



**CITIZEN
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CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING: The Challenge of Drawing Competitive Congressional Districts

LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITY

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CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING

Lesson Plan and Activity

Grade Level: 9, 10, 11, 12

Subjects:

- Social Studies: U.S., State, and Local Government
- Language Arts: Reading, Writing,

Duration: Three class periods

Description: Students will learn about United States Congressional districts, how and when they are drawn and who draws them. Students will also practice drawing districts for their State and learn about political issues related to redistricting.

Goals:

ISBE Standards:

- 14C. Understand election processes and responsibilities of citizens.
- 14D. Understand the roles and influences of individuals and interest groups in the political systems of Illinois, the United States and other nations.
- 16A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.
- 16B. Understand the development of significant political events.
- 16C. Understand the development of economic systems.
- 18B. Understand the roles and interactions of individuals and groups in society.
- 18C. Understand how social systems form and develop over time.

Objectives:

1. Understand how Congressional districts are divided among the states;
2. Understand the need for redistricting;
3. Understand when and how districts are redrawn; and
4. Learn about the potential abuses of redistricting power and the advantages conferred to incumbent representatives through gerrymandering.

Materials:

Blank map of your state (one for each student)
Population density map of your state (one for each student)
Overhead projector
Overhead map of current Congressional districts for your State
Gerrymandering diagram (attached) on overhead

Instructions and Activity:

Lecture

The United States House of Representatives is composed of 435 Representatives from the 50 states. Each state is entitled to at least one Representative. The remaining 385 Representatives are divided among the states proportionally, based upon a national census taken every ten years.

The census determines which states gain or lose Representatives. As states gain or lose Representatives, legislative districts must be redrawn to accommodate the change. The redrawing of districts is called redistricting.

Each state has the individual power to determine how it will draw congressional districts, subject to federal requirements that mandate that each congressional district be as equal as possible in terms of population. In order to create competitive elections, certain techniques can be used to draw districts. Some of the techniques include:

- Contiguity (ensuring that all parts of the district are connected, thus ensuring that the representative of this district can better serve all the constituents in the district);
- Compactness (ensuring that the district is as compact as possible and not thinly stretched out over hundred of miles, with the similar result as contiguity of better constituent services); and
- Creating districts of equal population (there already is a requirement of equal population districts, though some deviation is allowed if a compelling state interest is involved).
- Additionally, states can adopt a "competitive requirement" which mandates competitive districts, as long as the creation of competitive districts does not interference with any other redistricting requirements.

Move to activity #1.

Activity #1: Draw Congressional Districts

Pass out the blank maps of your state (an outline of your state) to each student. Inform students of how many Congressional Representatives your state has and the corresponding number of districts in your state. Tell students they are the state committee that is responsible for redrawing the Congressional districts and ask them to draw lines on their maps to divide the state up into the appropriate number of districts. There is no right or wrong answer. This is merely to get students thinking about the difficulty in dividing up the state into districts. Give them five minutes.

Return to Lecture

Most states give their legislatures the authority to create and implement the redistricting plan. Seven states give the authority to an independent bipartisan or nonpartisan commission (Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, New Jersey, Washington, Iowa and Maine). Also, seven states avoid the issue of redistricting because their population is so low that they are only apportioned one Congressional Representative (Alaska, Delaware, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming). In the rest of the states, partisan politics plays an enormous role in the redistricting process because political parties and incumbents often want to keep the status quo in some districts while redrawing others to their advantage. The tactic used to draw districts that are favorable to one person or group but not another is 'gerrymandering'.

Gerrymandering is defined as: dividing an area into political units so as to give special advantages to one group. There are two strategies that are part of gerrymandering: packing and cracking. Packing is used to put as many voters of a single type into one district in order to minimize their influence in other districts. Cracking is used to spread out voters of a single type among numerous districts so that they will always be in the minority. Packing and cracking are often combined, giving a few "safe" seats to incumbent candidates.

Gerrymandering has a longstanding political tradition in the United States, dating back to 1812. The initial idea behind gerrymandering was to create districts of common voter interest. It has since evolved into a highly precise science involving advanced statistics and computers. Gerrymandering may be used to the advantage or disadvantage of particular constituents in a district and often works in favor of the party in control of the state legislature at the time of redistricting.

Move to activity #2

Activity #2: Gerrymandering

See the attached diagrams. The diagrams are composed of 1's and 0's. Each integer represents a person (or equal number of persons) with 1 being Republican and 0 being Democratic. The first diagram represents four Congressional districts drawn with equal numbers of 1's and 0's in each district. The second diagram is drawn intentionally without lines and gives students the opportunity to draw gerrymandered districts. Distribute copies of the diagrams to the students, have them declare themselves Republican or Democratic, and have them try to draw four gerrymandered districts. (In order to be successful, a combination of packing and cracking must be used.) Students may draw the districts to favor either party. After the students are finished, show them the example diagram included on the same sheet as the non-gerrymandered diagram.

Activity #3: Draw Congressional Districts

Display the map that shows current congressional districts where everyone can see. Discuss with the class the following questions: Are any of the districts oddly shaped? Which ones? Why do you think that is? Why are some districts smaller or larger? Are there some districts that you would draw differently?

After the discussion, pass out the maps displaying population density to each student. Remind the students about the total number of districts they need to draw. Then have them draw the districts again, keeping in mind the population density. Have the students estimate districts of equal population, without actually calculating the number of people in each district. Give them ten minutes for this.

Discuss these follow up questions:

Are your districts similar or different to the actual Congressional districts? Do you think that the actual districts are drawn in that manner for a reason?

Should gerrymandering be allowed? Is it acceptable or even necessary to utilize gerrymandering to ensure fairness (such as through the Voting Rights Act)? Which of the techniques for creating

districts or amending election processes do you think would be most successful in creating competitive elections? Why? Which techniques would be least effective in creating competitive elections? Why?

Supplemental Activity:

Discussion:

Considering what you now know about gerrymandering, are there any districts in your State that seem to be gerrymandered? What do you think about this? Is it fair? If you were in a position to develop a redistricting plan, would you gerrymander the districts? Why or why not? Are you aware that gerrymandering is widely used by both major parties in the U.S.? Did you know that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that it is legal for a State legislature to redistrict at any time they desire, not just after a census? (See: LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS v. PERRY, GOVERNOR OF TEXAS)

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Example of a non-gerrymandered distribution of districts:

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Example of a gerrymandered distribution of districts:

$$\begin{array}{cccc|cccc}
0 & 0 & \underline{0} & \underline{0} & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 1 & | & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\
\underline{0} & 1 & | & \underline{1} & \underline{1} & \underline{1} & \underline{1} & \underline{0} \\
0 & | & 1 & 1 & | & 0 & 0 & | & 1 & 1 & 0 \\
0 & | & 1 & 1 & | & 0 & \underline{0} & | & 1 & 1 & 0 \\
0 & | & 1 & 1 & | & 1 & | & 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\
0 & | & \underline{1} & \underline{1} & | & 1 & | & \underline{1} & \underline{1} & 1 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & | & 0 & 0
\end{array}$$