



The Census and the Constitution Lesson Plan

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STANDARDS:

National Standards for United States History

- Historical Thinking Standards
 - Standard 4B: Obtain historical data from a variety of sources
 - Standard 4C: Interrogate historical data
 - Standard 4F: Support interpretations with historical evidence

National Standards for Civics and Government

- Standard 3: III. How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Vocabulary: census, enumerator, enumeration

In Article 1, Section 2, the Constitution includes the phrase:

[An] 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.

Discuss as a class why there is a census taken every 10 years in the United States.

Discussion questions:

- What was the government's purpose in requiring a census? Why every 10 years?
- What was the government interested in finding out about its citizens?
- How did the government use the information it obtained?
- How is the census used today?

Look at examples of censuses taken over the course of America History.

Discussion Questions:

- Why do the questions change over time?
- How are different groups of people treated in the various census years? Why does it change over time?
- How are the slave schedules different from the population schedules in 1850 and 1860?
- Is the information provided by individuals always correct? Why might individuals lie to enumerators? Why might enumerators record the wrong information?

Study how the census impacted your community. Look at historical newspapers to find how your community prepared for the census in various years.

Discussion Questions:

- How did they inform citizens about the census?
- How were enumerators hired? What type of people became enumerators?
- What were the newspapers' attitudes toward the census?

- Were any problems with the enumeration highlighted in the papers?
- Did the census cause changes to government representation in your community?

Study how individuals were represented in the census. Have students find census records for their ancestors, people with their surname, people from your community, celebrities or historical figures.

Discussion Questions:

- What does the census tell you about individuals? Families? Communities?
- Does it tell you the whole story? What is missing?
- What else would you want to know about a person in the census? Where could you find that information?
- What information might be missed if you only look at census records every ten years?