Diversity and the Census

Overview

In this lesson, students read a short text about how the census defines and seeks to measure racial and ethnic diversity in the United States, examine questions this data gathering raises, and consider what projections tell us about population trends in the future. Next, they participate in a Civil Conversation (CivCon) based on the reading. In this structured, small-group discussion method — with facilitation from the teacher — students engage intellectually with challenging materials, gain insight into their own point of view, and work towards a shared understanding of issues.

Standards and Topics

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A; SL.11-12.1.A**
  Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C**
  Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C**
  Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D**
  Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D**
  Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

Topics: census, diversity, race and ethnicity, population trends

Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Define the decennial census and its purpose.

2. Explain how the Census Bureau defines and measures diverse racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

3. Participate in Civil Conversation, which will enable them to:

   a. Gain a deeper understanding of a controversial issue.

   b. Use close reading skills to analyze a text.

   c. Present text-based claims.

   d. Develop speaking, listening, and analytical skills.

   e. Identify common ground among differing views.

Materials

- **Handout A: Diversity and the Census** (one per student)
- **Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide** (one per student)

Procedure

I. Focus Discussion

A. Ask students if they know what a census is, and have them explain it if they do. If necessary, provide the simple definition from the reading: "A census is an official count of a population."

B. Ask them: If they were going to try to do a count of the population, what would they want to know about the makeup of the population (e.g., race and ethnicity) and why?

C. Tell students that today they will be looking closely at what the U.S. Census is and how it classifies different groups of people by race and ethnicity. Then they will have a chance to consider and evaluate questions that have been raised by the way the government does this – reflecting first on their own and then in a small-group discussion.

II. Reading: Diversity and the Census

A. Briefly provide students with an overview of the purpose and rationale of the Civil Conversation activity. Use the Overview above to help you.

   Give each student a copy of **Handout A: Diversity and the Census**

B. Civil Conversation Guide

   Distribute a copy of **Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide** to each student to complete as they read. (Each student should fill in his/her own guide.)

III. Activity: Civil Conversation

A. Divide the class into groups of 3–4 students. You may want to have each group select a leader who will get the discussion started, ensure the group stays on-task, and finishes on time.

B. Determine how much time the groups have to complete the discussion. (You will know what's best for your students, depending on the length of the reading and how experienced your students are in student-directed discussion.)

- **Time:** Conversations for classroom purposes should have a time limit, generally ranging

from 15 to 45 minutes and an additional five minutes to reflect on the effectiveness of the conversations. The reflection time is an opportunity to ask any students who have not spoken to comment on the things they have heard. Ask them who said something that gave them a new insight that they agreed or disagreed with.

- **Small Groups:** This discussion strategy is designed to ensure the participation of every student. Groups of 3-4 students are ideal. If you are scaffolding text for various reading levels, group students who will use the same text together.

C. Review the rules of a Civil Conversation (listed under Step 3 on the Guide) and direct the groups to follow the instructions on the Guide to get started.

D. Let groups know you will be circulating to listen in on their conversations and that each person in a group is expected to participate. The goal is for everyone to contribute equally to the conversation.

E. If necessary, remind groups of the time and urge them to move to the next steps.

IV. Assessment/Closure

A. After the groups have completed their discussions, debrief the activity by having the class reflect on the effectiveness of the conversation:

- What did you learn from the Civil Conversation?

- What common ground did you find with other members of the group?

- Ask all participants to suggest ways in which the conversation could be improved. If appropriate, have students add the suggestions to their list of conversation rules.

B. For assessment, look for the following on each student's Civil Conversation Guide:

Step 2 – A, B: Basic understanding of text.

Step 2 – C, D: Text-based arguments.

Step 2 – E: Appropriate and compelling questions about the text.

Step 4 – A: Level of participation (should be "about the same as others").

Step 4 – B: Answer is appropriately related to topic/issue presented in text.

Step 4 – C, D: Specificity/text-based.

C. For additional assessment, you may want to collect the article/text students used to assess the annotations they made in terms of connections to prior knowledge/experience, questions they had while reading, and comments they made.

D. Lesson extension: If you have time to delve more deeply into how definitions of race and ethnicity have changed over time in the United States, you can download and share with your students the following resource from the Pew Research Center, available as a PDF. *What Census Calls Us: A Historical Timeline* provides a powerful visual representation of how the government's designation of different groups of people in the U.S. has changed over time. Students could use this to answer remaining questions they may have, or to develop additional questions for future research.

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Diversity and the Census

Every ten years, as required by Article I of the Constitution, the government carries out a ***census***. A census is an official count of a population. In the United States, census figures are used to shape key aspects of daily life, including representation in Congress and distribution of over $675 billion in federal funds to local, state, and tribal governments. The statistics gathered by the census are also important for understanding the changing ***demographics*** of the United States. Demography is the study of human populations or the makeup of a particular human population, and demographics are the data that come from that kind of research.

The U.S. Census Bureau is part of the Department of Commerce and administers the census. The head of the Census Bureau is appointed by the president.

The process of developing and administering the census raises important questions about diversity and membership in U.S. society. How do we decide how to count different groups in the country? How do we decide who is part of which group? In what languages will the census be available? And who should make these decisions?

When classifying people based on race, the Census Bureau uses terminology and definitions revised by the government in 1997. (See text box on the right of this paragraph.) Since the 2000 census, people have been able to "check the box" for more than one race. In that year, only about 2% of respondents chose that option. About 3% did in 2010.

Besides race, many people in the United States have an ethnic identity that is an essential part of who they are. The census addresses this quality in different ways — depending on the ethnicity — and uses the term "origin" when doing so. Since 1970, it has included a separate, specific question to ask if a person is "of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin." People who claim that origin may be of any race.

In 2020, for the first time, the census questionnaire will provide a space for people to indicate their ethnicity or national origin when they answer the question about which race they identify with. The image on the right shows how the question will be asked, including examples of "origins" people might indicate.

Many people have raised questions about the terminology and definitions the census uses. They argue that the census options reflect neither how they see themselves and their heritage, nor how many people in the United States see

How the Census Bureau Defines Racial Groups in the U.S.

White – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

Black or African American – A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.

American Indian or Alaska Native – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.

Asian – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

What is this person's race?
Mark **X** *one or more boxes* **AND** *print origins.*

☐ White – *Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc.*

☐ Black or African Am. – *Print, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc.*

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native – *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc.*

☐ Chinese   ☐ Vietnamese   ☐ Native Hawaiian
☐ Filipino   ☐ Korean   ☐ Samoan
☐ Asian Indian   ☐ Japanese   ☐ Chamorro
☐ Other Asian – *Print, for example, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, etc.*   ☐ Other Pacific Islander – *Print, for example, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc.*

☐ Some other race – *Print race or origin.*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

them. For example, under current Census Bureau definitions,

people whose families originated in Southwest Asia, North Africa, or the Middle East are counted as white. But Arab and Iranian communities have been lobbying the bureau for many years to create a separate race category for people of Middle Eastern or North African descent. They point out that their ostensible inclusion in a group that has, in fact, frequently discriminated against them effectively "erases the community."

Throughout the nation's history, discrimination and exclusion have persistently been responses to the diversity that has also always been a defining characteristic of this country. Yet recent censuses and census projections indicate that diversity will continue to grow and shape the nation in important ways.

Table 1: Percent of the U.S. Population, by Race and Ethnicity				
	1900	1960	2000	2060 projected
White	87.8	88.6	75.1	68
Non-Hispanic White			69.1	44.3
Black or African American	11.5	10.5	12.3	15
Asian	0.3	0.8	3.6	9.1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander[1]	n/a	n/a	0.1	0.3
American Indian or Alaska Native[2]	0.3	0.3	0.9	1.4
Hispanic/Latino[3]	n/a	n/a	12.5	27.5

Note: Even working with raw data from the Census Bureau, it is difficult to measure the population of some racial and ethnic groups since the government's categories and designations have changed over time.
[1] Pacific Islanders (including native Hawaiians) were included with "Asians" between 1960 and 1990. Prior to 1960, the government did not provide any way for native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders to identify themselves on the census.
[2] Prior to 1960, the government did not provide any way for Native Alaskans to identify themselves on the census other than as part of the very broad "Indian" (1860-1940) or "American Indian" (1950-1960) categories used.
[3] Recall that this additional designation did not appear until the 1970 census.

Indeed, terms like "minority groups" or "minorities," refer to people who make up less than 50% of the population. But while white people remain the majority in the U.S. as a whole, in many parts of the country and sectors of society, it is people of color who make up the majority. For example, since 2014, children of color have made up the majority of public school students in the United States. The table above shows how the United States has become increasingly diverse over time and how that trend is expected to continue.

Another important marker of the diversity of the U.S. population is the number of languages spoken by people who live in this country. Census questionnaires and other forms have also increasingly reflected this. For the 2020 census, the Census Bureau has added seven new languages in which survey materials will be available. Arabic, Tagalog, and Haitian Creole are among them; this means that as of 2020, census materials will be available in a total of 13 languages.

Writing & Discussion

1. Why is it important for the United States to conduct a census every ten years?

2. How have changing demographics shaped definitions of race and ethnicity in the United States over time?

3. Read the notes under Table 1 carefully. What do you think it means if a group of people cannot accurately identify themselves on the census? How do these past instances relate to the concerns raised by people from the Middle East and North Africa, as explained in the text?

CivCon Guide

Name:_____Class: _____

Title of Reading: _____

Step 1: Read.

A. Read through the entire selection without stopping to think about any particular section.

B. Re-read the selection and annotate ("talk to") the text:
- Underline the main/most important points. You can comment on these points in the margins.
- Circle words or phrases that are unknown or confusing to you.
- Write down any questions you have in the margin labeling them with a "?".
- Draw an ➡ in the margin next to text that connects to something you know from outside the text. Note what the connection is, such as a news item or personal experience.

Step 2: Think about the reading to prepare for the discussion.

A. This reading is about…	B. The MAIN POINTS are:
C. In the reading, I agree with:	D. In the reading, I disagree with:

E. What are two questions about this reading that you think could be discussed? (The best questions for discussion are ones that have no simple answer and that can use the text as evidence.)

1.

2.

Step 3: Discuss and listen.

RULES FOR CIVIL CONVERSATION (CIVCON)

1. Everyone in your group should participate in the conversation.
2. Listen carefully to what others are saying.
3. Ask clarifying questions if you do not understand a point raised.
4. Be respectful of what others are saying.
5. Refer to the text to support your ideas.

You will have _____minutes to discuss. Your goal is to engage with each other and the text to gain insight about your own point of view while finding a shared understanding of the issue.

At the end of the reading, you will likely find at least one discussion question. Use that question to get started. If time permits, you can also discuss questions you came up with in Section E above.

If the reading does not provide discussion questions, choose questions to discuss from Section E.

Step 4: After your conversation…

A. Compared to others in your group, did you speak?_____Less than,_____About the same as, ___More than others.

B. Note some of the ways you added to the discussion.

C. What evidence did you use from the text to add to the discussion? Why was this evidence helpful?

D. What did you learn about the topic from the CivCon? (Be sure to reference the text!)