

300,000,000!

IN THE USA

Concept:

U.S. population has grown steadily from our first census in 1790 through the present. Our growth rate has increased in the last 100 years. That growth is expected to continue into the future.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Describe U.S. population growth trends.
- Contrast historical census data with future projections.

Subjects:

Science, Social Studies, Math, Geography, History

Skills:

Observing patterns, critical thinking, graphing

Method:

Students experience the pace of population growth by simulating U.S. growth over our history.

USA Population Circle

Introduction:

Students may know that the U.S. population is around 300 million, but it is instructive to put that number in the context of our history. By simulating population growth since 1790, students discover that most of our growth was recent.

Materials:

Chalk, yarn, or tape
Population Circle “counting cards”

Procedure:

1. Cut out the Population Circle counting cards.
2. Using chalk, yarn, or tape, place a 10-foot diameter circle (if using yarn, measure 30 feet of yarn and tie the ends together) on the floor, and ask the class to gather around it. Explain to the class that the circle represents all of the land in the U.S., and that you will be looking at how the population of the country changed since our first census was taken.
3. Distribute the 28 counting cards. Each card represents 15 million people. One student will get a special card that represents the early growth until 1840. That student will need to first sit in the circle to represent four million people, then kneel in the circle to represent 10 million people, and then stand to represent the full 15 million people in 1840. If you have fewer than 28 students, you may use chairs or some other item to represent additional people. If you have more than 28 students, you may ask additional students to represent trees or animals inside the circle.
4. Ask the students to imagine that they are back in the year 1790 – the year the first U.S. Census was taken. Ask the student with the “Early Years” card to sit in the circle. Explain that this represents everybody who lived in the U.S. at the time of our first census, when our population was about 4 million (3,929,214) people. Now, three hundred million people live in our country.
6. Tell the class, “We’ll be counting by fives through the years from 1790 to the present, and then forward to 2050 (1790, 1795, 1800, 1805, etc. all the way to 2050) to find out how our population grew and is expected to grow in the future. As we count, listen carefully for the number on your card. When we get to your year, step into the circle.
7. As a group, start counting at a comfortable pace. Stop when you reach 2050.



Population

Discussion Questions:

1. What did you observe about how our population changed over time?

It took a while before more than one person was in the circle. Most of our growth has been recent.

2. After we started counting, what year did we have a standing person (15 million people) in our circle? From the start, how long did it take to reach 15 million people?

The first person in our circle stood up in 1840. It took 50 years (1790 - 1840) to grow to 15 million people.

3. As we neared the present, how long was it taking to add another 15 million people to the U.S. population?

Between 5 and ten years. Between 1940 and the present, we added at least one person to the circle every ten years.

4. How would you characterize the forecasted growth from the present through the year 2050?

Growth is expected to continue at a steady clip, at a pace similar to that of our last few decades.

5. What will happen if we continue to grow at this rate?

The U.S. will become more and more densely populated.

Follow Up:

Have the students draw a line graph to illustrate the history of population growth over this 260-year period.

Year	Population
1790	4,000,000
1800	5,000,000
1810	7,000,000
1820	10,000,000
1830	13,000,000
1840	17,000,000
1850	23,000,000
1860	31,000,000
1870	39,000,000
1880	50,000,000
1890	63,000,000
1900	76,000,000
1910	92,000,000
1920	106,000,000

Year	Population
1930	123,000,000
1940	132,000,000
1950	151,000,000
1960	179,000,000
1970	203,000,000
1980	227,000,000
1990	248,000,000
2000	281,000,000
2010	(309,000,000)
2020	(336,000,000)
2030	(364,000,000)
2040	(392,000,000)
2050	(420,000,000)

Source:

U.S. Census Bureau, www.census.gov

USA Population Circle
Counting Cards

USA Population Circle 1790 (sitting)			USA Population Circle 1825 (kneeling)	USA Population Circle 1840 (standing)	USA Population Circle 1860	USA Population Circle 1875
USA Population Circle 1890	USA Population Circle 1900	USA Population Circle 1910	USA Population Circle 1920	USA Population Circle 1930		
USA Population Circle 1940	USA Population Circle 1950	USA Population Circle 1955	USA Population Circle 1960	USA Population Circle 1965		
USA Population Circle 1975	USA Population Circle 1980	USA Population Circle 1985	USA Population Circle 1990	USA Population Circle 1995		
USA Population Circle 2000	USA Population Circle 2005	USA Population Circle 2010	USA Population Circle 2020	USA Population Circle 2025		
USA Population Circle 2030	USA Population Circle 2035	USA Population Circle 2040	USA Population Circle 2045	USA Population Circle 2050		