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GRADES 5–6

STUDENT  
Worksheet

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# The U.S. Census— Collecting 200 Years of Data



The following is adapted from *Factfinder for the Nation*, a history of the census.

## Introduction

The newly independent United States urgently needed a **census** (population count) of the entire nation. Population would determine the number of seats each state was to have in the U.S. House of Representatives.

## The First U.S. Census—1790

The first census took place soon after George Washington became president. It listed the head of household by name and simply counted everyone else. One of the few questions it asked was about gender and how many of the males were over and under age 16. This was to measure how many men might be available for military service. Compared with modern censuses, the 1790 Census was a simple and possibly inaccurate operation. The law required that the responses be made in a specific format, but the **enumerators** (census workers)

had to furnish their own paper. They used all sorts of books and sheets to record the information. It took 18 months for the horseback-riding enumerators to complete the census.

## The Expanding Censuses

Down through the years, our nation changed through expansion, industrialization, and immigration. The content of the decennial census changed accordingly. For example, the first **inquiry** (question) about manufacturing was made in 1810; it concerned the quantity and value of products. A question about occupation was added in 1850; and in 1890, the census included questions about year of immigration and language spoken.

There were so many questions on the census form in the late 19th century that it took nearly a full decade to publish the results. Today's census is much simpler.

## 2010 Census Questions

In 2010, the census questionnaire will include questions about:

1. Number of people in your household
2. Who owns your residence
3. Name, gender, race, and birth date of each member of your household
4. How many members of your household (if any) are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

The complete text of this document can be found at [www.census.gov/prod/2000pubs/cff-4.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2000pubs/cff-4.pdf).