



Teacher Inquiry Kit Merril Sandoval

Title	Merril L. Sandoval: Code Talker
Author(s)	Ellen Baumler
Grade Level	K-5
Soldier	Merril L. Sandoval
Tribal Affiliation	Navajo, Red Cheek People Clan
Branch of Service	Marines, 2nd and 5th Division
Dates of Service	1943-1946
Essential Question	How did service in WWII strengthen Merrill's pride in his heritage and impact his career path?
Contextual Paragraph	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'l (The Red Cheek

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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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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



	<p>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>C3 Standards: https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/c3</p> <p>D2.His.3.K-2. Generate questions about individuals and groups who have shaped a significant historical change.</p> <p>D2.His.14.3-5. Explain probable causes and effects of events and development</p>
<p>Source Permanent Link</p>	<p>http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.14223/</p>
<p>Title of Source</p>	<p>“In Harm’s Way, Merril L. Sandoval Collection”</p>
<p>Suggested questions for the source</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did the Code Talkers do? 2. Why were the Code Talkers so effective? 3. How did Navajo Code Talkers create their code?

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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Why were Merrill Sandoval and his fellow Navajo code talker mistaken for enemy Japanese? 5. What is the message that Merrill Sandoval wanted to send to future generations? 6. How do you know that Merrill's job was dangerous?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did Merrill Sandoval learn from his experiences during WWII? 2. Do you think that Merrill was proud to serve his country?
Source Permanent Link	<p>Navajo Code Talker - Merrill Sandoval (navajo-codetalker.com) (includes Merril Sandoval photos, biographical information, personal experiences, and service information)</p>
Title of Source	<p>"Navajo Code Talker: Merrill Sandoval"</p>
Suggested questions for the source	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What can you learn about Merrill's Navajo family 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. How did Merrill's training as a code talker prove valuable later in his life?
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. Why did Merrill want to join the Marine Corps? 2. How did Merrill show his loyalty to the U.S. Government? 3. Do you think Merrill's experience in the service influenced 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. How did Merrill help others in his tribe? 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	What is the title of your source? If it does not have one please write an appropriate one. "Iwo Jima Operation, 1945"
Suggested questions for the source (3-5)	What are 3 - 5 questions that can be used with this source? <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 island?



	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Why do you suppose Camp Tarawa, Hawaii, was a perfect location for the soldiers to become acclimated before their entry into enemy territory? What evidence of wartime activities is present in the photo?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you think the soldiers felt about getting ready to disembark at Iwo Jima? How did the geography of Iwo Jima make it difficult for the Americans 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"> Why was the U.S. government reluctant for Native American soldiers to serve as Code Talkers? Why did Merrill and his fellow Native soldiers have reasons to resent the United States government? In spite of these reasons, why did so many Native Americans enlist? 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"> If a person has experienced racism, can he or she put it behind them? Why or why not? 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

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Title of Source	"Navajo Code Talker Samuel F. Sandoval Talks about 'Making a Navajo Code'"
Suggested questions for the source	<p>What are 3 - 5 questions that can be used with this source?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Samuel discusses experiences that are also true of 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. 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 not often good experiences for children. In what ways did their time at boarding school benefit both Sandoval brothers? 2. In what way did government policies influence the lives of Samuel and Merrill and their family?
Source : Permanent Link [Secondary]	<p>https://www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/code-talkers-legacy-native-languages-helped-turn-tides-both-world-wars</p>
Title of Source	"Code Talkers Legacy"
Suggested questions for the source	<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?



	<p>4. Merrill was not the only soldier who experienced mistaken identity. In what way did this put American Indian soldiers in even more danger than their fellow white soldiers?</p>
<p>Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was the Code Talkers' most important asset and why was this so ironic? 2. How important is it to preserve Native languages?
<p>Primary Source 8: Permanent Link</p>	<p>https://www.nhnews.com/news/2006/nov/21/in-their-twilight-years-navajo-code-talkers-calle/</p>
<p>Title of Primary Source</p>	<p>"In their twilight years, Navajo Code Talkers called to service to help save endangered Native languages"</p>
<p>Suggested questions for the source</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What were Merrill and other elderly code talkers supporting when they visited Washington D.C. and why? 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?
<p>Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)</p>	<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?
<p>Works Cited</p>	<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/.

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8. "In their 'twilight years,' Navajo code talkers called to service to help save endangered Native languages." *Navajo-Hopi Observer*. November 21, 2006, <https://www.nhnews.com/news/2006/nov/21/in-their-twilight-years-navajo-code-talkers-calle/>



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