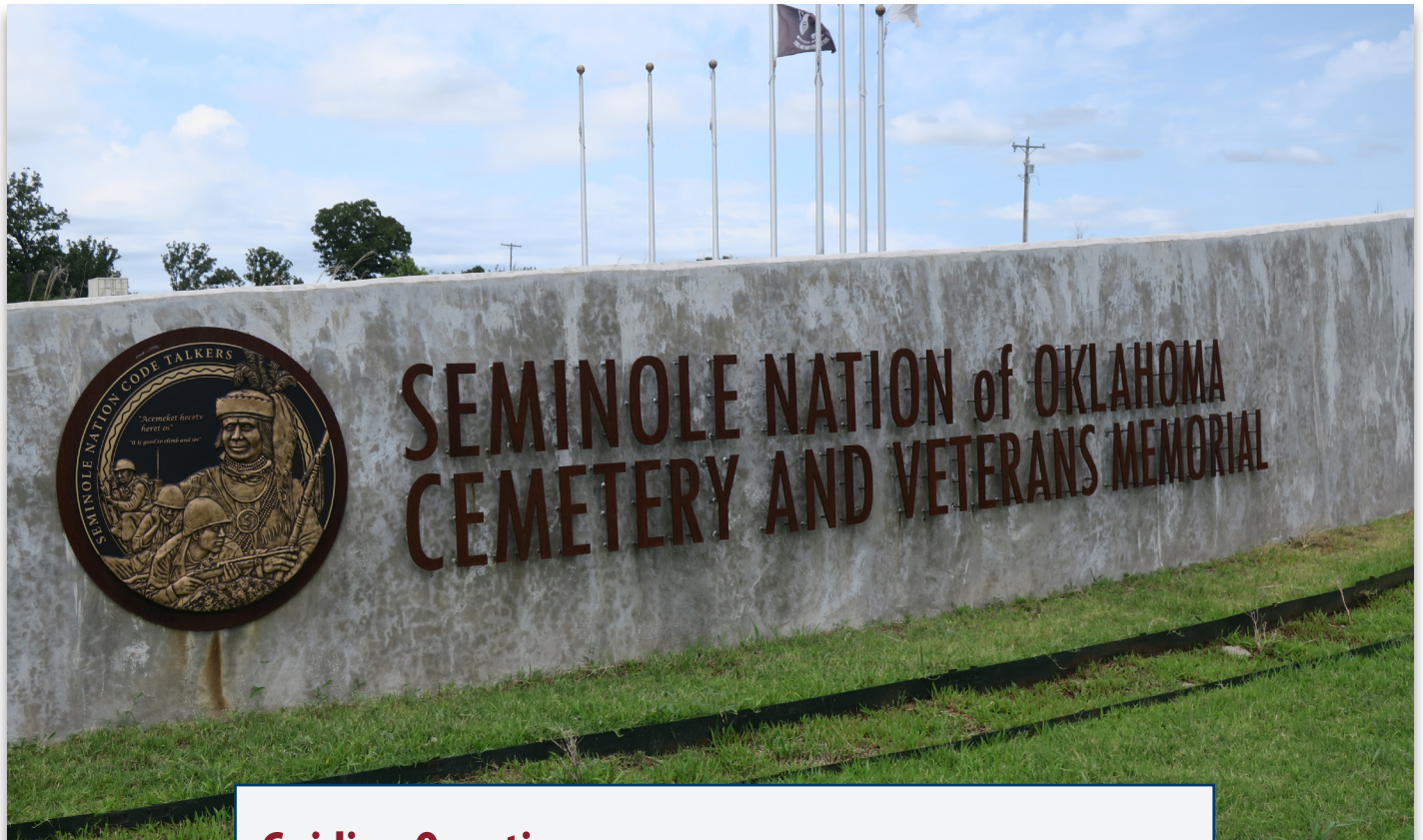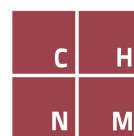# A Secret Language:
## American Indian Code Talkers

DEVELOPED BY AMANDA KORDELISKI

**Guiding Question:**

How did the United States utilize American Indian languages during World War II?

# Overview

During World War I, the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) began using American Indian tribal languages to communicate vital information between AEF troops. The top secret program was expanded during World War II to include many tribes and languages including Choctaw, Cherokee, Comanche, Navajo and Seminole/Creek. These "Code Talkers" provided vital information and the unique qualities of each language proved impossible for German and Japanese intelligence to decipher. American Indian Code Talkers provided essential support and information for key battles across the European and Pacific theatres, including Normandy and Iwo Jima.

# Objectives

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- Understand the contribution of American Indian Code Talkers in World War I and II; and

- Recognize important Seminole words that describe the traits of an American Indian warrior.

*When anyone thinks of the Code Talkers of World War II, their minds immediately go to the Navajo Code Talkers in the Pacific Theatre. I wrote this lesson to highlight the contribution of other tribes that also worked as Code Talkers during the war. I think it is important to understand the differences between the tribes and why code talking was such a unique and difficulty challenge for the military to coordinate.*

*— Amanda Kordeliski*

**Kordeliski teaches at Norman North High School in Norman, Oklahoma.**

# Standards Connections

## Connections to Common Core

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7**   Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9**   Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

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National Cemetery Administration | American Battle Monuments Commission | National History Day | Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media

# Documents Used

## Primary Sources

"Seminole Code Talker Phrase." Performed by Joe Coon. Recorded September 25, 2018. On *Seminole Language Recording*.
https://www.nhd.org/sites/default/files/CodeTalker.mp3

"Yvmv Estemer." Performed by Joe Coon. Recorded September 30, 2018. On *Yvmv Estemer*.
https://www.nhd.org/sites/default/files/YvmvEstemer.mp3

## Secondary Sources

Language Lessons
Pumyhakv School, Seminole Nation of Oklahoma
https://pumvhakv.sno-nsn.gov/category/language-lessons/

Seminole Code Talker, March 24, 2016
Seminole National Museum
https://www.seminolenationmuseum.org/m.blog/23/seminole-code-talker

Veteran Profile, Private Edmond Andrew Harjo
National Cemetery Administration
https://www.cem.va.gov/legacy/

# Materials

- Seminole Code Talker Activity Translation Table

- Seminole Code Talker Activity Sheet

- Seminole Code Talker Activity Sheet Answer Key

- Audio file of Maskoke (Creek/Seminole) phrase

- Pencil

- Internet-capable device to play audio clip

# Activity Preparation

- Make one copy of the Seminole Code Talker Activity Translation Table and the Seminole Code Talker Activity Sheet for each student.

- Make one teacher copy Seminole Code Talker Activity Sheet Answer Key.

- Download audio file or have internet capable device queued to play clip.

- Test all online resources before arriving at cemetery.

# Procedure

## Activity (30 minutes)

- Distribute one copy of the Seminole Code Talker Activity Translation Table and the Seminole Code Talker Activity Sheet to each student prior to arrival at the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma Cemetery and Veterans Memorial.

  - Ask the students: *Why did the United States use American Indian languages as code during World War II?*

  - Ask the students: *What complications or problems could develop by using an obscure language to communicate over radio?*

    - Push learners to understand that there were an extremely limited number of soldiers who spoke each language and if one is killed or wounded the ability to communicate is lost.

    - Discuss how each language is unique and Code Talkers needed to be paired with another member of the same tribe.

- Encourage learners to explore the memorial and examine the stones and the significant words and phrases engraved on each.

- Direct students to use the Seminole Code Talker Activity Translation Table and memorial stones to complete Seminole Code Talker Activity Sheet.

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# Assessment

- Lead a group discussion about the impact of Code Talkers on the outcome of the war.

- Use Seminole Code Talker Activity Sheet Answer Key to assess student work.

# Methods for Extension

- Have students listen to "Yvmv Estemer," performed by Joe Coon.

- Learners with more interest in the role code talkers played in World War II can read the young adult novel *Code Talker* by Joseph Bruchac.

- Learners with more interest in the Seminole language can learn more words and phrases and correct pronunciation through the Seminole Tribe of Oklahoma Pumvhakv School.

- Learners can expand their knowledge of Seminole Code Talkers by exploring the Seminole Nation Museum online.

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# Seminole Code Talker Activity Translation Table
Translations Courtesy of Language Lessons, Pumvhakv School, Seminole Nation of Oklahoma

| English | Seminole/Creek |
|---|---|
| Wait! | Hvtec ce! |
| Turn left | Kvskvnvn folotkvs |
| Turn right | Kvpervn folotkvs |
| Toward the right | Kvperv fvccv |
| Toward the left | Kvskvnv fvccv |
| Yes | Ehe |
| No | Monko |
| Look! | Hehcvs |
| Where? | Estvmin |
| In front of | Homv |
| How many people are there? | Este nvcowet owa? |
| This way | Yv mimv |
| Tonight | Mucv-nere |
| Now | Hiyowat |
| Go | Vyvs |
| I understand | Kerris |
| Warrior | Tvstvnvke |
| Courage | Fek'hvmketv |
| Sacrifice | Ena Herometv |
| Honor | Vrakkueckv |
| Strength | Yekcetv |

Many code talkers used the military alphabet (alpha, bravo, charlie …) to correlate letters into a native language and spell out information in code. Tribal words like those in the table above were used less often, occasionally code talkers used a native word to represent something else. For example, the Comanche word for turtle was used to describe a tank.

# Seminole Code Talker Activity Sheet

Listen to the Seminole phrase and try to translate it.

_____! _____ ___ _____ _____? _____ _____.

Create your own phrase from the translation table and write it below in English and Seminole.

**English:**

_____

**Seminole:**

_____

Explore the memorial and identify the five Seminole words represented in the memorial. Draw the symbol that represents the word most meaningful to you. Explain why you chose this word.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

# Seminole Code Talker Activity Sheet Answer Key

Listen to the Seminole phrase and try to translate it.

**Seminole**: Hvtec ce! Naken hecetska? E-vketecet owvccvs.

**English**: Wait! What do you see? Be careful.

Create your own phrase from the translation table and write it below in English and Seminole.

**English:**

_____

**Seminole:**

_____

Explore the memorial and identify the five Seminole words represented in the memorial. Draw the symbol that represents the word most meaningful to you. Explain why you chose this word.

Words to choose from:

- Warrior: Tvstvnvke
- Courage: Fek'hvmketv
- Sacrifice: Ena Herometv
- Strength: Yekcetv
- Honor: Vrakkueckv

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# "Yvmv Estemer." Performed by Joe Coon. Recorded September 30, 2018

Some say there were seven, others say there were eight. During the invasion on a Japanese beach, many soldiers were being killed by gunfire coming from a concrete pill-box from the top of a hill. One evening as they were huddled down inside their trenches and foxholes, there was heard a song being sung. The Muskogee Nation is made up of both Seminoles and Creeks but the language is 99.9% the same, likewise the songs are the same. As they listened closely the Seminole and Creek soldiers recognized it as from their homeland. Those soldiers crept through the trenches and all came to one place where they each recognized each other as being from Oklahoma.

They talked and decided that the next morning  they (the seven soldiers) would assault the hill and would not quit until they took the hill or were killed. So during the night they sang a very familiar song sometimes referred to now as "the soldiers death song" and prayed for strength and bravery. The next morning, they ran up the hill and to their own surprise, none of them were killed and only one was wounded. They overtook the hill.

**Note**: Some connecting words such as(is, it, the,) are understood when in a song. Other words are understood to mean something similar such as (I will pass by them, I will pass over) . Some words are compounded nouns, nouns compounded with verbs,  nouns compounded with adjectives, verbs compounded with  adjectives, diminuitives and slang.

That is why it could not be deciphered by the enemy forces. Sentence structure also is SOV (Subject, Object, Verb)  while English is SVO (Subject, Verb, Object). Some words mean different things depending on content of what is being said.

**Yvmv estemerketvn tehoyvniyof, tehoyvniyof, tehoyvniyof**
(Here, this place of sorrows, I will pass by them, I will pass by them, I will pass by them)

**Yvmv estemerketvn tehoyvniyof**
(Here, this place of sorrows, I will pass by them)

**Cesvs vpakares**
(I will be with Jesus)

**Mekusapv yicvn hecaks, mekusapv yicvn hecaks, mekusapv yicvn hecaks**
(Look, the Christians are coming, look, the Christians are coming, look, the Christians are coming)

**Cesvs vpakares**
(They are coming with Jesus)

**Yvmv hvcce elkv tehoyvniyof (x3)**
(Here , the river of death, I will pass over it) (x3)

**Yvmv hvcce elkv teyoyvniyof**
(Here, the river of death, I will pass over it)

**Cesvs vpakares**
(I will be with Jesus)