

Featured Activity: How the Census Impacts My Community

Topic(s):

Government, U.S.
Constitution, censuses

Grade Level:

9-12

Approx. Time Required:

50 minutes

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Understand the historical context for why the census was included in the Constitution.
- Identify the impact of census counts on their communities.
- Analyze significant historical documents.
- Read and interpret data in a table.

Introduction

The 2020 Census Statistics in Schools (SIS) program is designed to educate students about the decennial census and to teach them educational concepts and skills, such as data literacy, through use of census data in the classroom. Responding to the census helps your community get its fair share of funding. Census data guides how more than \$675 billion in federal funding is distributed to states and communities each year. These funds support vital community programs that help children, such as schools, hospitals, housing, and food assistance. By educating students about the 2020 Census, you can help encourage a complete count.

The 2020 Census SIS program can be used with educational standards across the United States. You can use the topics and learning objectives above to determine which subject and unit plan or theme this activity will best fit into.

About the 2020 Census

In addition to the information that is built into instructions for this activity, the following points provide an easy, grade-appropriate way to explain the decennial census to your students.

- The decennial census is a count of every person living in the United States that occurs every 10 years.
- It is important that every person be counted so that the government can properly distribute \$675 billion to communities.
- The population of every state as counted in the census also determines how many representatives each state is given in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- You can do your part by making sure an adult in your home counts you—and every person living in your home—in the 2020 Census.





Materials Required

- Printed student worksheets
- Eight printed copies of Activity Item: My High School Census
- An interactive whiteboard or a projector with internet access
 - If technology for online display is not available, teachers can print out data before class.
- [American FactFinder](https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_1YR/B14007) (https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_1YR/B14007)

Worksheet Description

Each grade band includes one featured worksheet, which focuses on how the decennial census benefits students, their families, and communities to highlight why participation is important. Teachers are encouraged to use this worksheet in their classrooms as a starting point or introduction to the 2020 Census. For high school students, this worksheet focuses on how the census helps the students' community.

Before the Activity—10 Minutes

1. Ask students what they know about censuses, either in the United States or in other countries.
2. Explain the following key points to students:
 - A census is a full count of every man, woman, and child within a territory.
 - A census is different from a survey in that it is a full count of people, whereas a survey, such as the American Community Survey, is a sampling in which information is obtained only from a subset of a population.
 - Censuses have been a fundamental part of government throughout history. These censuses were useful for jurisdictions for purposes of taxation and labor or military drafts.
 - Examples of censuses throughout history:
 - In the 16th century B.C.E., the Pharaoh in Egypt conducted a census.
 - The Bible mentions the Roman census in the early first century C.E.
 - William the Conqueror ordered a census of England, which was compiled in the Domesday book in 1086 C.E.
 - The Inca and other South American cultures used a quipu (or knot record) to count populations for the purposes of taxation.



Note for students that although the decennial census is best known for tracking population data, the U.S. Census Bureau tracks all kinds of data, from age, sex, and race to types of housing or average household size. This varied information helps the federal government better understand and make decisions for the people. Today we will look at census data from the American Community Survey.

3. Explain that when it came time to write the U.S. Constitution based on the principles of representative democracy, the founders debated how representation ought to be determined. Issues considered in these debates included:
 - Whether representation should be based on property or population.
 - Whether the states or the federal government would conduct the census.
 - The conflict between large states and small states.
 - The issue of slavery, which Southerners hoped would increase the amount of representation they would get.

During the Activity—30 Minutes

1. Hand out student worksheets. As a class, read Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution.

“Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years, in such Manner as they shall by Law direct.”

Then lead a short discussion about the purpose for the census’s being written into the Constitution. Ask students to complete Question #1 in their student worksheet.

Question #1: What was the purpose of the census, as written into the Constitution?

Answers will vary but should include that it determines representation in the U.S. House of Representatives, so that all people, regardless of the size of their state, are represented fairly in Congress.

2. Note that the decennial census in the United States is extremely important today, because it:
 - Determines how many representatives each state is given in the U.S. House of Representatives.
 - Affects how more than \$675 billion every year is spent on federal programs each year.



3. Now have students look at U.S. Census Bureau data on high school enrollment and complete the table in Question #2 on their student worksheet. The data can be viewed in any of three ways, depending on the technology available in the classroom:

- View as a class with the use of an interactive whiteboard or a projector.
- Have students view individually with laptops or tablets. (Teachers can guide students through the steps to find their state data, which are listed below.)
- Have students view printed copies of the data (Teachers can navigate to their state data using the instructions below and hand out one copy to each student.)

If the class has the available technology, project [American FactFinder](https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_1YR/B14007) (https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_1YR/B14007) on the board, displaying the data for school enrollment by detailed level of school for the population 3 years or older. If the class does not have the available technology, access the link above, print by selecting the Print button at the top of the webpage, and pass out one copy of the data to each student.

4. Have students add up the total number of high school students in the United States and record the number in the third column of the Question #2 table in their worksheet. Next, navigate to your state's data by selecting the Add/Remove Geographies button at the top of the table. Select the geographic type State from the drop-down menu. Then select your state and press the Add to Your Selections button. Click the Show Table button on the right, and the data table will update to show your state.

Give students five minutes to first add up the population of grades 9-12 to get their state's high school population and then complete the data table.

5. Explain that the decennial census finds out how many people live in a specific area, which enables the government to make important decisions, such as how to distribute resources, for the people who live there. The government allocates funding for community programs and services, such as schools, roads, or hospitals, based on certain details of the population. Knowing how many students are in each grade level allows the government to better understand how many schools are needed in specific areas, where more teachers or more schools may be needed, and which types of schools are needed most.

Now that you've shown how many high school students live in your state, focus on your own class and show how taking a census can enable informed decision-making based on data.

6. Tell the students to imagine that their class was given a \$50,000 grant to spend on something new for their school. This money could be spent to support new clubs, resources, technology, or something else. To find out how the money should be spent, have students conduct their own census to gather information about their classmates. They can then use the data collected to inform their decision about how to spend the fictitious grant money.



7. To develop the questions for the survey, split the class into four groups. Ask the groups to brainstorm three to five questions each to get the information they would need to know in order to better allocate the grant money. Encourage students to think about the kind of information they might need to know to make this decision, such as:
 - Which sports or clubs not currently at the school would their classmates like to participate in?
 - How much free time per week do students have outside of school, jobs, or activities?
 - How do students get to and from school?
 - What issues within the community are students most interested in helping fix?
8. Once each group has three to five questions, come back together as a class and discuss the suggested questions. Teachers may want to have students from each group write their group's questions on the board or share out loud, so all students can see or hear all questions. There will likely be duplicate questions, so have students come up with new questions if needed until they have eight that they can agree on. These eight questions will make up their class census. Once eight questions are established, have the students record these questions on their individual student worksheet in Question #3. Then have students return to their groups.
9. Assign each group two of the eight questions to facilitate. Each group will then be in charge of gathering every student's responses to its two questions.
10. Pass out two copies of **Activity Item: My High School Census** to each group and give the groups five minutes to write their assigned questions at the top of the activity item pages (one question per sheet of paper). At this point, in the classroom, there should be eight pieces of paper with one question written on each. Now have the groups come up with four to five potential answers to each of their questions for their classmates to choose from. These questions should be multiple choice, not open-ended. An example is included below.

How do students get to and from school?

- Bike
- Walk
- Car
- Bus
- Other



11. Students in the groups will start by recording their own, individual answer choices for their own group's census questions (they can put a check mark on each of the two activity items). Then students should pass all eight worksheets around the room to make sure every student has recorded an answer to every question. The activity item pages should all end up with the group that was originally assigned those two questions.
12. Now have one member from each group share the results of their group's census questions, recording the top answer(s) for each question on the board. Give the groups five to 10 minutes to brainstorm how they would spend the grant money, using the data gathered from the class census to defend their reasoning. (Note that students do not need to allocate all the money to one thing. Each group can propose spending however it thinks best.) Have each group share its ideas with the class.

After the Activity—10 Minutes

1. Come back together as a class. Allow the students to debate which ideas to fund and what percentage of the \$50,000 will go toward each proposed idea. (Remind students that they don't need to give each idea equal funding.) As a class, students can choose to support one initiative or a variety of initiatives. Keep in mind that any decisions should be informed by the data collected.
2. Wrap up the activity by sharing with students how important it was that everyone in their class participated in their class census, so that they could be counted when the class made decisions. The same thing is true of the decennial census. The government relies on having an accurate count when it allocates \$675 billion annually to fund programs and services for cities and states—including yours.

Home Extension

Teachers, please read the instructions for the students' homework assignment out loud to the class:

Take your student worksheet home and share with an adult in your home, highlighting which ideas your class would implement if given a \$50,000 grant. Ask them which areas they would like to see funding go to within your community and ask who will be completing the census for your household in 2020.



Activity Item: My High School Census

1. Question:

2. Answers:

	Option 1: _____	Option 2: _____	Option 3: _____	Option 4: _____	Option 5: _____
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