

Process Paper

I had recently read *The Diary of a Part Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, which introduced me to what it is like to be Native American, and it made me want to learn more about indigenous people. When I learned that the theme for National History Day was Communication in History, I brainstormed with my parents and decided to research the Navajo Code Talkers. Because the Code Talkers were key to communicating in World War II, I thought they related to the theme. Utah has a significant Native American population and is home to part of the Navajo Nation. I wanted to expand my knowledge of Native Americans and learn about their culture and history.

Being a visual learner, I started my research with documentaries and a Hollywood movie. As I got more into my research, I started emailing various people that I thought would be helpful, including a linguist at the University of Utah, a Navajo artist and historian, and the grandson of a Navajo Code Talker. I also watched several interviews of the surviving Navajo Code Talkers. I wasn't able to go to the Navajo Code Talker Museum in New Mexico due to Covid-19 restrictions, but I was able to drive through a portion of the Navajo Nation in Arizona and Utah. I saw how the Navajo live today. I was also able to see a portion of the land that the Navajo hold sacred and fought for during WWII. Lastly, I included some of the photos I took in Monument Valley but found the majority of the historical photographs and documents I used on the National Archives website. I also read some books on the Navajo Code Talkers, including *Code Talker, The First and Only Memoir by One of the Original Navajo Code Talkers of WWII* written by Chester Nez with Judith Schiess Avila.

At the beginning of this project, I knew very little about Native Americans. Doing this project, my eyes have opened to the culture and oral traditions of the Navajo. I have also learned more about the hardship Americans put the Navajo through. For example, Anglo-Americans tried to erase their language, to change their religion, and to change their looks. Learning that, I was surprised by the irony of Americans using the Navajo language to create a code.

With this information I started to build my project with a slideshow, adding information as I went. Then I used the slides to create my web pages. While doing this I learned Photoshop, website design and internet research skills. I have also gotten very comfortable with asking people I don't know for information on the subject I am studying.

I think being able to communicate in war without your enemy knowing what you're saying is very important. And that relates to my historical argument: The Navajo Code Talkers developed a code that the Japanese could not understand; this code helped the United States communicate to its soldiers and win the war in the Pacific.