

CHOCTAW CODE TALKERS OF WORLD WAR I

by Amy Rogers

LESSON PLAN 4

HISTORY, 9



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These lesson plans are created with Farina King and the History Department at Northeastern State University. Students of the program – most of them active schoolteachers – study areas of the political and cultural history of Native American individuals and tribes and create thorough, engaging lesson plans based on their research. It is through the generosity of Farina King and her students that the Museum of Native American History is able to share this wonderful material with the Education community, with the hope of creating a broader and more inclusive understanding of Native American history and culture.

This lesson plan was created by Amy Rogers



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How To Use This File

This file is designed to give you all the resources necessary to create a compelling lesson plan using whichever program or lesson planning style you are most comfortable with. All of the text can be easily copied and pasted, and the images can be dragged and dropped into any program, showing up in high quality. All videos and websites referenced can be reached directly using their hyperlinks.

Overview

MATERIALS INCLUDED

- Introduction (p. 4)
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KEYWORDS

Choctaw Language
WWI
Code Talkers
Native Americans in the U.S. Military
Native American Rights
Forced Assimilation

Introduction

BUILD BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Before teaching the lesson using the historical narrative of the Choctaw code talkers, explain to students that Native Americans experienced a vastly different set of circumstances than other soldiers of European-American descent. Native Americans struggled to maintain their sovereignty, natural resources, lands, and traditional tribal customs. Due to Euro-American ethnocentricity, the Native Americans lost much of their homeland base due to a series of treaties, removal, land allotment, and assimilation. It was not until 1924 that all Native Americans were recognized as United States citizens, and even the 1924 act did not give all Indigenous people the right to vote in each state. In 1965, Congress passed The Voting Rights Act, which finally outlawed the exclusion of American Indians the right to vote in all states (Campbell & DeLeon). Despite the discrimination and social injustices they experienced, many Native Americans willingly enlisted to serve in the United States military during World War I.

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

- Learn that although the United States government attempted to eradicate Native languages during the assimilation era, the U.S. government relied on a Native language to help defeat Germany in World War I.
- The Choctaw, along with other Indigenous people, proved to be resilient to forced assimilation.
- As the first code talkers, the Choctaw maintained their commitment to faith, family, and culture as they served on the front lines.

Oklahoma Academic Standards

ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

HISTORY CONTENT STANDARDS:

1. **OKH.5.1** Examine the policies of the United States and their effects on American Indian identity, culture, economy, tribal government, and sovereignty including:
 - A. A. passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924
 - B. B. Effects of the federal policy of assimilation including Indian boarding schools (1880s-1940s)
 - C. C. Authority to select tribal leaders as opposed to appointment by the federal government.
 - D. D. Exploitation of American Indian resources, lands, trust accounts, head rights, and guardianship as required by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.
2. **OKH.5.9** Summarize and analyze the impact of mobilization for World War II including the establishment of military bases, prisoners of war installations, and the contributions of Oklahomans to the war effort including the American Indian code talkers and the 45th Infantry Division.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

9TH GRADE ENGLISH I SPEAKING & LISTENING

9.1 R.3 Students will engage in collaborative discussions about appropriate topics and texts, expressing their own ideas clearly while building on the ideas of others in pairs, diverse groups, and whole class settings.

WRITING

READING AND WRITING PROCESS

- 9.2 R.1 Students will summarize, paraphrase, and generalize ideas, while maintaining meaning and a logical sequence of events, within and between texts.
- 9.2 R.3 Students will synthesize main ideas with supporting details in texts.
- 9.2 W.4 Students will edit and revise multiple drafts for organization and transitions to improve coherence and meaning, sentence variety, and use of consistent tone and point of view.
1. *Critical Reading and Writing*

9.3.W.2 Students will compose essays and reports to objectively introduce and develop topics, incorporating evidence (e.g., specific facts, examples, details, data) and maintaining an organized structure and a formal style.
 5. *Language*

9.5.R.3 Students will recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.

9.5.W.1 Students will write using correct mechanics with a focus on punctuation marks as needed.
 6. *Research*

9.6.R.2 Students will follow ethical and legal guidelines for finding and recording information from a variety of primary and secondary sources.

9.6.R.3 Students will evaluate the relevance, reliability, and validity of the information gathered.

9.6.W.3 Students will quote, paraphrase, and summarize findings following an appropriate citation style (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.) and avoiding plagiarism.

Lesson Plan and Narrative

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did the Choctaw use their unique cultural ways and values to help the United States and the Allies defeat Germany in World War I?

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF CHOCTAW CODE TALKERS

NATIVE AMERICANS have served in all the United States military actions since the Europeans arrived on the North American continent. The Choctaw Nation has long represented brave and honorable American military heroes and has held their tribal members who serve as soldiers in high esteem. Traditionally, the Choctaws deemed their boys as men after they demonstrated bravery in warfare. The men who distinguished themselves as war leaders often entered more prominent roles within Choctaw society and its tribal government system. Choctaw chief Pushmataha exemplified this warrior status with his own success as a boy when he fought against the Caddo and Osage. He later led the valiant Choctaw warriors to fight on the side of the United States in the War of 1812 and the Creek War of 1813 and 1814 (O'Brien). In 1820, Pushmataha predicted that the "Choctaw War Cry would be heard in many foreign lands," (qtd. in Meadows 54), which demonstrated his faith in the continuance of the Choctaw people's qualities of honor, bravery, and dedication to family and

culture (Allen). Almost a century after Pushmataha's prediction, his vision for his people came true when nineteen Choctaw soldiers served as the first code talkers in World War I.

The Choctaw Join the Armed Forces in World War I

On April 6, 1917, the U.S. declared war on Germany and joined its allies Britain, Russia, and France to fight in World War I (See fig-



Figure 1. Harris & Ewing, *President Wilson Before Congress, Announcing the Break in the Official Relations with Germany* [Electronic Record]; February 3, 1917; War Department. 1789-9/18/1947; Record Group, 165; National Archives Identifier: 53372; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

ure 1). When the United States entered the war in 1917, over 11,000 Native American men joined the armed forces regardless of their U.S. citizenship status (“American Indians’ Service”). Members of the Five Civilized Tribes became U.S. citizens on March 3, 1901, but there was much confusion for those who were not allotted or allotted after 1906 about whether they were subject to the draft or eligible to enlist voluntarily (Meadows 20). A substantial number of American Indians who served were from the Plains, Great Lakes, and Southeast regions, where they experienced greater immersion in assimilation practices. By the time World War I began, the Choctaw people had adapted to many mainstream cultural ways of the Euro-Americans. Their children attended boarding schools where they were prohibited from speaking their language or adhering to their native culture. Despite all the challenges Native Americans endured, the Choctaws, and thousands of other Native soldiers continued to hold a spirit of honor and courage. Many Choctaw men served in WWI as they combined their allegiance to the United States with their traditional tribal values and customs (Meadows 24). The Choctaw men proved to be valiant soldiers who played a crucial part in ending the war by using their native language to send secure, coded messages across the battlefields.

The Need for Coded Messages

The first known documentation written about the Choctaw code talkers was written by Colonel Alfred W. Bloor, commander of the 142nd Infantry, in which several of the Choctaw code talkers were assigned. To record activities in the war field, Colonel Bloor wrote a memo on January 23, 1919, titled “Transitioning messages in Choctaw” to General Smith, the commanding general of the 36th Division. Bloor provided a brief explanation of the idea, reason, and methods by which the Choctaw soldiers transmitted coded

messages in their Native language. The Germans kept tapping into the American telephone lines and radio circuits to gather intelligence information, so the Americans needed a way to communicate with other companies across the battlefields without German interference (See figure 2). The military used various forms of communication such as rocket and flag signals, light signals, carrier pigeons and dogs, radio, telegraph, and human messenger runners (Meadows 67). However, each of these forms presented particular challenges and hazards. The use of the field telephone was by far the fastest and most efficient way to relay messages, but as Colonel Bloor’s memo states, the Germans received every “decipherable message” (Bloor). The Americans were in desperate need of a way to send secure messages.

The Choctaw Used Their Language to Send Secure Messages

In Colonel Bloor’s memo, he presents when the idea to use the Choctaw language occurred. The 36th Division consisted of the all-Indian Company E in the 142nd Infantry (See figure 3). This



Figure 2. American Field Telephone, photograph, The National World War I Museum, Kansas City, MO.

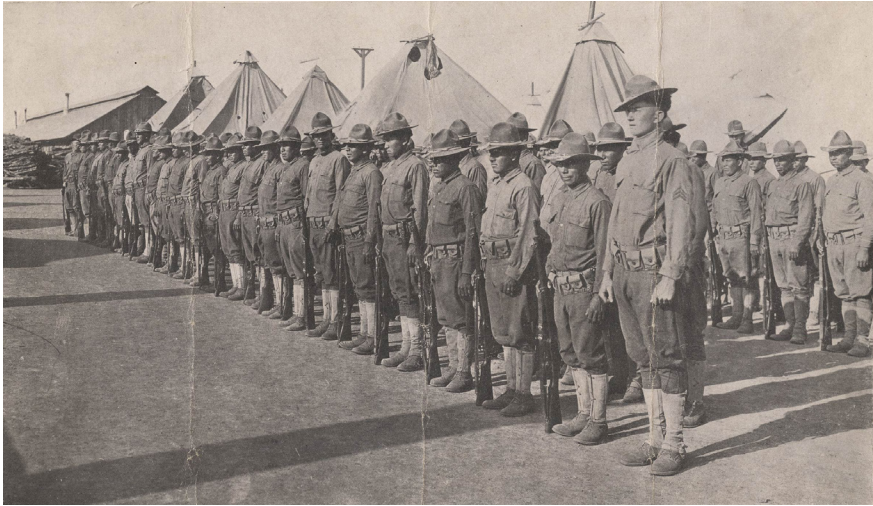


Figure 3. Company E, 142nd Regiment, 36th Division at Camp Bowie, 1918, photograph, Camp Mabry Texas, Texas Military Forces Museum. <https://www.texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org/choctaw/codetalkers.htm>.

division contained the greatest number of Native Americans who spoke various Native languages than any other division in World War I (Meadows 47). Bloor states that while the 36th Division was in Vo-Champagne, France, it was realized that an Indian language could be used to transmit telephone messages that the Germans would not be able to decipher. According to one of the Choctaw soldiers, Jonas Durant, the Choctaw men were chosen as code talkers because they could fluently speak, read, and write in English (Meadows 86). Matt Reed, a curator for the Oklahoma Historical Society, explained how the translation process worked. Reed described that Choctaw soldiers would be placed at the headquarters of different companies or divisions. A headquarter staff member would hand an order written in English to a Choctaw soldier. The Choctaw would translate the order in the Choctaw language to another Choctaw soldier placed in a separate company. The Choctaw on the other end of the telephone would write the order back down in English and hand the order over to his

superior (Red Horse 32:12). By using the Choctaw language, the enemy was unable to decipher the Americans' messages, and they could confidently use the telephone to convey messages (Bloor).

Choctaw Code Talkers During the Battle at Forest Ferme

The idea to use the Choctaw language to transmit messages was only thought of toward the end of WWI during the Meuse-Argonne campaign. The Meuse-Argonne campaign took place on the Western Front, about a 400-mile line through France and Belgium from the North Sea to the Alps on the Swiss border (Krause). The Choctaw code talkers used their native language before and during the battle at Forest Ferme on October 26th - 27th (Meadows 77). By the end of October, the American and French troops fought to weaken the German forces. The Choctaw men had played a vital role in helping the Americans and their allies defeat the Germans by sending messages in their native language that could not be deciphered. The Choctaw language did not have words for some English military terms. For example, there was not a Choctaw word for "regiment," so in place of "regiment," the code talkers used "The Tribe" (Morrisey 1919). Lieutenant Colonel William J. Morrisey wrote a memo in the spring of 1919 to document a list of Choctaw substitutions that were created for the line of duty. His memo indicates that the Choctaw men were astute at creating a set of substitutions quickly and efficiently in preparation for further use.

Nineteen Code Talkers and Code Talker Training

It has been documented through various archival sources that eight Choctaw code talkers were used at Forest Ferme. A photograph from the Wanamaker Collection titled "Choctaw Telephone Squad", documents five Choctaw code talkers standing with their



Figure 4. "Choctaw Telephone Squad." Photograph by Dr. Joseph K. Dixon, June 7, 1919. Wanamaker Collection Archives, Mathers Museum of World Cultures, Indiana University. 1962-08-6452

Captain, Elijah W. Horner, at Camp Merrit, New Jersey, after the war in 1919. The photographer of the "Choctaw Telephone Squad," Dr. Joseph K. Dixon, was able to photograph five of the eight Choctaw code talkers who used their language during battle at Forest Ferme. Before the intense battle at Forest Ferm, the Choctaw men had not had time to create a code before battle (Meadows 103). After the battle, the 36th Division underwent training in Louppy-le-Petit, France in preparation for sending future coded messages in the Choctaw language during the war. However, by November 11th, Germany surrendered, and the Armistice was signed, ending the war (Meadows 79). Therefore, along with the training at Louppy-le-Petit, nineteen Choctaw code talkers have been reported to have used their native language as code talkers during the Great War (Meadows 84-85). Whether it was eight men who used the field telephones on the battlefields while others participated in only the training, the Choctaw code talkers set

the history and intelligence for future code talkers, such as the Comanche and Navajo, who served in World War II (Red Horse 42:30).

The Irony of Forced Assimilation and the Need for the Choctaw Language

As part of the assimilation process beginning in the late nineteenth century, the United States government forced many Indian children to move away from their families to attend strict boarding schools. In these military-like institutions, children were forbidden from speaking their native languages. Many code talkers of World War I and World War II attended these strict boarding schools. Ironically, the same government that relied on a Native language to help defeat the enemy in war, was the same government that tried to eradicate their languages through the assimilation process. The Choctaw men proved to be resilient to the forced assimilation they experienced as children at boarding schools. As the first code talkers, the Choctaw maintained their commitment to faith, country, and family as they served as brave warriors on the front lines ("*Native Words*").

Demonstrating Resistance and Survivance Through Service

Adhering to the Choctaw spirit of humility and integrity, the code talkers returned from World War I without seeking recognition or boasting of their feats in war. It was not until decades later that the Choctaw code talkers received awards and recognition for their unique contribution to helping the United States end World War I. The first Native Americans to receive long-overdue recognition for their extraordinary service as code talkers were the Navajo. The Navajo code talkers gained the greatest recognition by the late

1960s for their service in World War II. After the publicity of the Navajo code talkers, more Native tribes sought to honor their war veterans and their service as code talkers, including the Choctaw (Meadows 213). By serving as code talkers and soldiers, the Choctaw and numerous other Indigenous tribes and nations demonstrated resistance and survivance during the turbulent years of the assimilation era. It has been a little over a century since the Choctaw code talkers helped defeat the German forces in World War I, and their unique contributions still represent the character and strength of the Choctaw Nation as they continue to preserve their culture today.

Recognition and Awards

The Choctaw Nation is enormously proud of the sacrifices and contributions their people made to help win World War I. In 2013, the United States Congress presented the Choctaw Nation with a Congressional gold medal in honor of their members. That same year, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation also renamed about 60 miles of Oklahoma Highway 3 as the “WWI Choctaw Code Talkers Highway”, while a monument in honor of the code talkers was erected in Antlers, Oklahoma. More recently, 23 bridges are being named after the Choctaw men who served in World War I and II (“Choctaw Code Talkers”). The Choctaw Nation is proud of their heritage and history. They have endured many trials since their forced removal to Indian Territory in the 1830s. However, today they continue their legacy as a strong nation as “the third largest federally recognized tribe in the United States” (“Learn More”).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What were the effects of attempted assimilation on Native Americans?
- Explain how the Choctaw soldiers demonstrated a continuance of their culture during their service in World War I.
- How did the Choctaw soldiers contribute to the United States and to the Choctaw Nation in World War I?

Activity: *Create a Newspaper Article About the Choctaw Code Talkers*

DIRECTIONS: Write an informative newspaper article by pretending you are a journalist in 1918 who is reporting the news and accomplishments of the Choctaw code talkers after the signing of the Armistice.

BRAINSTORM (*worksheet on p. 11*)

Create a list of all the major events, people, and topics of the Choctaw code talkers that were discussed in the lesson.

START WITH THE FACTS: Most newspaper articles focus on who, what, when, where, and why. Fill out the boxes below to organize your information.

- *When/ Where:* When and where were the Choctaw code talkers involved in World War I?
- *Who:* Who were the Choctaw code talkers and who was involved in the process of having them use their Native language to send messages?
- *What:* What happened in World War I that led up to the need for code talkers? What did they accomplish?
- *Why:* Why were the Choctaw soldiers needed for the task of using their language to send messages? Why were the Choctaw chosen?

ARTICLE TITLE

Create a strong title to your article that will catch your audience's attention.

LEAD LINE

The first line of your article needs to draw the reader in. It should include the who, what, when, where, and why.

ARTICLE OUTLINE / ROUGH DRAFT

(*worksheet on p. 12*)

INCLUDE A PRIMARY SOURCE

Find a primary source about the Choctaw code talkers that will enhance your article. Include the source in your article.

INCLUDE CITATIONS

A good reporter makes it clear where he or she got their information. State where you got your information so that the reader knows your story is reliable. Use any primary or secondary source as if it were already available after World War I ended so that you can show your research and give credit where it is due. Include a separate reference page with your newspaper article assignment.

Worksheet

START WITH THE FACTS

<i>when/where</i>	<i>who</i>	<i>what</i>	<i>why</i>

ARTICLE TITLE:

LEAD LINE:

ARTICLE OUTLINE/ROUGH DRAFT

ARTICLE TITLE:

Finally:

PARAGRAPH 1: GIVE A SUMMARY OF THE EVENT

Lead Line: This is the first of your story. It should state the who, what, when, & where.

Paragraph 2. Describe how other people are reacting to the Choctaw code talkers. Make sure it is clear how the people you mention are related to the story.

What happened first:

Next:

Paragraph 3. Why were the Choctaw code talkers important? How did they contribute to helping the United States win the war, and what does this reveal about the Choctaws or other Native Americans?

Then:

Newspaper Article Rubric

(Lesson plan and rubric purchased and adapted with permission from *Simplified Instruction*)

POINTS	3	2	1	0
Content	Relevant, accurate, and thorough information. Clear effort to make content interesting to classmates. Well-explained. Includes different perspectives on the Choctaw code talkers.	Accurate information, could be more thorough, interesting, but not relevant to classmates. Somewhat includes different perspectives on the Choctaw code talkers.	Lacking essential information in the story. Includes inaccurate information. No perspectives on the Choctaw code talkers.	No information of substance or completely inaccurate.
Spelling & Grammar	Almost no spelling or grammatical errors.	Some spelling or grammatical errors, but not enough to distract the reader.	There is a distracting amount of spelling or grammatic errors.	The amount of spelling and grammatical errors makes the article almost unreadable.
Organization	Good, attention-catching first line. Article follows a logical structure that walks the reader through notable events of the story. Conclusion ends the story leaving the audience with something to	First line is good. Article has some sense of order but gets confusing in some places. Conclusion wraps up the article well.	The article has some order to it, but it is confusing to the reader. No clear introduction or conclusion.	No organization or structure.
Citations	The student included citations of primary and secondary sources.	All citations of primary and secondary sources are included, but there are a few citation errors.	All citations of primary and secondary sources are included, but there is a lack of proper format.	There is a lack of sources, or no sources are cited.

Works Cited

Allen, Judy. Personal interview. 2 March 2021.

I conducted a phone interview with Judy Allen, a long-time researcher of Choctaw code talkers, Choctaw Nation member, and the Historic Projects Officer for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Her extensive knowledge of the Choctaw code talkers was helpful in finding reliable primary and secondary sources on the Choctaw Code Talkers, as well as how to contact the descendants of some of the code talkers who served in World War I and II. Also, in speaking with Ms. Allen, she informed me about the Choctaw values of faith, family, and culture.

Bloor, A.W. Letter from the Commanding Officer of the 142nd Infantry to the Commanding General of the 36th Division. 23 Jan. 1919. National Archives Catalog. National Archives Identifier: 301642. College Park, Maryland.

This primary source is a letter from the Commanding Officer of the 142nd Infantry to the Commanding General of the 36th Division during World War I. This letter is a significant piece of Choctaw and military history because it marks the first time it was realized that a Native American language could be used to keep the Germans from decoding the American Army's messages. Natives from the Choctaw tribe were first chosen as code talkers, and it helped turn the tide of the war as the Germans were driven out of Foret Ferme, France.

Campbell, Matthew L & De Leon, Jacqueline. "Native American Voting Rights Coalition." *Native American Rights Fund*.

<https://www.narf.org/cases/voting-rights/>

This Native American Rights Fund website provides information about when Native Americans were granted the right to vote.

"Choctaw Code Talkers Monument Dedicated in Antlers." 24 July 2018. <https://www.choctawnation.com/news-events/press-media/choctaw-code-Talkers-monument-dedicated-antlers>

This source is Choctaw Nation's news website that presented a story in 2018 about the dedications made to the Choctaw code talkers and other Choctaw members who served in the armed forces in World War I and World War II.

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American. "American Indians' Service in World War I, 1920." History. <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/american-indians-service-world-war-i-1920>

The Gilderman Lehrman Institute of American History provides a website for the history education. This website was useful in gaining more knowledge about the service of Native Americans in World War I, including the Choctaw code talkers.

Meadows, William C. *The First Code Talkers: Native American Communicators in World War I*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021.

William Meadows' book covers all the known code talkers of World War I, including the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Eastern Band of Cherokee, Osage, and Comanche. Meadows draws his research from military and Native American archives, interviews from the code talkers and their family members, and newspaper articles. He describes how the Natives used their languages to create encrypted codes. His extensive research will help me gain knowledge of the code talkers as I build my lesson plan with factual information.

Morrissey, William J., Lt. Col., to Lieut. John R. Eddy, Historical Section, G.S., G. HQ. "Terms used by Indians Over Telephone." 2 March, 1919. Folder WW-75-11. IU Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Mathers Ethnographic Collection.

Lt. Col. William J. Morrissey's memo was written to Lt. John R. Eddy to document, from Morrison's memory, a list of military terms for which the Choctaw code talkers created substitutions, since there were no equivalent words in Choctaw for these terms.

"Native Words, Native Warriors." National Museum of the American Indian, Native Knowledge 360, Smithsonian, 2020, <https://www.americanindian.si.edu/nk360/code-talkers/>

The National Museum of the American Indian's website, Native Knowledge 360, provides photographs, maps, and documents that examine the Native American Code Talkers. It explores their experiences growing up in boarding schools that attempt-

ed to repress their culture, and their experiences serving in World War I and II as code talkers for the United States military. This website is written specifically for teachers and students; a useful tool to include information about various Natives from different tribes who served in World War I and II as code talkers.

O'Brien, Greg. "Choctaw recruits fight with the U.S. Army." *National Park Service*, 3 Feb. 2015. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/choctaw-indians-and-the-battle-of-new-orleans.htm>

This website article provides insight into the early Choctaw traditions of boys earning prestige as warriors and how the Red-stick rebellion provided the opportunity for many boys to gain respect and recognition as men.

Red-Horse, Valerie, et al., directors. *Choctaw Code Talkers*. Distributed by Vision Maker Video, 2010.

This is a documentary video about the World War I Choctaw Natives who used their native language to serve as communication specialists in the United States Army. This documentary is full of interviews by the family members of the Choctaw Code Talkers as well as tribal members who describe the reasons that the Choctaw men would serve in the United States Army when they were not even allowed to vote. The documentary also consists of photographs of the Choctaw Code talkers and film clippings of moments in World War I in which the code talkers would have experienced.

Simplified Instruction. "Creating a Newspaper Article for Any Social Studies Unit (editable!). Teachers Pay Teachers.

Purchased 30 March, 2021.

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/>

This resource is from Teachers Pay Teachers, an online marketplace for teachers to purchase materials. I used this editable resource to modify and adapt my newspaper article lesson plan and rubric.