

Constitution Day

September 17, 2009



Census in Schools Lesson Plan for Grades 9-12:

The Constitution, Congressional Representation, and the Census

Curriculum Areas: Civics and English Language Arts

Time Commitment: 1 Class Period

Objectives:

- The student is able to understand apportionment and why a census is conducted every ten years, according to Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution
- The student is able to discuss the issue of reapportionment by comparing the number of Congressional representatives of a couple of states using census data from 1990 and 2000. Students will evaluate arguments that focus on the question: Should We Increase the Number of Congressional Seats from 435 to a Higher Number?

Skills:

- Civics - Understand Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution with the focus on apportionment and the census
- Language Arts – Use the www.census.gov database to conduct research.
- Use critical thinking to evaluate and compare 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, Section 2 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 “Matthew Cossolotto’s “A Fight for a Bigger House” and George Will’s “Congress Just Isn’t Big Enough.”

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

Homework for students in preparation for the Constitution Day lesson:

Let students know that to observe Constitution Day, they will focus on the Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution to gain a better understanding of the significance of apportionment, and why a decennial census occurs. Later they will also discuss the issue of whether we need to augment the number of Congressional seats from 435 to a higher number in order to increase access to representatives.

To prepare for the class, give the students the following homework assignment:

Summarize Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution.

Have students visit the Census Bureau’s website so that they can read about apportionment. Go to

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/apportionment/faq.html>.

Read Matthew Cossolotto’s “A Fight for a Bigger House” and George Will’s “Congress Just Isn’t Big Enough.” Critique the arguments in terms of the logic and evidence. Are the arguments and evidence convincing? Why or why not?

Getting Started:

Tell the class that to celebrate Constitution Day, they will be focusing on the legislative branch, apportionment, the census, and some arguments about whether there is a need to increase the number of seats in the House of Representatives.

1. Ask 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 have 435 Congressional seats. Refer to the thematic map that shows the number of Congressional representatives per state and populations.

Refer to the Census Bureau’s webpage that answers frequently asked questions about apportionment.

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

Indicate New York and Pennsylvania lost two House seats in 2000, whereas Texas, Georgia, and Florida gained two seats. What may be the reasons for the population shifts in these states over the past decade 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 federal dollars for government-funded programs, such as Title 1 school funding, special education, youth services, and elder care.)

3. Make the connection to students about apportionment and the census and how this is explained in Article 1, Section 2. The first federal census was in 1790. 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.
4. Have students explain how a census is conducted. They may be familiar with their city’s or town’s census. Distinguish the difference between a local 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.

5. 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 seats or gain seats in 2010. Ask students what are their predictions about which states will lose or gain seats because of the population shift and why? Remind them that these are speculations and that they will need to do research to substantiate their arguments or claims.

6. 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.
7. 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, they believe it is difficult to have access to representatives.

Have the class break into small groups of four to five students so that they can evaluate two essays written in 2001 from the fairvote.org site about why we need to increase the House size. They are: Mathew Cossolotto’s “A Fight for a Bigger House” that appeared in the *Hartford Courant* in October 2001 and George Will’s “Congress Just Isn’t Big Enough,” written in January 2001.

*Ask students to analyze and evaluate the logic and evidence.

* Do the authors present their cause and effect points in a clear and effective way?

* What are some of the similarities and differences in the essays in terms of logic, evidence, tone, use of rhetorical devices, and style?

*Are the arguments convincing? Why or why not? What stands out in the arguments and evidence? What questions do they have about these pieces? What, if anything, has been omitted?

*What may be other viewpoints on this issue?

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

If the class seems to be interested in this issue, have them write a future research paper about the costs and benefits of increasing the number of seats in the House.

Wrap up:

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

Assessment:

Informal observations of students' participation