

Constitution Day

September 17, 2009



Census in Schools Lesson Plan for Grades 6-8:

The Constitution, Congressional Representation, and the Census

Curriculum Areas: Civics and English Language Arts

Time Commitment: 1 or 2 Class Periods

Objectives:

- The student will understand the importance of Article 1 of the Constitution, in particular, what powers are granted to the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- The student will understand apportionment and why a census is conducted every ten years, according to Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution.
- Classes will discuss reapportionment by comparing the number of Congressional representatives for several states using census data from 1990 and 2000. Explore the question: Should We Increase the Number of Congressional Seats from 435 to a Higher Number?

Skills:

- Civics - Understand Article I, Sections 1-8 of the Constitution, the powers of the legislative branch, and the purposes of apportionment and the census
- Language Arts – Use the www.census.gov database to conduct research. Use critical thinking to explore arguments about increasing the number of seats in the House of Representatives.

Standards:

- Civics - Understand concepts of the Constitution and its purposes.
- Language Arts - Use databases and libraries to conduct research to develop research skills; use a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate texts.

Vocabulary:

“Apportionment” and “Redistricting”

Materials Needed:

- A copy of Article 1, Sections 1 – 8, of the Constitution
- The census map showing population data from 2000 and the number of Congressional representatives for each state
- A chart showing the 1990 apportionment and population by state from www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/apportionment/results.html
- A sample of the 2010 Census questionnaire
- Sample historical census questionnaires from 1790 and thereafter from www.census.gov/pubinfo/www/broadcast/photos/historical_census/004299.html
- “Commentaries and more on increasing U. S. House size” from www.fairvote.org/action/commentary.htm. Read Paul Jacob’s “More Politicians?” and Matthew Cossolotto’s “A Fight for a Bigger House”

Teacher Resources:

- An overview of the census and apportionment
- www.census.gov/history/www/demographic/013861.html
- www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/apportionment/index.html

Getting Started:

1. Explain to the class why we observe Constitution Day. Indicate that they will be focusing on the legislative branch, apportionment, the census, and some arguments about whether there is a need to increase representation in the House of Representatives from 435 seats to a higher number.
2. Have students work in pairs to read Article 1 of the Constitution to find out more about the powers of the House of Representatives and the Senate, and to understand the significance of apportionment and the census. They should focus on Sections 1-2 and 7-8. Have them write any words or statements that they don’t understand in their journals and discuss them with their partner.

Ask the class to distinguish the powers granted to House of Representatives and the Senate. In what ways are their powers different?

3. See if there were any words or statements that they didn’t understand when they read Article I of the Constitution. Clarify the meaning of the text.
4. Refer to a Congressional representative who is in their district and what bills or legislation that he/she has proposed or co-sponsored. Some students may already know about their Congressional representative’s work and accomplishments. Ask students to share their knowledge.
5. Have a student to read aloud Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution about apportionment. What does the word “apportionment” mean? What is their

interpretation of this section in relation to the census? Explain that the framers of the Constitution, after many debates, decided that each state would have a certain number of representatives based on its population. We currently have 435 Congressional seats. Refer to the census map that shows the number of Congressional representatives for each state.

Also take a look at the Census Bureau's webpage, which answers frequently asked questions about apportionment.
<http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/apportionment/faq.html>.

6. Have the class compare the number of Congressional representatives for several states based on census data from 1990 and 2000. They can look at the chart from 1990, which can be downloaded from
<http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/apportionment/results.html>.

Indicate that New York and Pennsylvania lost two House seats in 2000, whereas Texas, Georgia, and Florida gained two seats. What might be the reasons for the population shifts in these states from 1990 to 2000? Record their responses.

Put the decade in a socio-economic context for students and talk about possible forces that might have caused the population shifts. What are the implications of losing seats for residents or communities? (ie. loss of political power and loss of federal dollars for government-funded social programs, such as Title 1 school funding, special education, youth services, and elder care.)

7. Make the connection to students about apportionment and the census and how this is explained in Article 1, Section 2. The next census will occur in April 2010. Each federal census occurs in the year that ends in "0." Census data will determine the number of congressional seats for each state.
8. Have students explain how a census is conducted. They may be familiar with their city census. Distinguish the difference between a city census and the federal government's decennial census, which is tied to apportionment. Mention that after the census is taken, the data are also used to determine funding for many federal programs. Show them a copy of a questionnaire and a couple of historical questionnaires from our website so that they will know that a census has occurred since 1790. Explain that the data collected in the questionnaire are confidential and by law cannot be shared with anyone for 72 years.

Let students know that in March 2010, each household throughout the country will receive a questionnaire that is required to be filled out and mailed back.

9. Mention that after the census is taken, the data will be delivered to the president. State legislatures will later find out how many people live in their state based on the census. The data will determine how many Congressional seats each state will have; this is called "reapportionment."

Indicate to the class that it will be interesting to see which states will lose or gain seats in 2010. Ask students what are their predictions about which states will lose or gain seats because of population shifts and why. Remind them that these are speculations and that they will need to do research to substantiate their arguments or claims.

10. Explain that after the census is taken, a bi-partisan committee of state legislators will be involved in revising or redrawing the congressional and legislative voting lines, where people elect their Congressional, state, and local public officials. Define the word “redistricting.” **Optional:** Show students a sample redistricting map of their state.
11. Segue back to the topic of apportionment and the 435 congressional seats. Share with the class that some voters believe that we need to increase the number of congressional seats because the population is growing and many representatives have on average 646,952 constituents. As a result, many voters feel it is difficult to have access to representatives.

Have the class break into small groups of four to five students so that they can read two arguments written in 2001 from the fairvote.org website about why we need to increase the House size. They are: Paul Jacob’s “More Politicians?” and Mathew Cossolotto’s “A Fight for a Bigger House” which appeared in the *Hartford Courant* in October 2001.

Ask students to explore the following arguments:

Are these arguments convincing? Why or why not? What stands out in the arguments and evidence? What questions do you have about these pieces? What may be other viewpoints on this issue?

Ask each group to have a spokesperson give a report of their discussion about the arguments.

Wrap up:

Summarize the importance of the Constitution, Congressional representation, the census, and reapportionment.

Assessment:

Have small groups write an essay or create a PowerPoint presentation on the powers of Congress, the significance of Article 1, Section 2, and the impact of the decennial census on states and the nation.