

Redistricting: Where Should We Draw the Line?

NCSS Thematic Strands: Power, Authority, and Governance

Grade Level: 9-12

Time Outline: 1- 50 minute class period

Purpose, Background and Context:

Since the early 1900s, the seats of the House of Representatives have been limited to 435. In order to establish fair representation among the states and the constituents within the states, seats are reapportioned after every census. After this process, district lines are redrawn, ideally, to insure fair political representation of the people within the state. This process is known as “redistricting.” Although most people see this process as a practical necessity to a representative form of government, the process can become the source of fierce political battles. In recent American history controversies have arisen concerning whether or not district lines should be re-drawn to help insure minority representation in government. Drawing district lines to insure African American representation, for example, become significant, and the source of controversy, after passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In this lesson, students will learn the importance and value of redistricting. They will also be able to understand the ways different groups have been, and can be, affected by redistricting. By examining historical examples of redistricting, students will see both positive and negative (fair and unfair) examples of the process’s outcomes. They will also be able to see how specific groups of citizens are directly affected by the process. Finally, students will develop their own opinion on the significance of redistricting for fair and effective governance.

Objectives & Student Outcomes

Students will:

- ❖ Understand the process of redistricting;
- ❖ Comprehend historical examples of the process;
- ❖ Understand how different groups have been, or can be, affected by the process;

- ❖ Express their own opinion on the political process of redistricting and hypothesize alternate ways the fairest representation of all American citizens.

Materials:

- ❖ Redistricting evaluation and analysis worksheet
- ❖ PowerPoint Presentation (Should include terms and examples of redistricting)
- ❖ PBS.org :How Redistricting Works Maps”
- ❖ Redistricting political cartoon
- ❖ Essay prompt

Procedures:

Procedure 1:

Show students the [“Redistricting Twister” political cartoon](#). Remind students that we have talked about how political cartoons often work to express a particular political viewpoint or comment upon economic, social or political developments. Have students to examine the cartoon and ask: *“Does anyone have a guess of what we will be talking about today?”*

Procedure 2:

Split the students into groups of 3-4. Distribute to each student the “How Redistricting Works Maps.” Explain the instructions for each of the two maps. Also, put the power point slide that has the instructions for each map on the Smart Board. Circulate through the classroom to help the groups finish the project.

Procedure 3:

Present the PowerPoint presentation with terms and examples of redistricting. Explain each example of redistricting. Ask the students if they have any questions about the terms. Ask if any students know of examples of redistricting.

Procedure 4:

Pass out the redistricting worksheet. Explain that they will be responsible for completing three tasks. The first is to come up with pros and cons of the redistricting process. Second, hypothesize groups that may be affected positively or negatively by the redistricting process. Third, brainstorm possible ways to ensure fair redistricting.

Procedure 5:

Lead a discussion over the worksheet. Have each group share their answers to each of the three tasks. Then, discuss whether or not the class as a whole feels that current practices of redistricting are right or wrong, fair or unfair.

Procedure 6:

Wrap up the lesson. Ensure that students understand the redistricting process. Highlight possible methods of redistricting. Explain the decision with the 2003 Texas Redistricting process. (It was constitutional except for one district on racial grounds). Distribute the essay prompt and explain that students will be required to write a short one page response in which they address the following questions:

Why is redistricting a necessary process?

How can redistricting positively affect the constituents in districts? Negatively?

How might a national standard for redistricting be developed? What might it look like?

The essays will be collected at the beginning of the next day's class period.

Assessment of Outcomes:

Students will complete a one page essay response to the following questions:

Why is redistricting a necessary process?

How can redistricting positively affect the constituents in districts? Negatively?

How might a national standard for redistricting be developed? What might it look like?

Extensions and Adaptations:

Students could use the redistricting game found at redistrictinggame.org on individual computers to understand the redistricting process.

Students could complete a simulation of a redistricting committee. Students would be assigned different roles including lobbyists for two parties, committee members, and Supreme Court justices. Students would be presented with an imaginary

district and the committee would have to develop a plan that was approved by the justices.

Students could further analyze the concept of gerrymandering and how it affects the redistricting process.

Resources:

Iowa 2012 Redistrict Proposal, <http://www.bleedingheartland.com/diary/2555/>

Redistricting Social Studies Curriculum,
<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/dotnews/RedistrictingSSFinal.pdf>

Redistricting Twister Cartoon, http://www.branchtoon.com/texas_cartoons?page=1