

# CLAT WHISPERS

## (CLAT Mentorship Program)

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### Passage 1

Source: Aeon

Silence, in conversation, is rarely neutral. It is either charged with meaning or burdened with discomfort. The philosopher David Lewis was known for his ability to tolerate silence—pausing for long stretches before responding, unbothered by the social pressure to fill gaps. His silences were not evasions but deliberations. Yet most people, when confronted with a lull in dialogue, scramble to speak, to rescue the interaction from perceived failure.

This discomfort arises not from silence itself, but from the ambiguity it introduces. In cultures where speech is equated with engagement, silence can feel like rejection, confusion, or judgment. The absence of verbal cues forces interlocutors to interpret intent without guidance, often projecting their own anxieties onto the void. Silence becomes a mirror, reflecting not what is said, but what is feared.

However, not all silences are awkward. In therapy, meditation, or religious ritual, silence is purposeful, even sacred. It is understood, contextualized, and shared. The awkwardness emerges when silence is unexpected, when its function is unclear. In such moments, the silence is not merely absence—it is a question without a frame.

Roache argues that our discomfort with silence is culturally constructed. In societies that valorize extroversion and immediacy, the pause is suspect. We are trained to interpret silence as a lapse in competence or connection. Yet this interpretation is not universal. In some cultures, silence is a sign of respect, thoughtfulness, or emotional depth.

To navigate silence well requires a shift in perspective. Rather than fearing the void, we might learn to inhabit it—to listen to what is not said, to allow space for thought, to resist the compulsion to perform.

## DAILY RC PRACTICE SHEET FOR CLAT

## CLAT WHISPERS

# CLAT WHISPERS

## (CLAT Mentorship Program)

In doing so, we may discover that silence is not the enemy of communication, but its most profound expression.

1. **What is the function of the anecdote about David Lewis in the first paragraph?**
  - A. To illustrate how silence can be used as a manipulative tactic in philosophical debate.
  - B. To provide a counterexample to the common discomfort people feel during conversational pauses.
  - C. To show that silence is universally interpreted as a sign of intellectual depth.
  - D. To argue that philosophers are uniquely immune to social norms around communication.
2. **Which of the following would be the most appropriate title for this passage?**
  - A. “The Language of Silence: Cultural Norms and Conversational Gaps”
  - B. “David Lewis and the Philosophy of Quietude”
  - C. “Speechless: Why We Fear the Pause”
  - D. “Silence as a Social Failure: A Psychological Inquiry”
3. **Which of the following best reflects the author’s opinion about silence in communication?**
  - A. Silence is inherently problematic and should be avoided in most social contexts.
  - B. Silence is a culturally shaped phenomenon that can be meaningful or awkward depending on context.
  - C. Silence is a universal signal of disengagement and emotional discomfort.
  - D. Silence is only valuable in structured environments like therapy or meditation.
4. **What does the phrase “a question without a frame” most likely mean in the context of the third paragraph?**
  - A. A moment of confusion caused by poor articulation.
  - B. A situation where silence prompts reflection but lacks interpretive boundaries.
  - C. A rhetorical device used to provoke philosophical inquiry.
  - D. A conversational tactic used to manipulate emotional responses.

**DAILY RC PRACTICE SHEET FOR CLAT**  
**CLAT WHISPERS**

## CLAT WHISPERS

### (CLAT Mentorship Program)

5. Which of the following statements would the author most likely disagree with?
- A. Silence can be a powerful form of communication when its purpose is understood.
  - B. Cultural norms heavily influence how silence is perceived and experienced.
  - C. Silence should be eliminated from professional settings to ensure clarity and efficiency.
  - D. Learning to tolerate silence can deepen interpersonal understanding and emotional connection.

#### Passage 2

##### Source: WWII Communication Strategies: An analysis

During World War II, the United States military faced a critical problem: how to communicate securely in the face of increasingly sophisticated enemy codebreakers. Traditional encryption methods were often too slow or vulnerable to decryption. In response, the U.S. Marine Corps turned to an unlikely source—Native American languages—and specifically, the Navajo language.

The idea was both innovative and pragmatic. The Navajo language, spoken by a relatively small group and unwritten at the time, was virtually unknown outside the Navajo Nation. It had a complex syntax and tonal qualities that made it exceedingly difficult for non-native speakers to learn. More importantly, it had never been codified in any military or academic context, making it an ideal candidate for secure communication.

In 1942, the first group of 29 Navajo men was recruited and trained as “Code Talkers.” They developed a code based on their language, assigning Navajo words to represent military terms. For example, the Navajo word for “turtle” was used to signify a tank, while “iron fish” referred to a submarine. The code was not a direct translation but a sophisticated overlay of metaphor and abbreviation, making it even more impenetrable.

The Code Talkers served in every major Marine operation in the Pacific theater, from Guadalcanal to Iwo Jima. Their transmissions were not only secure but also astonishingly fast. While traditional encryption methods could take hours, a Navajo Code Talker could encode, transmit, and decode a message in minutes. Their work was so effective that military commanders credited them with saving countless lives and shortening the war.

## DAILY RC PRACTICE SHEET FOR CLAT

## CLAT WHISPERS

## CLAT WHISPERS

### (CLAT Mentorship Program)

Despite their contributions, the Code Talkers' role remained classified until 1968. Many returned home without recognition, their heroism buried under the weight of secrecy. It was only decades later that their story began to receive the attention it deserved, culminating in the awarding of Congressional Gold Medals in 2001.

The legacy of the Navajo Code Talkers is not just one of military ingenuity but also of cultural resilience. In a time when Native American communities faced systemic marginalization, these men used their heritage as a tool of national defense. Their story is a testament to the power of language—not just as a means of communication, but as a vessel of identity and strength.

**1. Which of the following best captures the central thesis of the passage?**

- A. The Navajo language's obscurity made it a convenient tool for military secrecy.
- B. The Code Talkers' linguistic innovation was a pivotal yet long-unrecognized wartime contribution.
- C. Native American languages were instrumental in shaping modern encryption practices.
- D. The U.S. military's reliance on indigenous knowledge marked a turning point in WWII strategy.

**2. The author's attitude toward the Code Talkers can best be described as:**

- A. Admiring, with an emphasis on their overlooked strategic brilliance.
- B. Objective, focusing on the technical aspects of their communication system.
- C. Critical, highlighting the delayed recognition of their efforts.
- D. Sentimental, emphasizing the emotional weight of their legacy.

**3. Which of the following inferences is most strongly supported by the passage?**

- A. The success of the Code Talkers was primarily due to the speed of their transmissions.
- B. The use of Navajo was a temporary solution until better encryption methods were developed.
- C. The Code Talkers' effectiveness stemmed from both linguistic complexity and cultural invisibility.
- D. The military's secrecy about the Code Talkers was a deliberate attempt to suppress indigenous contributions.

## CLAT WHISPERS

### (CLAT Mentorship Program)

**4. In the context of the passage, the phrase “sophisticated overlay of metaphor and abbreviation” most nearly implies:**

- A. A poetic reinterpretation of military jargon for ease of memorization.
- B. A layered linguistic system that concealed meaning through symbolic substitution.
- C. A simplified version of Navajo adapted for rapid battlefield use.
- D. A technical encryption model based on phonetic and semantic compression.

**5. What is the primary function of the final paragraph in the structure of the passage?**

- A. To contrast the military utility of the Code Talkers with their cultural background.
- B. To conclude with a reflection on the broader implications of their story.
- C. To introduce a new argument about the role of language in warfare.
- D. To summarize the operational details of the Navajo code system.

DAILY RC PRACTICE SHEET FOR CLAT  
CLAT WHISPERS

# CLAT WHISPERS

## (CLAT Mentorship Program)

### Answers:

#### Passage 1

##### 1. B

a. incorrect - The anecdote is not about manipulation. Lewis's silences are described as "deliberations," not evasions or tactics.

b. correct - This option accurately describes the function of the anecdote. The passage introduces the common "discomfort" with silence and immediately presents David Lewis, who was "unbothered by the social pressure to fill gaps," as a direct counterexample to this general tendency.

c. incorrect - The passage presents Lewis as an exception, stating that "most people... scramble to speak," which implies his comfort with silence is not universally interpreted or practiced.

d. incorrect - The passage does not make a general claim about all philosophers, only about David Lewis as a specific example.

##### 2. C

a. incorrect - This title is too narrow, focusing only on cultural norms and conversational gaps while missing the psychological and philosophical dimensions of silence discussed in the passage.

b. incorrect - This title is too specific, focusing only on David Lewis, who is just an introductory example, not the main subject of the entire passage.

c. correct - This title effectively captures the passage's central theme: the common "discomfort" and "fear" associated with conversational pauses and the exploration of the psychological and cultural reasons behind this phenomenon

d. incorrect - While the passage explores the psychology of silence, calling it a "social failure" reflects only one interpretation that the author seeks to challenge and complicate.

##### 3. B

a. incorrect - The author argues the opposite, suggesting that silence can be the "most profound expression" of communication if we learn to "inhabit it".

b. correct - This option accurately reflects the author's nuanced view. The passage explains that discomfort with silence is "culturally constructed" and that its meaning changes depending on whether

## DAILY RC PRACTICE SHEET FOR CLAT

## CLAT WHISPERS

## CLAT WHISPERS

### (CLAT Mentorship Program)

it is an "unexpected" gap or a "purposeful, even sacred" silence in a context like therapy or meditation.

c. incorrect - The author argues that this interpretation is culturally specific ("In cultures where speech is equated with engagement") and not universal.

d. incorrect - The author uses therapy and meditation as examples of purposeful silence but concludes by advocating for learning to appreciate silence more broadly in communication, not just in structured environments.

#### 4. B

a. incorrect - The phrase refers to a lack of interpretive context, not poor articulation.

b. correct - In the context of an "unexpected" silence whose "function is unclear," the phrase "a question without a frame" means that the silence prompts a need for interpretation (it asks a "question") but provides no context or boundaries ("without a frame") to guide that interpretation, leading to ambiguity and discomfort.

c. incorrect - While the passage has philosophical undertones, this specific phrase describes a social-psychological phenomenon, not a formal rhetorical device.

d. incorrect - The passage describes this silence as emerging from ambiguity, not as a deliberate tactic used to manipulate.

#### 5. A

a. correct - The author would agree with this. The passage concludes that silence can be the "most profound expression" of communication.

b. correct - The author would agree with this. The passage explicitly states that our discomfort is "culturally constructed" and that in some cultures, silence is a sign of respect.

c. incorrect - The author would most likely disagree with this statement. The passage advocates for a greater appreciation and understanding of silence, which contradicts the idea that it should be eliminated from any setting. The author's argument suggests that even in professional contexts, thoughtful pauses could be valuable.

d. correct - The author would agree with this. The final paragraph is a call to "learn to inhabit" silence to "discover that silence is not the enemy of communication," which would deepen understanding.

## DAILY RC PRACTICE SHEET FOR CLAT

### CLAT WHISPERS

# CLAT WHISPERS

## (CLAT Mentorship Program)

### Passage 2

#### 1. B

a. incorrect - This is too narrow. While the language's obscurity was a key factor, the thesis encompasses the Code Talkers' innovation, their pivotal role, and their lack of recognition.

b. correct - This statement provides the most complete summary of the passage's central argument, covering the Code Talkers' crucial linguistic contribution ("pivotal"), their ingenuity ("innovation"), and the delayed acknowledgment of their heroism ("long-unrecognized").

c. incorrect - This is an overstatement. The passage focuses specifically on the Navajo language in WWII, not on the broader influence of Native American languages on modern encryption in general.

d. incorrect - While their contribution was a significant part of strategy, calling it a "turning point" is an overstatement not explicitly supported by the text. The passage focuses more on their specific, vital contribution rather than a wholesale shift in military strategy.

#### 2. A

a. correct - The author uses words like "innovative," "astonishingly fast," "heroism," and "testament," conveying admiration. The focus on their role remaining "classified until 1968" and their heroism being "buried under the weight of secrecy" highlights their overlooked brilliance.

b. incorrect - The author's tone is not merely objective. The use of appreciative and emotive language ("heroism," "cultural resilience") indicates a clear perspective of admiration.

c. incorrect - While the author is critical of the delayed recognition, the overall attitude is one of admiration for the Code Talkers themselves, making "admiring" a more accurate primary descriptor.

d. incorrect - The tone is respectful and admiring, but "sentimental" suggests an overly emotional quality that isn't present. The author's admiration is grounded in their strategic and cultural significance.

#### 3. C

a. incorrect - The passage emphasizes that their transmissions were "not only secure but also astonishingly fast." Security, based on the language's complexity and obscurity, was at least as important as speed.

DAILY RC PRACTICE SHEET FOR CLAT  
CLAT WHISPERS

## CLAT WHISPERS

### (CLAT Mentorship Program)

b. incorrect - The passage gives no indication that this was a temporary solution. It is presented as a highly effective and unique system that solved a critical problem.

c. correct - This inference is strongly supported. The passage highlights the language's "complex syntax and tonal qualities" (linguistic complexity) and the fact that it was "virtually unknown outside the Navajo Nation" (cultural invisibility) as the key reasons for its success as a code.

d. incorrect - The passage attributes the secrecy to the classified nature of their military role ("remained classified until 1968"), not to a deliberate attempt to suppress indigenous contributions, although that was a consequence.

#### 4. B

a. incorrect - The code was designed to be "impenetrable," not for "ease of memorization." The use of metaphor was for concealment, not simplicity.

b. correct - This phrase accurately describes the code. It was a "layered linguistic system" (an "overlay" on the Navajo language) that used symbolic substitutions ("turtle" for tank) to hide ("concealed") the true meaning.

c. incorrect - The code was described as "sophisticated," not simplified. The complexity was key to its effectiveness.

d. incorrect - The code was based on a natural language and metaphor, not a "technical encryption model" based on phonetics or semantics in a computational sense.

#### 5. B

a. incorrect - The final paragraph does not contrast these elements; it connects them, showing how their cultural background was the source of their military utility.

b. correct - This paragraph moves beyond the historical and operational details to reflect on the "legacy" of the Code Talkers, framing their story in the broader context of "cultural resilience" and the "power of language," thus providing a concluding reflection.

c. incorrect - The paragraph reflects on the implications of the story already told; it does not introduce a new argument.

d. incorrect - The paragraph summarizes the legacy and meaning of their work, not the operational details of the code itself.