

# 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 for the decennial census.

## 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.

## Materials Required

- Printed student worksheets

## About the Census Bureau and the Decennial Census

The Census Bureau is the federal government's largest statistical agency. It is dedicated to providing high-quality facts and figures about America's people, places, and economy.

In addition to the decennial census count (which is a count of every person living in the United States that occurs every 10 years), the Census Bureau also conducts many other surveys on a variety of subjects, including education, health care, businesses, housing, and employment. Census Bureau data are used to:

- Determine the number of Congressional representatives each state receives.
- Make planning decisions about where community services are needed. This includes roads, schools, services for the elderly, job training centers, and hospitals.
- Distribute trillions of dollars in federal funds to local, state, and tribal governments each year.



## 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, last happened 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.



## Activity Item: Uses of Census Bureau Data

| Program Name                                            | What It Does                                                                                             | Fiscal 2021 Funds |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Highway Planning and Construction                       | Helps state departments of transportation plan, build, and repair national highways                      | \$60,451,795,865  |
| National School Lunch Program                           | Provides reduced-price or free lunches to children each day at school                                    | \$27,104,136,942  |
| Temporary Assistance for Needy Families                 | Helps families until they can become self-sufficient                                                     | \$18,117,088,073  |
| Special Education Grants to States                      | Provides grants to help cover the cost of special education and education for students with disabilities | \$15,539,803,303  |
| Head Start                                              | Promotes school readiness for children under 5 in low-income families                                    | \$11,938,353,035  |
| Children's Health Insurance Program                     | Provides health coverage to eligible children                                                            | \$18,166,407,569  |
| Unemployment Insurance                                  | Provides temporary financial assistance for people who are unemployed through no fault of their own      | \$8,867,601,955   |
| Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants (formerly | Ensures that all students are taught by qualified teachers, principals, etc.                             | \$2,111,040,954   |
| Federal Transit Capital Investment Grants               | Funds things like railways, streetcars, and buses                                                        | \$3,880,102,852   |
| Rural Rental Assistance Payments                        | Reduces rent paid by low-income families who live in Rural Rental Housing or Farm Labor Housing          | \$861,893,611     |

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

<https://www2.census.gov/library/working-papers/2023/decennial/census-data-federal-funds-fy-2021.pdf>

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.