

Interdisciplinary Activities Using Census in Schools

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Like many other teachers, I'm always looking for a way to enliven a lesson—a new twist, a different perspective, a novel resource. I want to make my classroom practical, interesting to 21st century kids, and sprinkled with pizzazz. Now that's a tall order, but elementary teachers know that's not only necessary; it's called survival. The slogan of the NCSS convention held in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2009 was, "Dreams and Deeds: The Civic Mission of Schools," and this article provides "how to" ideas, easy, high-interest opportunities to make that happen in your classroom.

Lessons Ready to Use

The downloadable, standards-based lesson plans accessible at www.census.gov/schools offer well-developed activities for teaching K-12 students about the history and importance of the nation's census. The lessons teach math and reading skills, as well as mapping, graphing, and many other social studies skills. Additionally, by clicking the "For Teachers" tab, one arrives at the "Teaching Resources" page, with a collection of ideas that span the curriculum. Clicking on "Teaching Ideas" takes one to lessons that enable students to collect, analyze, and compare data. These lessons are summarized below.

Do your students think they're the only ones who face challenges? The lesson, "A Child's Day: 2004," examines the well-being of children in the United States and provides an updated look into how they spend their days. Your students can compare their lives to other students by reading a news release and participating in math and language arts-related activities as indicated on this link.

Population Pyramid

Are you teaching the concept of relationship, analysis, and/or synthesis?

The lesson, "Population Pyramids," offers a different way to study population structure that appeals to elementary students. The lesson changes what could seem to students like a boring, difficult subject into a fun, easy-to-understand, real-life

application of local and national data by making population pyramids. Teachers who are studying other countries will find this site offers an opportunity for students to apply data and create international population pyramids.

California Wildfires

Do your students know there's a connection between the Census Bureau and the National Weather Service? Specific instructions for elementary students help them understand how Census Bureau data help local, state, and national agencies determine how many citizens will be affected by harsh weather events (such as snowstorms, tornadoes, hurricanes, forest fires) and indeed, prepare for emergency response and recovery.

Other "Must-Do's"


At the "For Teachers" webpage, in the box labeled, "Newsletter," click on "Go to archive" and sign up for the monthly electronic newsletter *Educator Update*, which provides other creative ideas and lessons. It's free, and the Census Bureau will not share your e-mail address. Looking for a novel way to include census data when celebrating a holiday? You'll find the answer to this and other topics each month when you read the online newsletter.

Visit "Facts for Features & Special Editions," a collection of statistics from the Census Bureau's demographic and economic subject areas, intended to commemorate anniversaries or observances and to provide background information for topics in the news. You'll find ten years' worth of timely data related to holidays and topics of interest. Students can find unusual information, and there's often a geography lesson hidden in the listing of place names related to the topic. It's fun for students to find on a map Mayflower, Arkansas, and Turkey, Texas, and then to challenge older family members to do the same.

A QuickFacts webpage enables students to find population, business, and geography facts about their state. Also, state

Student State Facts, a very popular student site specifically for younger students, invites students to “grab your state data and go.” This interactive site is kid-friendly, comparing, for example, the numbers of boys and girls in your state in 2000 and 2007. There is a section titled “I never knew that” with information of interest to children, such as the number of toy stores, zoos, and ice cream makers in the state. There is also a lesson plan for grades 3-5 that includes graphing and mapping activities.

Have students visit www.census.gov/schools and click on “Census for Kids” to interactively explore coloring pages, quizzes, word finds, and more! Students in grades K-5 have fun learning about the Census Bureau by self-selecting attractive, engaging activities. The site even has music.

As this issue of *SSYL* goes to press, 2010 Census forms are reaching the homes in your community. All these resources will help you turn classroom dreams into deeds, inform your students about the census and how it affects their community, and help you teach the curriculum. 

PAT WATSON, an educational consultant with the U.S. Census Bureau, assisted in the preparation of this paper.



A “History” timeline is available at www.census.gov if you click on the “History & Pop Culture” icon. Interestingly, this wonderful resource is not easily found, today, with a Google search on the key words “census” and “timeline”



"State Facts for Students" (www.census.gov/schools/facts) provides interesting facts and figures about each state in the Union.