

Who Doesn't Count?

Estimated time: 1–2 hrs

The census is designed to collect information about all Americans. However, certain individuals and communities find that the questions on the census form either provide very unspecific options for answers that generalize their experiences or exclude them altogether. In this lesson, students will study the U.S. Constitution's mandate for the census, the census form, and a press release for a bill put forth recently that would ensure a more accurate count of the Dominican and Caribbean communities. Students will learn more about groups who are at risk for being inaccurately counted as part of Census 2010 and the implications of their generalization or exclusion from the overall enumeration.

Objectives

- This lesson will
- allow students to study and analyze the census form;
 - identify for students individuals and communities that are not accurately represented by the census;
 - consider different ways that individuals and communities might be undercounted or excluded by the census;
 - engage students in reading news articles and conducting independent research;
 - ask students to summarize research findings in presentations; and
 - explore the effects of not having a fully accurate census count in the United States.

Time and Materials

- Materials:
- Handout 1: Article I, Section 2, Paragraph 3 of the U.S. Constitution
 - Handout 2: 2010 Census form
 - Handout 3: Press release announcing the introduction of the Caribbean Count Bill
 - Library/computer lab with Internet access for small group research
 - Chart paper and tape/adhesive
 - Markers
- All handouts are available from Teaching Tolerance or linked from the Insights online supplemental resources listed at www.insightsmagazine.org.*

Teaching Tolerance

This lesson is adapted from the lesson, “Who Doesn't Count?” from the Teaching Tolerance program at the Southern Poverty Law Center. Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations, and supporting equitable school experiences for America's children. They offer free educational resources at www.tolerance.org.

Warm-Up Activity

1. Ask students to brainstorm responses, as a class, to the following questions:
 - What is the purpose of the census?
 - Where does the census come from? Why do we do it?
2. Distribute copies of Handout 1: Article I, Section 2, Paragraph 3 of the U.S. Constitution. Ask students to read it, and then discuss the following questions:
 - What does the Constitution say is the reason for taking a census?
 - Does the Constitution offer any guidelines about conducting a census? What?
 - Who is supposed to be counted? Why do you think these groups are listed? Does the Constitution distinguish between citizens and non-citizens?
3. Distribute copies of Handout 2: 2010 Census Form to students. Ask them to review the form and then answer the following questions:
 - What guidelines does the form offer to help respondents complete it? Why do you think these rules are explained?
 - How many questions ask about citizenship? Housing? Race? Ethnicity? Sex? Marriage?
 - Where are questions about sex and marriage? Does everyone have an opportunity to explain their marriage status?
Highlight for students that questions about marriage appear only under Person 2 on the form. There are no questions about marital status for Person 1, who

may be the only person in the household completing the form.

- Can you think of people who might not be described on this form?

Students may think of several groups, including racial or ethnic groups, the homeless, married persons living alone, transgendered individuals, or homosexual couples. Begin listing these groups on the board for use in the next activity.

- How might you get this form? Can you think of groups of people that might have trouble being counted with this form because of their living arrangements?

Answers may include frequent travelers, overseas residents, military officials, homeless people, students, prisoners, displaced persons or refugees, or hospital or nursing home patients. Continue to list these groups on the board, as necessary.

- Out of these groups that we've identified, which do you think are the most difficult to count? Why?

Activity: Who Doesn't Count?

1. Using the list of excluded groups that students created, explain that there are always challenges in counting everyone during the census. Explain that students will look at one of the groups on their list, racial and ethnic communities, and distribute Handout 3: Press release announcing the introduction of the Caribbean Count Bill. Currently people of both Dominican and Caribbean origin must check broader boxes (for example, "Hispanic" or "African American") or write in their ethnicity when filling out the census. Both groups want their race and ethnicities specifically listed. As a result, a New York congresswoman recently introduced a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives called the Caribbean Count Bill.
2. Ask students to read the press release and discuss the following questions:

- What is the Caribbean Count Bill? What issue is it trying to address?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of listing specific racial and ethnic groups on the census?

3. Refer students back to the list of *generalized* and *excluded* groups. Suggest that while racial and ethnic groups are generalized by having to select other groups, certain groups are excluded from the census entirely. Draw attention to three groups: undocumented immigrants, homeless people, and homosexual and transgendered individuals.

4. Split students into three or four small groups, and assign each one of the groups excluded from the census: Dominican and Caribbean immigrants, undocumented immigrants, homeless people, and homosexual and transgendered individuals. Students should research the three questions below in their research. All of the groups answer the first two questions:

- What are the key issues related to your group's exclusion from the census?
- What are specific ways that having an accurate count of your category could better serve this group?

The third question is specific to each small group, depending on their research topics:

- **Dominican or Caribbean immigrants:** How are specific racial and ethnic groups working to make sure that they are accurately counted in the census? Why are some groups specific on the census form and others not?
- **Undocumented immigrants:** Why are some immigrant advocates threatening to tell undocumented immigrants to boycott the census? What would be the risk of such a boycott?
- **Homeless people:** What are three reasons it is hard to accurately count

the homeless population? What has been a strategy of the Census Bureau to address this problem?

- **Homosexual or transgender individuals:** How does the 2010 Census limit the ability to count homosexual couples or transgendered individuals? Why is it important to have an accurate count of these populations?

5. Small groups should display what they learn, including answers to their research questions, on chart paper. Hang chart paper around the classroom, creating teaching stations.
6. Ask students in the small groups to rotate from teaching station to teaching station. Spend two to three minutes at each station. First, students should point out key points of the display or summarize the small group's findings. Then students should write any clarifying or probing questions or feedback on the display or a separate piece of chart paper next to it. Have students move every two to three minutes to the next station until all students have visited all of the stations.
7. Direct small groups to return to their own teaching stations to study their classmates' comments. Each small group should select a spokesperson to present their display to the rest of the class. Presentations should make sure to answer the following questions:
 - Why it is important to include this category in the census count?
 - What could be lost if this category was excluded? How might these groups be affected? How might society be affected? ■

For assessment ideas, visit www.insightsmagazine.org.