Calculating Population Density

Students calculate population density in the United States and describe some of the patterns in the results.

GRADES
9 - 12+

SUBJECTS
Geography, Human Geography

CONTENTS
2 Links, 1 PDF

OVERVIEW

Students calculate population density in the United States and describe some of the patterns in the results.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:
http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/calculating-population-density/

DIRECTIONS

1. Introduce the activity.
Ask: What do you think the population of the United States is? Have students check their predictions against the U.S. Census Bureau Population Clock. Then ask students to predict which states are most and least populated. Tell them they can confirm their predictions later in this activity. Explain that students will calculate the population density for each individual state and then the United States as a whole. Write the formula for figuring out population density on the board:
number of people ÷ the area they occupy = population density

2. Have students complete the worksheet.
Provide each student with a copy of the worksheet United States Population Density and a
calculator. Have students use QuickFacts on the U.S. Census Bureau website to get current land
area and estimated population data. Then ask students to use the population density formula
and a calculator to calculate the population density for each state. Next, have students rank
the states from highest population density to lowest using numbers 1-50. Finally, to calculate
the average for the entire United States, have students first total the land area for each state,
then the estimated population for each state, and then use the same formula to calculate
population density.

3. Discuss the results as a class.
As a class, identify the states with the highest and lowest population densities. Discuss
possible reasons a state might have a high population density, such as:

- a large total population
- a small land area
- a fairly large population, but a significantly smaller land area

Ask: What is the ranking of our state with the current data?

Informal Assessment

Make informal observations as students calculate the density populations for the states. You
can also assess students’ understandings of population density by asking: What does the
population density of a country or state tell you?

Extending the Learning

Encourage students to use this same technique to calculate the population density for cities
within their own state or for particular countries of interest.

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography
Learning Objectives

Students will:

- calculate the population density for each state and the United States as a whole
- identify multiple reasons for high population densities

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Discussions
- Information organization

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- Critical Thinking Skills
  - Analyzing
  - Remembering
  - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
  - Acquiring Geographic Information
  - Analyzing Geographic Information

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS
• **Theme 3:**
People, Places, and Environments

**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS**

• **Standard 9:**
The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth’s surface

**Preparation**

**What You’ll Need**

**MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE**

- Calculators
- Paper
- Pencils
- Pens

**REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY**

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per learner

**PHYSICAL SPACE**

- Computer lab

**GROUPING**

- Small-group instruction

**RESOURCES PROVIDED: WEBSITES**

- U.S. Census Bureau: U.S. and World Population Clocks
- U.S. Census Bureau: State & County QuickFacts

**RESOURCES PROVIDED: HANDOUTS & WORKSHEETS**

- United States Population Density
Background Information

Population density describes the number of individuals occupying an area in relation to the size of the area they occupy. It’s helpful to analyze the population density of the United States at different scales in order to find patterns.

Prior Knowledge

["population density"]

Recommended Prior Activities

- Introduction to Population Density

Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>area</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>a geographic region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>population</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>total number of people or organisms in a particular area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>population density</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>the number of people living in a set area, such as a square mile.</td>
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