. His father gave consent, telling Merrill to bring his brother home.</p> <p>Although both Samuel and Merrill were Marine Code Talkers, they had no contact with each other while in the service. Early Navajo recruits like the Sandoval brothers at first had no idea that they were being recruited for their native language skills. Ironically, their mission school, like other Indian boarding schools, punished students for speaking their native language. It was the knowledge of this forbidden language that eventually helped the United States achieve victory in WWII.</p> <p>Merril was at boot camp in San Diego, California, and then at Camp Pendleton at Oceanside for radio communication and rifle training. From there he went to Camp Tarawa in Hawaii to train for the Pacific campaign, serving in the 2nd and 5th Marine Divisions in the Hawaiian Islands, Saipan, Iwo Jima and the occupation of Japan. Merrill's job as a Code Talker was to receive, translate, and send coded messages</p>


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	<p>behind the front line of battle. Because the Navajo language was not a written language and unknown to the enemy Japanese, it was impossible for them to decipher.</p> <p>Merril was discharged from the Marines in 1946, finished high school and trained as a machinist at the Haskell Indian Vocational School in Lawrence, Kansas. He married Lorraine Humetewa Shingoitewa in 1951 and together they raised five children. Merrill worked as a machinist before returning to the Navajo Reservation in 1963 where he joined the Navajo Tribal Police. After three years, he became an advocate for the Navajo Nation’s legal service. Retiring after 23 years, he continued to serve as a tribal advocate and tribal court interpreter. He also traveled extensively, speaking about his experiences and advocating for Indian people.</p> <p>Merrill received the Silver Congressional Medal of Honor along with other Navajo Code Talkers in 2001. He died in 2008.</p>
<p>C3 Standards</p>	<p>D2.His.6.6-8. Analyze how people’s perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.</p> <p>D2.His.6.9-12. Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced.</p>
<p>Source Permanent Link</p>	<p>http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.14223/ (Oral Interview)</p>

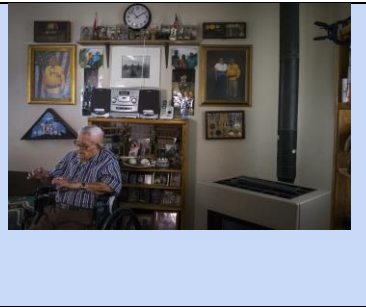
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Title of Source	"In Harm's Way, Merrill L. Sandoval Collection"
Suggested questions for the source	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did the code talkers do and why were they so effective? 2. How did Navajo Code Talkers develop and interpret their code? 3. Why were Merrill Sandoval and his fellow Navajo code talker mistaken for enemy Japanese? 4. What is the message that Merrill Sandoval wanted to send to future generations? 5. How dangerous was Merrill's job and what examples can you cite?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did Merrill Sandoval learn from his horrific experiences during WWII? 2. Do you think that Merrill was proud to serve his country? Why?
Source Permanent Link 	Navajo Code Talker - Merrill Sandoval (navajo-codetalker.com) (includes Merril Sandoval photos, biographical information, personal experiences, and service information)

Title of Source	"Navajo Code Talker: Merrill Sandoval"
Suggested questions for the source (3-5)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What aspects of Merrill's Navajo culture can you learn about from his brief biography? 2. Why do you think it took Merrill many years before he returned to the Navajo Reservation? 3. When he did return, in what way did Merrill give back to his community? 4. In what way did Merrill's training as a code talker prove valuable later in his life? 5. How do Merrill's children reflect their father's pride of heritage?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did service as a Code Talker bring men closer to their heritage? 2. In what way does a person's upbringing reflect what kind of person he or she is as an adult?
Source Permanent Link 	https://www.nhnews.com/news/2008/jul/01/life-of-navajo-code-talker-merril-sandoval-celebr/

Title of Source	"Life of Navajo Code Talker Merrill Sandoval Celebrated"
Suggested questions for the source (3-5)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What prompted Merrill to join the Marine Corps? 2. In what way did Merrill show his loyalty to the U.S. Government? 3. How did Merrill's experience in the service impact his later career? 4. How can you tell that Merrill was proud of his Native heritage? 5. How did Merrill's community show appreciation for him?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a "tribal advocate" and what might those duties entail? 2. Why did Merrill keep his service experiences secret from his family?
Source Permanent Link 	https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-104000/NH-104142.html Photograph
Title of Source	"Iwo Jima Operation, 1945"
Suggested questions for the source (3-5)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Based on this picture and what you know of Merrill's description of the landing at Iwo Jima, what can you tell about the terrain? 2. Why do you suppose Camp Tarawa, Hawaii, was a perfect location for the soldiers to become acclimated before their entry into enemy territory? 3. What evidence of wartime activities is present in the photo?

Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What emotions might soldiers getting ready to disembark at Iwo Jima experience? 2. How did the geography of Iwo Jima impact the Americans' desire to take the island?
Source Permanent Link 	https://www.library.pima.gov/blogs/post/remembering-the-amazing-sacrifices-of-navajo-code-talkers/
Title of Source	"Remembering the Amazing Sacrifices of Navajo Code Talkers"
Suggested questions for the source (3-5)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why was the U.S. government reluctant for Native American soldiers to serve as Code Talkers? 2. Did Merrill and his fellow Native soldiers have reasons to resent the United States government? 3. Despite these reasons, why did so many Native Americans enlist? 4. How important were the Navajo Code Talkers in the taking of Iwo Jima?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can a person overcome the impacts of racism and discrimination they have experienced? 2. Why would the United States discriminate against the people it has displaced?
Source : Permanent Link	https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2019/08/29/navajo-code-talker-samuel-f-sandoval-ww-2-marines/1883296001/ Interview with Merrill's brother, Samuel Sandoval

	
Title of Source	“Navajo Code Talker Samuel F. Sandoval Talks about ‘Making a Navajo Code’”
Suggested questions for the source (3-5)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Samuel offers insight that applies to both himself and his brother. What happened to the Sandoval family ranching business and how might it have affected Merrill’s career path? 2. Both Merrill and Samuel attended Indian boarding school. How did this experience help prepare them for their Marine training? 3. Indigenous people suffered greatly from the US government’s policies, like livestock reduction, of the federal government. Can you explain why so many Native Americans, including Merrill, served their country in spite of disrespect and mistreatment? 4. Merrill and Samuel chose different career paths, but in what ways were they similar?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indian boarding schools were often brutal experiences for children. In what ways did this experience direct both Sandoval brothers in their career paths? 2. In what way did government policies that directly affected the Sandoval family influence the lives of Samuel and Merrill?
Source: Permanent Link [Secondary]	https://www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/code-talkers-legacy-native-languages-helped-turn-tides-both-world-wars

	
Title of Source	"Code Talkers Legacy"
Suggested questions for the source (3-5)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From the photograph in the article, what can you tell about the Code Talkers' working conditions? 2. Who were the first Code Talkers and what was their role? 3. Merrill kept his WWII service secret even from his wife until 1968. Even so, how did it happen that the Code Talkers' service wasn't really secret? 4. Merrill was not the only soldier who experienced mistaken identity. In what way did this put American Indian soldiers in even greater peril than their white counterparts?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was the Code Talkers' most important asset and why was this so ironic? 2. Technology made code talking out of date. How important are Native languages?
Source Permanent Link 	https://www.nhnews.com/news/2006/nov/21/in-their-twilight-years-navajo-code-talkers-calle/



Title of Source	"In their twilight years, Navajo Code Talkers called to service to help save endangered Native languages"
Suggested questions for the source (3-5)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did Merrill and other elderly code talkers travel to Washington D.C. to support House Resolution 4766? 2. How important is their message? 3. What impact can the media have on this critical issue? 4. How can Native languages best be preserved?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why is language especially important to the Code Talkers? 2. What happens when a tribe or other cultural group loses its language?
Works Cited	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Veterans History Project. "Merril L. Sandoval Collection." <i>American Folklife Center</i>. Library of Congress, November 6, 2019, http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.14223/. 2. U.S. Marine Corps: Navajo Code Talkers Association. "Navajo Code Talker Merrill L. Sandoval." n.d. http://navajo-codetalker.com/about/about.html. 3. "Life of Navajo Code Talker Merrill Sandoval Celebrated." <i>Navajo-Hopi Observer</i>, July 1, 2008. https://www.nhnews.com/news/2008/jul/01/life-of-navajo-code-talker-merril-sandoval-celebr/ 4. Naval History Series 104000-104142. "NH 104142: Ilwo Jima Operation , 1945." Naval History and Heritage Command. Photograph, https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-104000/NH-104142.html

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	<p>5. Pima Blogs. "Remembering the Amazing Sacrifices of Navajo Code Talkers." Pima County Public Library. August 9, 2019, https://www.library.pima.gov/blogs/post/remembering-the-amazing-sacrifices-of-navajo-code-talkers/</p> <p>6. Silversmith, Shondin. "Navajo Code Talker Samuel F. Sandoval talks about 'making a code.'" <i>The Republic</i>. August 29, 2019, https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2019/08/29/navajo-code-talker-samuel-f-sandoval-ww-2-marines/1883296001/</p> <p>7. Meadows, William C. "The Code Talkers Legacy: Native Languages Helped Turn the Tides in Both Wars," <i>Magazine of Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian</i>. Vol. 21 No. 3/ Fall 2020, https://www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/code-talkers-legacy-native-languages-helped-turn-tides-both-world-wars</p> <p>8. "In their 'twilight years,' Navajo code talkers called to service to help save endangered Native languages." <i>Navajo-Hopi Observer</i>. November 21, 2006, https://www.nhnews.com/news/2006/nov/21/in-their-twilight-years-navajo-code-talkers-calle/</p>
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