

Maggie's Civics Corner



Lesson 31 – The United States Census

Today's lesson is about the United States Census and its purpose: One thing I love to do is count all of my toys and bones. Counting helps me keep track of everything and keeps me organized. Did you know that the United States of America's Constitution requires a Census to count all of the people that live inside of the United States and its 5 territories? A census is the procedure of acquiring and recording information about a population. Every 10 years, the United States Census counts every person living in the United States and its territories. Every house in America and its territories receives an invitation to respond to a short questionnaire online, by phone, or by mail.

About the United States Census: Article I, Section 2 of the United States Constitution states: "Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States... 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." Section 2 of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution states that "respective Numbers" of the "several States" shall be determined by counting the whole number of persons in each state and territory. The first United States Census was taken in 1790 shortly after the American Revolution and has continued every 10 years since then. Since it is 2020, the United States Census is currently being conducted.

Filling out the Census is fast and easy. The questions are simple. For example, the Census asks how many people live in your home, whether you rent or own your home, and the names, sex, birth dates and relations of everyone who lives in the home.

As you can probably tell by it being mandated by the Constitution, the United States Census serves an important role in helping the government operate. The United States Census helps the government in two major ways. First, the information provided by the Census helps the government determine how they will allocate billions of dollars in federal funding to things like hospitals, fire departments, schools, and roads in states and communities all around the country. The federal funding that the government provides comes from taxes that citizens pay. Second, the Census helps the government determine the number of seats each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives and is used to draw congressional and legislative districts. Because the Census is so important to the functioning of our government, it is critical that the government has a complete and accurate count of all people living in the United States and its territories. In fact, it is required by law that all households respond to the United States Census. It is vital that all people living in the United States of America are counted.

Activity: Let's do a United States Census check! Talk to your family and explain to them what you have learned about the United States Census and the different functions it serves. Make sure to explain the two major ways that an accurate Census helps the government operate. Ask your family if someone from your household has filled out the 2020 United States Census. If not, let your family know that they can fill out the United States Census by going online and Googling "US Census." If your family has not yet filled out the 2020 United States Census, help them complete the short questionnaire and impress them with your new Census knowledge!

Civic Resources: Check out information regarding the United States Census and respond to the 2020 United States Census here: <https://2020census.gov/>