

Red Letter Days

by Joseph Bruchac

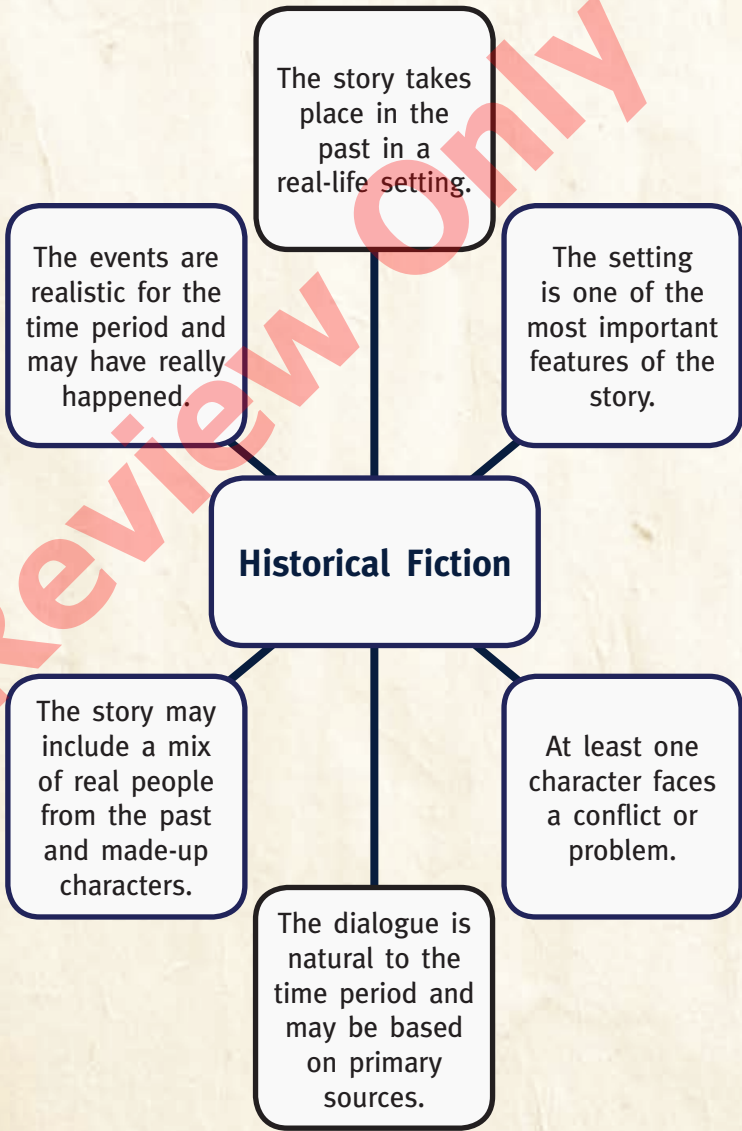
illustrated by Robert Martinez



Level	V/50
Lexile®	830L

Historical Fiction

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



© Benchmark Education Company, LLC. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Printed in Guangzhou, China. XXXX-XX-XXXX

LEXILE® is a trademark of MetaMetrics, Inc., and is registered in the United States and abroad. E-books and additional digital resources available at benchmarkuniverse.com.

ISBN: 978-1-5322-6009-4

Toll-Free 1-877-236-2465
www.benchmarkeducation.com
www.benchmarkuniverse.com

BENCHMARK EDUCATION COMPANY
145 Huguenot Street • New Rochelle, NY • 10801

After the United States entered World War II in 1941, few things were more important to Americans in the Armed Forces than hearing from people at home. “Mail call,” when letters were distributed, was the highlight of the day for most troops.

Because the U.S. military had to guard its secrets from the enemy, censors read each letter before it reached its recipient. If a letter contained “strategic information,” like the location where a soldier was, that part would be cut out.



Among those soldiers waiting to hear from home were Navajo Code Talkers. The Navajo are a Native American tribe from the southwestern United States. The Navajo Code Talkers used their native language to code, send, and receive secret information by radio for the United States Armed Forces. Since the Navajo language is very complex, the “code” was never broken. This proved instrumental to the success of the U.S. war effort.

However, back home many Navajo children—along with other Native American children—were still being taken from their homes by the government and sent to boarding schools. At these schools, Native American children were punished for speaking their languages and forced to leave their cultures behind.

The story that follows is an imagined exchange of letters between a Navajo Code Talker serving during World War II, and his young nephew, who is experiencing the same harsh boarding school conditions he once endured.

The term *red-letter day* refers to a medieval European tradition of marking important days on calendars in red. It now means a memorable or special day. This story shows the importance of wartime communication between those serving in the war and those back home.

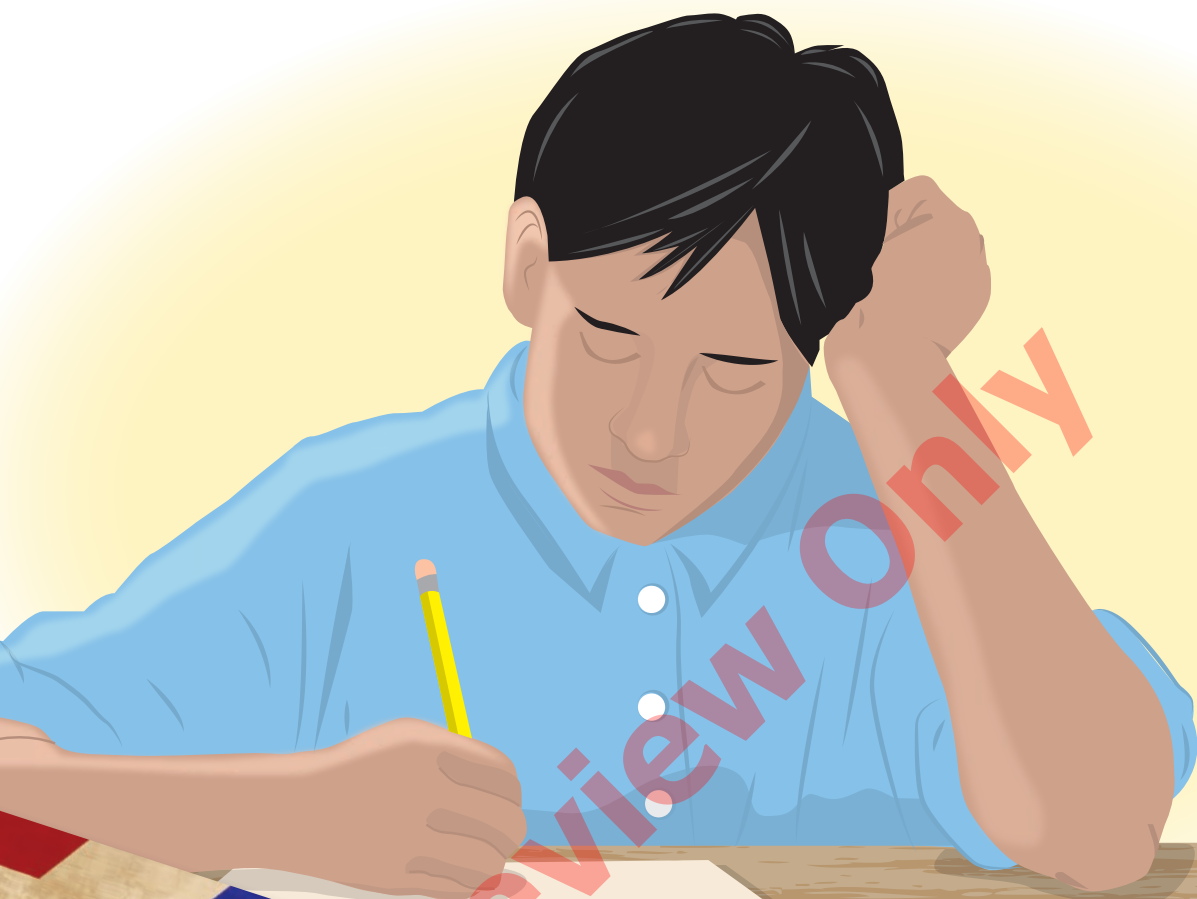
◀ **Mail call aboard a troop transport ship in the Pacific Ocean, 1945**

Navajo Boarding School
September 10, 1942

Dear Uncle George,

It is me, your nephew Thomas,
who is sending this letter to you.
I'm writing you as Sister May, my teacher,
asked me to do. She is reading this letter
to make sure it is written well.
All of the students in our class,
even those with no relatives in the war,
are writing letters to men overseas
to help the war effort by encouraging our soldiers.
I am very glad to do this, Uncle.
I miss you and wish I could see you.
I would write something in Navajo to you,
but Sister May says use English only, always!
She also says we must keep our letters clear
so the censors don't think we're using code.
All of our relatives back here in New Mexico
are well. I know they would want me to
send their wishes and prayers for safety to you.
Uncle George, I will say goodbye now.
I hope you will find time to write me, too.

Sincerely yours,
Thomas Jefferson Benally



PFC. GEORGE WASHINGTON YAZZIE 1235468
3RD MARINES 2ND BATTALION
A.P.O. 83C/0 P.M.
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA



Somewhere in the Pacific

October 1, 1942

My nephew Thomas,

I was so happy, so very happy, to get your letter. It was a real red-letter day for me when it arrived. Some of our guys get four or five letters every mail call.

Yours is the first one from home that I've gotten.

I guess that's because just you and me are the only ones who can write in our family.

Also, smoke signals won't reach this far across the ocean, as you know.

That was a joke, Nephew, ho ho ho.

I am well, but can't tell you much.

"Loose lips sink ships" is what they say, even though I'm no longer on a ship.

I think it's okay for me to tell you

I am on an island with palm trees on it.

There are fewer trees now than before we landed.

There are also a whole lot fewer enemies, too.

Nonstop shelling is the reason why.

Maybe you have read this island's name in the papers or heard it on the radio.

If that's the case, I guess you know that us marines don't have it easy.

I am going to write its name here now
to see if the censors are doing their job.
If they are, all you'll see here is a hole
and not the name of a place called [redacted]
Fighting here has been hard, but I am fine
and I think that what us Navajo marines
have done has really helped so far.
There are other guys from back home here.
We all are looking out for each other.
We all miss home, just like I do.
It means a lot when I hear from you.
I hope you'll write me another letter.
Give your mother, my little sister,
a big hug for me at Christmas
when you see her.
Don't forget to hug all
our sheep, too.
That's another joke. Ho ho.

Sincerely,
Your uncle,
George Washington Yazzie



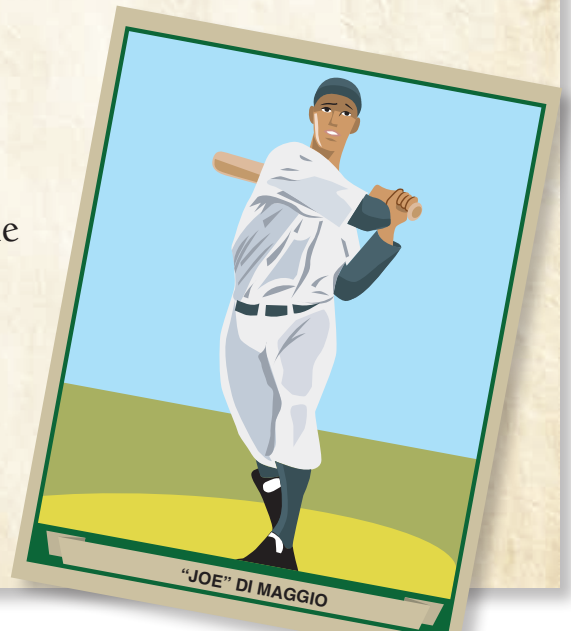
Navajo Boarding School
October 15, 1942

Dear Uncle,

I can't believe how soon your letter got here.
It arrived here just six days after
you wrote it. Even eagles don't fly that fast.
It was so wonderful to hear from you.
I am well and working hard in school.
I guess you know about the World Series
and how the Cardinals beat the Yankees.
I bet you were sad, seeing as how
we both love Joltin' Joe DiMaggio.
It's still a long time till Christmas break,
so I haven't been able to hug Mom for you.
But when I do get home, that's the first thing I'll do.
Watch out for bombs, Uncle George. Stay safe.

Sincerely yours,
Tommy

P.S. I'll be sure to hug all the
sheep, too.



Somewhere in the Pacific
November 1, 1942

Dear Tommy,



It's been real good to hear from you.
Your letters sure mean a lot to me.
Here, the coconuts keep falling, so we
may get medals for being bombed by trees.
Sometimes at night we get woken up
by this one enemy bomber with an engine so old
it sounds like a broken washing machine.
But don't you worry, Tommy.
We just take shelter when we hear her,
and hide by turning out our lights.
What we really have to watch for here
are the giant crabs that come out at night.
You don't want to ever step on one of them.
Boy, those suckers sure can bite!
Well, it's lights out so ...

Love,
Your uncle George

P.S. Too bad about our Yankees. I listen to baseball
on Armed Forces Radio, dodging coconuts and
hopping over crabs under palm trees.