

TEACHING REDISTRICTING THROUGH GEOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

A model for civic learning in communities in the United States

UNDERSTANDING REDISTRICTING

In legislative bodies at the federal, state, and local levels, citizens elect representatives based on geographic location. Understanding how the lines are drawn to create these districts is essential to determine whether the districts in which members of the community vote produce fair representation. Each state and locality has its own rules for voting and organizing representation; federal laws and traditional guidelines support analysis of the redistricting process.

GeoCivics provides a guide for students and community members to make their own electoral redistricting maps using a series of background resources and hands-on materials to gain confidence in explaining how to group people together so they may vote for representatives at the federal, state, and local levels.

WHAT IS EDUCATING FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

Educating for American Democracy is a diverse and cross-ideological group of scholars and educators who created guidance and an inquiry framework to transform the teaching of history and civics to meet the needs of a diverse 21st-century K-12 student body.

Educating for American Democracy (EAD) has designed a framework for excellence in history and civics for all learners that is organized by major themes and questions, supported by key concepts. Each theme has driving questions to explore, and the framework has pedagogical principles for how educators can approach the teaching of the EAD roadmap.

www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org

HOW CAN MY STATE USE THIS CURRICULUM?

Complete the steps on the GeoCivics website for your state. Identify resources and background information that would be helpful in explaining the redistricting process in your community.

- Primary sources such as voting records for local, state, and federal races
- Laws and statutes related to creating electoral districts
- Secondary sources such as commentaries or news analyses of the redistricting process
- Interviews with members of the community, members of legislative bodies, and observers

HOW CAN MY COMMUNITY USE THE ROADMAP?

The Educating for American Democracy roadmap lists multiple ways to engage students in civics learning. This project connects to Theme 4: A New Government and Constitution as well as Theme 7: A People with Contemporary Debates & Possibilities as well as Design Challenge 5: Balancing the Concrete and the Abstract. Electoral districts are inherently about how debates are carried out within an electoral structure. With current geospatial technology tools, it is possible to guide learners in moving between concrete, narrative, and chronological learning and thematic and abstract or conceptual learning.

KEY CONCEPTS

Explore concepts of fairness, unfairness, freedom, and equality in classrooms, communities, and governments.

- Why would some people think that some rules are unfair?
- How can people work together even if they disagree with one another?

Explore why the U.S. form of government is so complex, embracing several levels and parts of government.

- Why are the concepts of representation, majority rule/minority rule, and rule of law important for a democracy?
- What happens to local and regional distinctions within a federal government?

Analyze the ideas and debates about rights, power, civic participation, and decision-making that shaped the Revolution and the framing of the Constitution.

- What is power? How is power reflected in your lived experiences?
- Why is majority rule an important principle? Why are mechanisms to protect minorities (whether racial, sexual, religious, ideological, or cultural) also important?

Explore past and present efforts to adapt and redesign the U.S. Constitution and political institutions over time.

- Why do we have three branches of government, or separation of powers? What are the roles of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches?
- How do elections work?

Develop an understanding of the purpose, processes, strengths, and weaknesses of U.S. government and politics.

- How do people experience self-government through the vehicle of the U.S. Constitution and state constitutions?
- In a constitutional democracy, what are the roles for institutions and procedures, and what are the roles for virtues, values, and good citizenship?

Explore elections and understand the reasons why individuals run for office.

- How can we assess and challenge leaders when we see the need for change?

Understand contemporary debates around the purpose and role of government and civic participation, including voting.

- Why is it important to deeply understand ideas and opinions that may be different than our own?

Build strategies for learning about current events, issues, and debates.

- What issues in current elections or local, state, national, or international decision-making are of most interest to you?
- What values or principles guide your thinking about the issues you care about? What guides the thinking of others who support different policy positions?
- Which sources of news and information are credible, fair, and accurate, and which are not?