

Redrawing Democracy (8th Grade American Studies Version)

Unit Overview

In this project, students will examine how political boundaries are established, their impact on elections and communities, and how democracy can be strengthened through fair redistricting. Students will learn about key historical moments related to voting rights, analyze current Georgia district maps, and design their own “fairer” maps using simple tools and real-world data.

The project will conclude with students presenting their maps and explaining how they would better represent the citizens of Georgia.

Essential Question

How can we draw voting districts that better reflect the people and reflect the intended purpose of the Legislative and Executive Branches of Georgia?

Time Frame

2 Weeks (10 Class Periods)

Flexible depending on your pacing needs—can be compressed into 8 days or extended to 3 weeks with additional enrichment.

8th Grade Georgia Standards Alignment (GSE)

Social Studies – U.S. History/Government Focus:

- **SS8CG1:** Describe the role of citizens under Georgia’s Constitution.
- **SS8CG2:** Analyze the role of the legislative branch in Georgia government (includes redistricting after the census).
- **SS8CG3:** Analyze the role of the executive branch in Georgia state government.
- **SS8CG4:** Analyze the role of the judicial branch in Georgia state government.
- **SS8CG6:** Explain voting qualifications and elections in Georgia.
- **Map and Graph Interpretation Skills:** Integrated throughout the course.

Literacy Standards for History/Social Studies (Reading & Writing):

- Cite specific evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
- Integrate visual information (maps, graphs, charts) into understanding of a topic.

Weekly Breakdown

Week 1: Understanding Representation & Redistricting

- Introduce key vocabulary: democracy, voting, redistricting, gerrymandering, cracking, packing.
- Brief history of voting rights in Georgia (focus on Reconstruction, Civil Rights Movement).
- Analyze Georgia's existing voting district maps using printed maps and simple visuals.
- Group Activity: Identify oddly shaped districts. Discuss: Why do these matter?

Deliverable: Vocabulary Quiz and District Map Analysis Exit Ticket

Week 2: Redesigning Districts and Civic Action

- Teach students how census data influences the creation of maps.
- Students sketch their own "fair" district maps on paper using provided templates, focusing on keeping communities together and achieving equal population distribution within each district.
- Write a short explanation: How is your map better for the people of Georgia?
- Group mini-presentations to classmates.

Deliverable: Redrawn district map and short written justification

Student Materials

- Vocabulary Sheet (simplified terms)
- Short Case Study Summaries (e.g., Baker v. Carr simplified one-pager)
- District Map Template
- Civic Engagement Reflection Sheet
- Final Presentation Checklist

Assessments

Formative:

- Vocabulary quiz
- Group discussion checkpoints
- Map draft peer review

Summative:

- Redrawn district map (paper-based)
- Short written explanation (1–2 paragraphs)
- Final Presentation to Class (graded with rubric)

Rubrics

- **Map Design Rubric:** Clarity, fairness, and keeping communities together.
- **Written Justification Rubric:** Explanation is logical and supports fairness.
- **Presentation Rubric:** Clear speech, evidence of thought, basic visuals.

Technology & Tools (Optional/Extension Opportunities)

- Paper and pencil map redesigns as a baseline
- Optional: Google Drawing or a free web tool like "[DistrictBuilder](#)" (simplified for students)
- Optional Enrichment: Show parts of Dave's Redistricting Tool or ArcGIS StoryMaps for an extension

Teacher Supports

- Sentence starters for written explanations
- Anchor charts for vocabulary
- Guided map analysis questions
- Flexible grouping options for collaboration

Optional Enhancements

- Invite a local election board member or city council member to visit.
- Host a "Fair Map Competition" for students to vote on the best design.
- Tie into a larger Civics Week or Georgia Studies Celebration.