

"The Unbreakable Code"

This Book was reviewed by: Publisher's Weekly, The Horn Book, Inc., School Library Journal and Judy Katsh - Children's Literature

From Publisher's Weekly: Setting a solidly intriguing, little-known historical episode within a fictional framework, Hunter (Don't Touch My Stuff) pays warm tribute to the Navajo "code talkers" who served in the Marine Corps during World War II. To comfort a grandson distraught about an upcoming move, an elderly Navajo man tells him about the time that he, too, had to leave their canyon home and, along with hundreds of other Navajo men, came to perform a crucial mission for the U.S. government. The Navajo language, which had never been written down and was virtually unknown to outsiders, became a "secret weapon" in preventing the Japanese from intercepting and decoding American radio messages. Hunter's lengthy but absorbing story, based on interviews with former code talkers, casts a well-deserved spotlight on these skilled soldiers and on a wartime role that is almost guaranteed to interest readers. Miner's (The Shepherd's Song) subtly textured oil paintings realistically depict serene canyon landscapes, tense battle scenes and the affectionate rapport between the narrator and his grandson. Young code-crackers will appreciate the inclusion of the original Navajo code in the endnotes. Ages 6-up. (Apr.)

From The Horn Book, Inc.: Upset that he's moving from his birthplace, a Navajo boy listens to his grandfather reminisce about helping the military create a code based on the Navajo language during World War II. The historical episode is fascinating, but the past and current story lines do not mesh well. The color illustrations sometimes have a static quality but are generally effective. The code is printed at the back of the volume.

From School Library Journal: Gr 2-4. John, a young Navajo, is frightened to leave his lifelong home on the reservation and move to Minnesota with his mother and new stepfather. The boy's grandfather assures him he'll be all right since he has an "unbreakable code," the Navajo language. The man goes on to tell the story of how he and other Navajos were recruited by the Marines and developed a message code based on their native language that helped the U.S. in the Pacific during World War II. After the story, John feels less tentative about his move because his grandfather "taught him who he was and what he would always have with him." The narrative melds nicely with the oil paintings, which adeptly depict the Southwestern landscape and the military scenes. Tables that show the original alphabetical code and some highlighted military terms are appended. The Unbreakable Code presents an interesting part of World War II history that traditionally has received little attention. Nathan Aaseng's Navajo Code Talkers (Walker, 1992) presents a nonfiction account for older children. Tom S. Hurlburt, La Crosse Public Library, WI

From Judy Katsh - Children's Literature: In this compelling combination of story and history, Hunter reveals the heroic work of Navajo signalmen during World War II. A grandfather recounts the story to his grandson and through this telling, readers learn not only of the existence of this corps and the code they invented; but also of the hardships and hard feelings the Navajos endured and overcame. The shame of it is that we haven't heard more of these men, their code, and the part they played in securing peace. The joy of it is that now children will be able to honor and celebrate the job that was done. The Southwestern style paintings that accompany the text are a good historical, geographic, and conceptual match for the text.