

# Constitution Day

**Topic(s):**

U.S. Constitution, decennial census, representation, data collection, apportionment

**Grade Level:**

5-6

**Approx. Time Required:**

35 minutes

**Learning Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Develop skills such as critical thinking, evaluation, listening, and speaking.
- Determine the central ideas of a primary source.
- Evaluate details in order to determine key ideas.
- Use textual evidence to support how census data affects funding for their community.
- Understand why it is important to get an accurate count in the 2020 Census.

## 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 census to your students.

- The decennial census is a count of every person living in the United States that occurs every 10 years.
- Responses to the census determine how \$675 billion is given to states and communities to support things like schools, hospitals, housing, and national parks.
- It is important that every person be counted so that the government knows where resources are most needed.
- 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

## Worksheet Description

Students will learn the significance of the U.S. Constitution and Constitution Day, with a focus on how the census is called for in the Constitution and why it is conducted every 10 years.

## Before the Activity—10 Minutes

1. Begin by asking students, “Why is it important that I (your teacher) know things about the students in my classroom (for example, learning preferences, interests, likes and dislikes)?”
2. Follow up by asking students to call out some things that might be important for you to know as their teacher. If students need ideas, have them think about how they learn best in the classroom (e.g., in groups vs. individually), favorite foods, favorite subjects, etc.
3. After letting a couple of students provide their answers, explain that it is important for teachers to understand information about their students so that they can provide the right type of instruction, have the right number of materials, and be able to meet the needs of their students.
4. Connect this idea to the census by telling students:
  - Just as it’s important for teachers to know information about their students, so the U.S. government needs to know information about U.S. residents so that it can better understand the needs of the country’s population.
  - With this knowledge, the government can make decisions about where to build more schools and roads and where to offer other community services.
  - The census, which the U.S. Constitution says must be conducted every 10 years, will happen next in 2020.

## During the Activity—20 Minutes

1. Tell students: “On September 17, 1787, the delegates at the Constitutional Convention finished their work and sent the Constitution out to the states for approval. In honor of the completion of the U.S. Constitution, September 17 is celebrated as Constitution Day.”





2. Review key vocabulary with students:

- **Constitution:** The basic written set of principles and precedents of the federal government.
- **U.S. House of Representatives:** One of the two legislative bodies of the U.S. Congress (the other is the Senate) established in Article I of the U.S. Constitution, with its members elected every two years and states allotted one or more seats based on their populations.
- **Apportionment:** The process of dividing the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the 50 states according to each state's population, which is determined by the decennial census; at the conclusion of each census, the results are used to calculate the number of House memberships to which each state is entitled.
- **Taxes:** A compulsory contribution to state revenue, levied by the government on workers' income and business profits, or added to the cost of goods and services.
- **Congress:** The legislative branch of the U.S. government. The House of Representatives and the Senate work together to create laws.

3. Pass out student worksheets.

4. Explain that today students are going to look at Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3 of the Constitution, which is printed at the top of their worksheet.

Select two students to read aloud the first and then the second sentence of the text.

*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.*

5. Lead a discussion, asking students to analyze the text they just read and encouraging them to find the connection between a state's population and its representation in the House of Representatives.

Explain to students that:

- The census counts every person in the entire country, and that the Constitution *requires* that a census be taken every 10 years.
- In addition to allowing seats in the House of Representatives to be redistributed based on changes in state populations, census counts affect funding for important federal programs that provide things like roads, schools, and health care.
- Requiring the census in the Constitution ensures that it will occur regularly and that Congress cannot simply write a law to abolish the census or change its frequency.



6. Next, direct students to look at **Activity Item: Uses of Census Bureau Data**, which lists programs whose funding is based on U.S. Census Bureau data. Have students look through the programs and answer Questions #1 through #4 on their student worksheets.

Question #1: Choose three items on the list in **Activity Item: Uses of Census Bureau Data** and explain how census data might affect the funding for those programs.

*Answers will vary based on interests but should include three programs and an explanation of why they are important.*

Question #2: Looking at the same three areas you chose in Question #1, why is it important that we have an accurate count of the population to inform decisions about funding for these different programs?

*Answers will vary, but students should make the connection that if not everyone is counted accurately in their city or state, they won't receive the funding necessary to support all the additional people, whether it's roads, school programs, or more affordable housing.*

Question #3: What do you think would happen in a community where not everyone was counted accurately? How would this affect the federal funding for community resources?

*Answers will vary but may include that an accurate count is necessary to ensure that the community receives appropriate funding to support the people.*

Question #4: Why is it important that the census is required by the U.S. Constitution and not simply something the country does?

*Answers will vary but may include that this ensures that Congress cannot simply write a law to abolish the census or change its frequency.*

7. Then split students into groups of four. Have each group come up with a clever ad idea to promote census completion within their community. Give students five minutes to come up with the format (audio, video, print, or web) and the key message or takeaway they want to promote.

## After the Activity—5 Minutes

Ask each group to share with the class its idea for promoting the census.

## 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 an adult in your home. Discuss what you learned about the decennial census and why it's important that everyone in your home be counted accurately in the 2020 Census.*





## Activity Item: Uses of Census Bureau Data

Program Name	What It Does	Fiscal 2015 Funds
Highway Planning and Construction	Helps state departments of transportation plan, build, and repair national highways	\$38,479,013,855
National School Lunch Program	Provides reduced-price or free lunches to children each day at school	\$18,915,944,292
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	Helps families until they can become self-sufficient	\$17,225,738,021
Special Education Grants to States	Provides grants to help cover the cost of special education and education for students with disabilities	\$11,382,885,850
Head Start	Promotes school readiness for children under 5 in low-income families	\$8,538,887,781
State Children's Health Insurance Program	Provides health coverage to eligible children	\$4,212,457,713
Hurricane Sandy Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Grants	Develops viable urban communities and expands economic opportunities for people of low and moderate income who were affected by a disaster	\$3,347,522,549
Unemployment Insurance	Provides temporary financial assistance for people who are unemployed through no fault of their own	\$3,015,880,910
Improving Teacher Quality State Grants	Ensures that all students are taught by qualified teachers, principals, etc.	\$2,321,910,864
Federal Transit Capital Investment Grants	Funds things like railways, streetcars, and buses	\$1,491,401,116
Rural Rental Assistance Payments	Reduces rent paid by low-income families who live in Rural Rental Housing or Farm Labor Housing	\$795,000,475

Source: *U.S. Census Bureau, Uses of Census Bureau Data in Federal Funds Distribution*

<https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2017/decennial/census-data-federal-funds.html>

Programs like those listed in the table above use Census Bureau data to direct funding to specific groups or places. Examples of how these programs use Census Bureau data include the following:

- Programs use a population count, such as "areas with a population of 50,000 or more."
- Programs use characteristics of the population, such as the number of people between the ages of 5 and 17, or the number of homes built before 1940.
- Programs divide another estimate, such as income or the number of homes, to create a per capita (for each person) estimate.