

LESSON: Demographic Mapping in Modern America

GRADE LEVEL: Middle School

SUBJECT: Civics & Government,
Current Events

TIME REQUIRED: 45 minutes

This lesson introduces students to spatial reasoning skills and the analysis of maps and their data.

RATIONALE

This lesson invites students to draw connections between demographic qualities using mapping practices. Students will analyze the complexity of both the data and its meanings.

NOTE: This lesson can be adapted to teach spatial reasoning and analysis for many different subjects, especially if teachers choose different maps.

This lesson plan and materials needed to teach it can be found at the Thurgood Marshall Institute: <https://tminstituteldf.org/>

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What elements of identity can we measure and study?
- How do we spatially represent information?
- How does identity influence human behavior?

OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES

After the lesson, students will...

- Read demographic maps effectively.
- Analyze and infer about demographic data.
- Evaluate the effects of demography on behavior.

PREPARING TO TEACH

- Students should have experience with reading and decoding maps and their legends, and students should have a preliminary knowledge of demography. Experience with intersectionality would be helpful but is not necessary.
- Teachers should:
 - Print a copy of the attached packet for all students (or share it electronically).
 - Share all links with students electronically.

SCAFFOLDS AND ACCOMMODATIONS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS

Reading support...

Teachers can offer specific research guidelines for students for the third part of this activity. Teachers may also choose to add vocabulary or comprehension supports associated with the questions and maps for students as is helpful.

Differentiation...

Teachers may update and translate the attached packet as needed for their classes. Teachers may also consider manipulating partner groupings to better support students.

Adjusting for high school grades...

This lesson would still be effective for older grades. Teachers may choose to edit or expand the questions in the packet depending on their class. For older ages, this lesson will most likely take less time than posted above.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES SEQUENCE

1. Make sure all students have access to a copy of the attached packet to record their answers.
2. Explain to students that they will complete the packet and its attached activities with their partner and that they will be allowed to work through it at their own pace.
3. Let students know not to choose the following states because they lack election data: Idaho, Louisiana, Missouri, Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, and Virginia.
4. Allow students time to complete the packet.

ASSESSMENT

Students may turn in their packets as the assessment for this lesson. Teachers may also opt to extend this lesson by offering additional assessments in the form of:

- Written or presentational reflections
- Group discussions
- More demographic research

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ENRICHMENT

- See attached links.

Map Explorer Activity

Open this map from ArcGis:

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=30d2e10d4d694b3eb4dc4d2e58dbb5a5>

1. Pick a state with your partner. What state did you pick? _____
2. Start by looking at the dots in that state. What colors do you see? How close together are the dots (notice the scale in the top left corner “1 Dot = ___”)?

3. What do these dots tell you about the kind of people who live in this state? Make a statement about the **racial demography** of your state.

Open this map from *The New York Times* next:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/upshot/2020-election-map.html>

1. This map shows the results from votes in the 2020 presidential election. Find your state and look at the colors you see here. What color do you see the most? Is it mostly light spots or dark ones? Do the colors mix at all in this state?

2. Think back to (or reopen) the first map you looked at. What patterns do you notice between the colors/dots in the first map and the colors in the second map? (In other words, what do these maps tell us about the relationship between racial demography and voting results?)

3. Now make a prediction: Why do you think the maps of your state look this way? Why does the relationship between race and voting results exist?

Think about another element of **demography** that is interesting to you: wealth, age, gender, education, occupation, or religion. Pick one of these elements and research what that element looks like in your state.

1. What do you find? What information did you learn about your state?
2. How does this new information relate to the patterns and relationships you've been looking at for race and voting results?
3. After looking at all of this information, is it important? Why or why not? How can demographic information like this help or not help us understand more about living in America and interacting with its systems?