

LESSON PLAN – WHY DO WE HAVE A CENSUS?

Subject: Why do we have a census?

Grade Level: 6-8

Standards:

USG.1.8 Evaluate the importance of a written constitution in establishing and maintaining the principles of rule of law and limited government.

USG.1.9 Evaluate how the United States Constitution establishes majority rule while protecting minority rights and balances the common good with individual liberties.

USG.2.4 Explain the history and provide examples of foundational ideas of American government embedded in the Founding-Era documents such as: natural rights philosophy, social contract, popular sovereignty, constitutionalism, representative democracy, political factions, federalism, and individual rights.

USG.2.8 Explain the history and provide historical and contemporary examples of fundamental principles and values of American political and civic life, including liberty, security, the common good, justice, equality, law and order, rights of individuals, diversity, popular sovereignty, and representative democracy.

USG.3.1 Analyze the United States Constitution and explain characteristics of government in the United States, which define it as a federal, presidential, constitutional, and representative democracy.

USG.3.5 Explain the section of Article IV, Section 4, of the United States Constitution which says, “The United States shall guarantee to every State in the Union a Republican form of government.”

USG.5.6 Explain and give examples of important citizen actions that can impact local, state, and federal government as individuals and members of interest groups.

USG.5.8 Describe opportunities available to individuals to contribute to the well-being of their communities and participate responsibly in the political process at local, state, and national levels of government.

Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

A computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone

Paper

Pen/pencil

Learning Objectives:

- Be able to describe the census process.
- Be able to identify at least two ways the census data is used.
- Be able to identify who is to respond to the census.
- Be able to describe the confidentiality rules for census information.

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

In 2020, the United States conducted a census. What is a census? It is an accounting of all the people living in the country at the time the census is completed. This includes citizens and non-citizens.

Body of Lesson:

Watch the video *Why Do We Have a Census?* presented by Dr. Terri Jett (video 2:33 minutes)

<https://www.wfyi.org/programs/simple-civics/television/why-do-we-have-a-census>

Census counts have occurred in the United States for the past 230 years. The Constitution of the United States requires a census count be done every ten years.

The first census was completed in 1790. It asked the following questions:

How many free white males under the age of sixteen.

How many free white males aged sixteen and older.

How many free white females.

How many other free persons (people of color who were not slaves).

How many slaves. (Under the three-fifths compromise, slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person.)

By 1890, the census form had grown to twenty-five questions to be answered by each person.

The questions included:

Gender

Age

Race

Occupation

Ability to read or write

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In 2020, the census was smaller with only twelve questions.

- Gender
- Age
- Race
- Date of birth
- Hispanic/Non-Hispanic
- Number of people living in home

What is a census?

An official count of all the people in the United States. It also has information about where they are living, age, gender, and other items that change with each census.

Why do we need a census?

- The number of people living in each state determines the number of seats that state has in the House of Representatives.
- States use the census information to redraw congressional, state, and local voting districts.
- Governments and nonprofit organization use the census to determine if there is a need for new roads, hospitals, schools, and other investments.
- Businesses use the census information to help guide their business investments and marketing.
- Federal funds are given to states and communities for health, education, and housing programs based on the census.
- Information about how the country has changed and evolved can be gathered by analyzing census data over time.

How is the census information collected?

In 2020, census information could be mailed in, completed online, completed in a phone call, or by an in-person visit from a census taker.

Is the census information confidential?

Title 13 of the U.S. Code (law) states that the census data cannot be used to identify an individual. Individual records are not to be released for at least 72 years.

Do people have to complete the census form?

Yes, it is required by law that all people (citizens and non-citizens) respond to the census. Refusal could result in fines. No one has been prosecuted for failing to complete the census since 1970.

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The following are videos that were prepared for the 2020 census. There is an overall explanation. There are also two examples of an explanation of the census for specific groups in the population.

Who's Counted in the U.S. Census – and Where Are They Counted? (video 2:45 minutes and article)

<https://www.prb.org/resources/u-s-2020-census-faq/>

The Census is Confidential and Safe (video 2:07 minutes)

<https://www.pbs.org/video/the-census-is-confidential-and-safe-36292/>

The Census is Safe and Vital for Latinxs (video 3:36 minutes)

<https://www.pbs.org/video/the-census-is-safe-and-vital-for-latinxs-36291/>

The Census Helps Our Hmong Community (video 3:06 minutes)

<https://www.pbs.org/video/the-census-helps-our-hmong-community-36289/>

Student Activity

After watching the above videos, hold a class discussion. Students should consider and discuss the following questions:

1. Is the census process adequately described in the videos?
2. Do you think people felt comfortable completing the census after watching these videos?
3. Do you think it is important to educate people on the census process and uses?

Student Activity

At the end of the lesson, students should be able to answer specific questions about the census. This may be done in a group discussion or as an individual assignment that they submit.

Students should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What are two ways that census information is used?
2. Who is required to submit census information?
3. Can the government release information about where an individual lives or how many children he/she has?
4. Does the census count citizens and people who are living in the United States but are not citizens?

Summary/Closure

The census is conducted every ten years. This is mandated in the Constitution of the United States. The questions on the census change each time. The census impacts states and communities in a variety of ways. It is important to respond to the census so that the number of people in a state are adequately represented in the House of Representatives.

Extension Activities

Indiana: 2020 Census (article)

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/indiana-population-change-between-census-decade.html>

This article reviews the population of Indiana and other states based on the 2020 census.

U.P. Census Data: Crunching the Numbers (video 28:48 minutes)

This video discusses the impact of the 2020 Census on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The potential economic, social, and political implications are reviewed.

IGI: Making Sense of the Census (video 27:37 minutes)

<https://www.pbs.org/video/igi-making-sense-of-the-census-hgjpz4/>

This video discusses the impact of the census on Kansas.

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