

LESSON PLAN – WHY DO WE HAVE A CENSUS?

Subject: Civics and Government

Grade Level: 9–12

Standards:

Indiana DOE

Academic (4)

GHW.3 Population Characteristics, Distribution and Migration

Students examine the physical and human geographic factors associated with population characteristics, distribution and migration in the world and the causes and consequences associated with them.

LH.7.1 The Research Process (Writing)

Conduct short as well as more sustained research assignments and tasks to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

USG.1.9 The Nature of Politics and Government

Evaluate how the United States Constitution establishes majority rule while protecting minority rights and balances the common good with individual liberties.

USG.3.13 Purposes, Principles and Institutions of Government

Explain the electoral process in terms of election laws and election systems on the national, state, and local level.

Nationwide

National Standards for Civics and Government (2)

I.D.3.4 What Are Civic Life, Politics, and Government?

Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on how well alternative forms of representation serve the purposes of constitutional government. To achieve

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this standard, students should be able to evaluate differing theories of representation, e.g., the theory that the foremost obligation of a representative is to promote the interests of society as a whole.

IV.C.3 What is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs?

Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about the effects of significant economic, technological, and cultural developments in the United States and other nations. To achieve this standard, students should be able to describe the impact of major demographic trends on the United States, e.g., population growth, immigration.

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

Founders of the United States expected the nation to grow rapidly, adding new states as its population expanded and shifted west. The U.S. Constitution requires a census of the entire population every ten years to make sure these new citizens have an equal voice in future elections and in the decisions of Congress.

Body of Lesson:

1. Show the video, “Why Do We Have a Census?”
 - a. Learning Activity:
 - i. Have students note the various reasons for taking a census, which Dr. Jett describes.
 - ii. The reasons mentioned by Dr. Jett include:
 1. Determining how to allocate funds distributed through Federal aid programs.
 2. Determining how many citizens can be mustered for military service.
 3. Recording data on individuals for future genealogical and historical research.
 4. Assuring that each member of Congress and each Presidential elector represents roughly the same number of citizens.
2. The reporting of new census data triggers several steps to assure that citizens have an equal voice in the decisions of the nation:
 - a. State legislatures redraw their maps of congressional districts to give the same number of citizens a representative in Congress. When a state’s population changes significantly, its number of representatives will change, so its number of districts must be changed.

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- b. If the state's number of congressional districts change, its number of Presidential electors will also change. This changes the state's influence in the electoral college, relative to other states.
 - c. To reflect these changes, political parties also change the number of votes that each state casts in their conventions to nominate a candidate for President.
 - d. Learning Activity:
 - i. Refer students to the Census Bureau's hub for looking up 2020 Census Data (<https://www.census.gov/data.html>).
 - ii. Have students answer these questions:
 1. What is our state's population trend?
 2. Will our state's number of congressional districts change as a result of the 2020 Census?
 3. Will our state's number of Presidential electors change as a result of the 2020 Census? See "Distribution of Electoral Votes" (<https://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/allocation#:~:text=Electoral%20votes%20are%20allocated%20among,number%20of%20its%20Congressional%20districts>).
3. Genealogists and historians use Census data to gather information about individuals in the past.
- a. The United States has conducted a Census every decade for the past 230 years, so you can find information about famous personalities and your own relatives for several generations.
 - b. Learning Activity:
 - i. Have students watch an episode of the PBS series, "Finding Your Roots" (<https://www.pbs.org/weta/finding-your-roots>), to see how this is done.
 - ii. Print and distribute copies of "Discovering Your Genealogy" from the PBS series, "Genealogy Road Show" (<https://indiana.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/ca0d345e-c9ce-4b31-b785-9c445d6367ff/discovering-your-genealogy/>).
 - iii. Have each student use this guide to research the genealogy of one parent and write a brief report, noting what information was found in Census data.

Extension Activities

Because Census data affects the distribution of Federal aid, state legislatures may challenge the results. The Census Bureau established a Count Question Resolution (CQR) process for the 1990 Census, and it continues to be used to resolve such challenges. When investigation reveals that an error has indeed been made, the Bureau publishes an errata document to assure that funds are allocated properly. However, such corrections do not change a state's number of congressional representatives or Presidential electors.

Have students research recent news stories to see if your state is challenging current Census data. (If not, ask them to find neighboring states that have raised such challenges.) Then refer them to the article, "Challenges to Census Data" (<https://www.ncsl.org/research/redistricting/challenges-to-census-data637631764.aspx>) for an explanation of how this process works. Finally, have students prepare a brief report that describes (1) CRQ steps that must be taken to challenge and verify the Census data, (2) a timeline showing how long each step of the appeal is likely to take, and (3) examples of Federal aid distributions to your state that may be affected if the data is corrected.

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