

## Impact Statement

Cailyn Yoon, Grade 9.  
***Shadows of War***, 2024.  
Graphite on paper, 30 x 20 inches.  
Lambert High School, Suwanee, GA  
Unsung Hero: Chester Nez

I chose Chester Nez as my Unsung hero because of the profound and commonly unnoticed impact he had during World War II. Among the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers recruited by the Marine Corps, Nez played a crucial role in developing an unbreakable code using his native language. This complex code helped immensely in wartime efforts, but the significance of his achievements has often been underestimated. Despite facing harsh cultural suppression along with other Navajo natives, Nez volunteered to serve his country out of a personal belief to defend freedom. His bravery in the face of calamity showcases the resilience that defined his character.

What truly makes Nez a hero is his ability to persevere in the presence of immense challenges and pressures. As a Code Talker, he worked tirelessly, transmitting vital messages during major battles such as Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Armed only with basic equipment like an old field phone, notepad, and codebook, he ensured the security of allied communications. Not only was Nez actively fighting a battle in the war, but he was also experiencing personal struggles with discrimination and the drastic change of going from speaking his once-forbidden native language to using it every day. Despite these hardships, Nez kept his resilience, dedicating over a year to the war effort without a single code being deciphered. His strength and remarkable ability to overcome societal prejudices make him a courageous and tenacious hero to people across the world.

In my artwork, I aimed to depict Nez's dedication through illustrating his countless late nights of having to transmit messages amidst the chaos of war. Research showed that he often went without sleep for more than 48 hours, enduring endless nights surrounded by the various pressures of battle. To bring this scene to life, I depicted a lonesome figure under a night sky filled with the chaos and destruction of war. Amidst all the havoc, Nez remains focused on his vital work, representing his ability to keep his composure under intense pressure. I also incorporated motifs of the Navajo code into hats and the background as a visual representation of how Nez's extensive language skills contributed to the triumphant Allied victory.

Throughout the process of creating this artwork, I gained a better understanding of Nez's commitment and began to reflect on my own life as a result. As I learned more about his selfless sacrifices, I found myself admiring and yearning to resemble Nez's character. By publicly displaying my piece, my goal is to shed light on the significant contributions of the Navajo Code Talkers in ultimately winning the war and saving countless innocent lives. Additionally, I hope to inspire viewers by demonstrating that individuals can overcome obstacles that seem to be impossible through courage and determination. Nez's story serves as a constant reminder of our shared history and the true meaning of service, sacrifice, and patriotism.

By honoring Chester Nez's under-appreciated service during World War II, my artwork aims to ensure that he and his fellow Code Talkers receive the recognition they deserve. The impacts of their contributions travel far beyond the bounds of American history and affect people globally, emphasizing the importance of freedom and resilience. Through my art, I hope to affect a larger audience and enlighten them about the impact of Nez's legacy on the world we live in today.