

Facilitation Guide



Operation: Rhythm Route

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Activity Summary:

Operation: Rhythm Route is an embodied learning simulation inspired by *Code Talker* by Joseph Bruchac. Students work in teams to guide a “Soldier” across a hidden minefield grid using only body percussion signals, simulating the silent precision and trust required of Navajo Code Talkers during WWII.

Rotating roles of Code Talker, Soldier, and Observer allow each student to experience responsibility, memory, listening, and teamwork. As an extension, this activity includes three code sets to reflect how codes changed in combat, and ends with a verbal debrief and a written reflection aligned to ELA standards. Optional extensions and celebrations like student-designed mazes or “medals” for successful missions help deepen engagement and historical connection.

Learning Targets:

I can perform and respond to body percussion patterns using rhythm, tempo, and dynamics to communicate clear meaning and direction.

I can explain what the Code Talker simulation taught me about responsibility, memory, listening, and trust, and connect those lessons to Ned’s experiences in WWII.

I will support my ideas with examples from the simulation and the book.

I will organize my writing clearly and revise for clarity, punctuation, and vocabulary.

Why the Arts:

Integrating the arts into this simulation transforms abstract historical concepts into embodied, emotional experiences. By using rhythm, movement, and silence, students don’t just learn about Code Talkers, they feel the tension, trust, and responsibility those roles required.

Body percussion activates multiple learning modalities (auditory, kinesthetic, and visual), which improves memory, focus, and emotional connection. It also fosters creativity, collaboration, and self-regulation, core skills in both music and life.

This arts-based approach aligns with culturally responsive teaching by honoring Navajo traditions of oral and rhythmic communication, and makes the learning inclusive, engaging, and memorable.

Assessment:

Formative: Students will know if their body percussion and listening skills are accurate because of the feedback they receive while playing the game. “Winning” = Successful!

Summative: A [written reflection](#) (one paragraph) of the simulation, in which students are asked to make connections between their experience, the text, and Ned’s experience as a Code Talker. An example answer is included in the reflection document.

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Lesson Connections: Grade 7, Module 2

Teaching through the arts doesn't just enrich content, it builds empathy, deepens understanding, and allows every student to participate in meaningful, multimodal learning.

Therefore this activity would be a strong **summative experience prior to writing the EOM essay**. The reflection document that students produce could be used to support their reasoning in the EOM task.

Recommended Materials:

[Reflection Task](#) / [Path Maps & Body Percussion Keys](#) / 6x6 Grid

Standards Alignment:

ELA:

RL.7.1 – Cite multiple textual evidence to analyze what the text says explicitly and make inferences

RL.7.2 – Determine central ideas and themes and analyze their development; summarize important supporting details

RL.7.4 – Determine the meaning of words and phrases, including figurative language and connotation

W.7.1 – Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence

W.7.2 – Write informative/explanatory texts to convey ideas clearly, citing evidence

W.7.3 – Write narratives that develop real or imagined experiences/events using effective techniques and descriptive details

L.7.1 – Command of grammar & usage use phrases, clauses, varied sentence structures purposefully

L.7.2 – Conventions, spelling, & punctuation use commas correctly, spell accurately

SL.7.1 – Engage in discussions, build on others' ideas, and use evidence when discussing text.

SL.7.6 – Adapt speech to different contexts, using formal English when appropriate

Connection to Module Goals/EOM Task:

Operation: Rhythm Route is a powerful arts-integrated simulation that helps students internalize one of the most important impacts WWII had on Ned: his deep sense of responsibility, discipline, and pride in serving as a Code Talker. During the simulation, students experience the pressure of guiding others without error, the trust needed between partners, and the silence required for secure communication, all central to Ned's role in the war.

By physically embodying what it meant to carry a code and protect lives, students gain insight into the mental and emotional weight Ned carried. This experiential understanding builds background knowledge and emotional resonance that students can draw on when writing their final response. It reinforces key ideas about identity, sacrifice, service, and pride, all of which shaped Ned during WWII and help answer the EOM question with depth and empathy.

Arts:

MU.Pr6.1.E.8a – Demonstrate performance decorum and audience etiquette appropriate for the context, venue, and genre.

MU.Pr4.2.E.8a – Demonstrate understanding of expressive qualities (such as dynamics and tempo) and how they contribute to a performance.

MU.Cn10.0.E.8a – Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

MU.Re7.2.E.8a – Describe how the elements of music and expressive qualities relate to context in a variety of musical works.

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Student Prerequisites:

To fully engage with this simulation, students should have the following foundational knowledge and skills:

Content Knowledge:

- Familiarity with the novel *Code Talker* by Joseph Bruchac, particularly Ned's role as a Navajo Code Talker during WWII.
- A basic understanding of how the Navajo Code worked, it was based on sacred language, used with discipline and precision, and changed frequently to protect U.S. military operations.
- Awareness that Ned's work carried high stakes, requiring silence, memory, responsibility, and trust under pressure.

Skills and Dispositions:

- Ability to recognize and clearly repeat basic body percussion patterns (e.g., claps, stomps, snaps, pats).
- Willingness to follow non-verbal directions and stay attentive while observing others.
- Cooperative mindset: readiness to work in a team, support peers, and handle mistakes constructively.
- Comfort with rotating roles (Code Talker, Soldier, Observer) and participating in active, embodied learning.

Mindset & Habits of Learning:

- Openness to risk-taking in a safe, respectful environment.
- Self-control and patience, especially while waiting for turns or navigating silently.
- Reflection skills: ability to connect personal experience to the text and articulate insights verbally or in writing.

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Accessibility Notes:

Operation: Rhythm Route is designed to be flexible and inclusive. With small adjustments, every student, regardless of physical, sensory, or learning needs, can engage with the core ideas of responsibility, trust, communication, and memory.

Physical Accessibility

- For students with mobility challenges:
 - Allow them to serve as Code Talkers, Observers, or Trackers (mapping the path on paper).
 - Offer a tabletop version using a printed grid and tokens to represent movement.
 - Use verbal rhythm cues or small instruments (e.g., drum pads, egg shakers) instead of physical movement.

Cognitive & Learning Support

- Use visual supports:
 - Project or post the body percussion codes clearly.
 - Provide individual cue cards with written or illustrated directions (e.g., 🟡 = Step Forward).
- Chunk the activity:
 - Model one code at a time and allow practice before full simulation.
 - Offer a “practice round” with no penalties.
- Partner strategically:
 - Pair students who need support with peers who are strong verbal or nonverbal communicators.
 - Assign classroom roles like “Signal Checker” or “Path Recorder” to keep students engaged in alternative ways.

Language & Communication Support

- Allow ELs or students with speech/language needs to:
 - Use gestures or draw directional arrows on paper to plan.
 - Preview vocabulary (“percussion,” “code,” “path,” “signal”) in advance with visuals or sentence stems.
 - Participate as non-verbal observers or rhythm participants first, and gradually take on more active roles.

Emotional & Behavioral Support

- Normalize mistakes as part of learning: “Boom” is not a failure, it’s a clue.
- Offer nonverbal opt-out signals for students who may be uncomfortable in the spotlight.
- Set clear routines and boundaries: model expectations for silence, patience, and respectful risk-taking.
- Let students reflect in different formats: drawing, audio recording, bulleted notes, or journaling.

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Brain Targeted Teaching Considerations:

BT1 – Emotional Climate:

Considerations

This simulation requires vulnerability, students must rely on others, perform publicly, and face mistakes. Creating an emotionally safe space is essential.

Suggestions

Begin with a short community-building circle or affirmation (e.g., “We’ve got each other’s backs today, just like Marines!”).

Normalize mistakes by modeling failure positively (“Booms” happen to the best soldiers!”).

Reinforce that everyone will take a turn in each role and that risk-taking is a strength, not a weakness.

Frame the experience as a team challenge, not a competition.

BT2 – Physical Environment:

Considerations

Students will move through space and need room for full-body participation and clear visibility of the grid.

Suggestions

Set up the grid in a spacious, clutter-free area (gym, hallway, or cleared classroom floor).

Position the Code Talker off to the side to ensure they can be clearly seen and heard.

Post the percussion code visibly (on the board or via projector) so the Soldier can access it easily.

Use soft, non-slip materials to mark the grid squares for safety.

Other Considerations:

BT3: Design the Learning Experience

This task is a prime example of arts-integrated, experiential learning, students engage emotionally, physically, and cognitively. The simulation builds conceptual understanding before abstract writing, supporting deeper transfer.

BT4: Teaching for Mastery of Content

This activity scaffolds understanding of Ned’s wartime role, preparing students to analyze his character more meaningfully in writing.

Students build vocabulary (responsibility, memory, trust) and connect concepts to lived experience.

BT5: Teaching for the Extension and Application of Knowledge

Students synthesize their experience with text-based evidence in their reflection.

Optional extensions (designing codes, writing journals) support transfer to new contexts and creative thinking.

BT6: Evaluating Learning

The [written reflection](#) and class discussion serve as assessments of emotional insight, content knowledge, and expressive ability.

Rubric-based feedback helps guide improvement.

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Steps for Implementation:

Teacher Background – Preparation & Confidence for Arts Integration

You do not need to be a musician to lead this experience, just a facilitator who values student creativity, engagement, and connection to content. Operation: Rhythm Route uses simple body percussion as a tool for embodied learning, empathy building, and deep comprehension of the themes in Code Talker.

What to Know

- The purpose is connection, not perfection. The goal is for students to feel the trust, responsibility, and memory required of a Code Talker. Encourage students to create high quality rhythms to CLEARLY communicate direction.
- This is grounded in historical and cultural respect. Navajo Code Talkers relied on rhythm, clarity, and non-verbal precision in high-stakes environments. This simulation is a respectful, student-centered representation of that experience.

What to Prepare

- A simple 6x6 grid using tape, paper plates, or classroom tiles, 8.5x11 paper.
- Three pre-set [body percussion code charts](#), which rotate just like the Navajo code did during WWII. Need to be posted or projected so students (especially “Soldiers”) can decode movements.
- The Operation Rhythm Route Maze needs to be copied for the Code Talker and the Teacher to highlight when students move successfully or unsuccessfully, BOOM!
- Teachers create medals for the soldiers who make it through the maze as a form of celebration and reward for hard work/completion of the mission!
- A structured and emotionally safe environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes and learning through collaboration.
- **Optional:** practice the body percussion cues yourself before the lesson, you only need 3-4 movements (clap, stomp, snap, etc.).

Tips for Success

- Use classroom norms or circle time to build trust before launching the simulation.
- Model the percussion patterns before the game begins and let students practice in partners.
- Emphasize that mistakes are part of the process, just like in real code cracking and wartime missions.
- Keep the tone respectful and rooted in learning, not competition.

This simulation is designed to be accessible, flexible, and powerful, giving all students an entry point into complex ideas through movement, rhythm, and reflection.