

The Census and Apportionment

Topic(s):

Government,
apportionment,
population change

Proficiency Level:

Advanced (also appropriate
for adult citizenship class)

Approx. Time Required:

40 minutes

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Review and understand specific government terms.
- Understand and describe the role census data plays in apportionment decisions.
- Discover how the census helps students and their communities.

Introduction

The 2020 Census Statistics in Schools (SIS) program is designed to educate students in grades pre-K-12 about the decennial census and to teach them educational concepts and skills, such as data literacy, through use of census data in the classroom. For the 2020 Census, SIS created a special set of activities for adult students learning English as a second language to teach them about the 2020 Census. 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, such as schools, hospitals, housing, transportation, and food assistance. By educating students of all ages about the 2020 Census, you can help encourage a complete count.

About the 2020 Census

In addition to the information built into instructions for this activity, the following points provide an easy way to explain the census to your students.

- The decennial census is a count of every person living in the United States, Puerto Rico, and other U.S. territories. To count every person, the Census Bureau uses a form that each household must fill out. It is done by the U.S. Census Bureau every 10 years and counts the total population for the country.
- It is important that every person be counted in the 2020 Census so that the government can properly distribute \$675 billion to communities, based on their population.
- The population of every state 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 completing your 2020 Census form to make sure every person living in your home is counted.



Materials Required

- Printed student worksheets
- A projector or smartboard with internet access
- [The Amazing Apportionment Machine](https://www.census.gov/schools/resources/videos/apportionment-machine.html) video (https://www.census.gov/schools/resources/videos/apportionment-machine.html)
- [State Population Change: 2010 to 2018](https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/population-change-2010-2018.html) (https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/population-change-2010-2018.html)
- [My Congressional District](https://www.census.gov/mycd) (for home extension assignment) (https://www.census.gov/mycd)

Worksheet Description

Adult students will learn how the U.S. government is structured and how seats are allocated within the U.S. House of Representatives. The worksheet gives special attention to explaining higher-level vocabulary, requirements for redistricting, and the impact of redistricting on voting.

Before the Activity—15 Minutes

1. Introduce or reintroduce the census to the class.
 - If you have not used another 2020 Census activity, introduce this topic to the class: “The census, also called the decennial census, is a count of every person living in the United States. It is done by the U.S. Census Bureau every 10 years. It is important that every person be counted in the decennial census so that the government can properly distribute \$675 billion in funding to communities across the country. Another reason it is important to get a complete count is that the numbers from the census are used for apportionment. Apportionment is the dividing up of the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the 50 states according to the states’ population.”
 - If you have used another 2020 Census activity, say, “We have talked in other classes about the importance of the U.S. census. One reason it is important is that the count of people done in the census is used to determine apportionment. Apportionment is the dividing up of the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the 50 states according to the states’ population.”



- Optional: If you have access to technology, inform the class that they are going to watch [The Amazing Apportionment Machine](https://www.census.gov/schools/resources/videos/apportionment-machine.html) video (https://www.census.gov/schools/resources/videos/apportionment-machine.html) about apportionment. Tell the students to jot down what they learn from the video and what questions they have. After the video, have students share what they learned, along with any questions. Tell them that, next, they will read an article to help them answer their questions.

Teacher Tip: Put on the closed captioning so students can read while they listen. Also, play the video at least two times to aid in listening comprehension.

During the Activity—20 Minutes

- Review the following vocabulary with students, as necessary:
 - Legislative branch:** One of the three main parts of the U.S. government. It consists of the U.S. Congress. The legislative branch drafts laws, confirms or rejects presidential nominations, and has the authority to declare war.
 - Congress:** The legislative branch of the U.S. government. The House of Representatives and the Senate work together to create laws.
 - Senate:** The smaller, upper assembly of the U.S. Congress. The Senate has two members from each state.
 - Electoral College:** A body of people representing the states of the U.S., who formally cast votes for the election of the president and vice president.
 - U.S. House of Representatives:** The lower chamber of congress where seats are distributed based on population determined through the decennial census.
 - Representative:** A person who speaks and acts on behalf of another person or a group of people.
 - Constitution:** The basic written set of principles and precedents of the federal government.
- As a class, have students take turns reading portions of the article on apportionment from the student worksheet.
- Now have students answer Questions #3 and #4, using the State Population Change: 2010 to 2018 infographic on the student worksheet. Note for students that while Puerto Rico is shown on the map, its population does not impact the reapportionment of seats within the U.S. House of Representatives.



Question #3: Which states had a population increase from the 2010 Census to 2018?

The population of every state and territory, except West Virginia, Illinois, and Connecticut, and Puerto Rico, increased.

Question #4: After the decennial census, which states do you think will have the highest percent change in population between 2010 and 2020, based on what you have learned?

Based on the data between 2010 and 2018, the population in Utah and Texas and in the District of Columbia will likely continue to have the highest percent change in population.

4. Explain to students that, while having a state lose a seat might seem “unfair,” it is intended to reflect population shifts throughout the country and to ensure that proportional representation is maintained. But no state wants to lose seats due to a lack of counting everyone accurately, which is why it is so important to participate in the census.
5. To summarize what students have learned during the activity, have students answer Questions #5 and #6 on their student worksheet.

Question #5: Why is apportionment important?

It makes sure that our voices are heard in the U.S. House of Representatives and in elections.

Question #6: How does participating in the census help make sure your voice is heard?

The census counts the U.S. population and ensures that states have accurate representation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

After the Activity—5 Minutes

1. Remind students that apportionment is the dividing up of the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the 50 states, according to the states’ population, as measured by the U.S. census.
2. Have students discuss their answers to Questions #5 and #6 with a partner.

Home Extension

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

Take your student worksheet home and share it with another person in your home. Then visit [My Congressional District](https://www.census.gov/mycd) (<https://www.census.gov/mycd>) and research your own congressional district to learn its total population and the characteristics of its population.

