

# Using Census Records Activity

## Summary

Students will analyze census records, a primary source document, to collect data on family members from the past.

## Objectives

At the end of this activity, students should be able to:

- ⇒ Understand that primary source documents can help us learn about people and places from the past.
- ⇒ Analyze information presented visually for relationships and patterns

## Opening Questions/Setting

Did you know that in 1880 the center of the U.S. population was in Erlanger, Kentucky? The population base in 1880 was 49,371,340. In 2010 the population had grown to 309,347,057 and the center was near Plato, Missouri. Every 10 years, the government reports the number of people who live in the United States. They do this by taking a count of people, also known as the census. This is required by the U.S. Constitution and has been taken since 1790. We can learn a lot about our ancestors and the past by looking at these records.

## Subjects

History

## Duration

1.5 - 2 Hours (in class)

## Materials

Computer Lab

Each student will need their library card

Name of a family member who was living in 1930 and 1940

Table (attached)

Questions (attached)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2  
CC.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.5  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6

## Suggested Procedure

1. Each student will need their Boone County library card number and access to a computer.
2. Students will need a family tree or the names, dates and places of birth of a relative who was living in both 1930 and 1940.
3. Read to students the Opening Questions/Setting.
4. Tell students they are going to look for their family member in the 1930 and 1940 census to see what they can learn about them.
5. Break students into groups if sharing a computer and give them a 1940 census handout.
6. Instruct students to examine the 1940 census handout to become familiar with the different categories of information that household members had to provide.
7. After students have thoroughly examined the 1940 census they will need to log on to HeritageQuest Online.
  - Visit [www.bcpl.org](http://www.bcpl.org)
  - Click on Local History
  - At the bottom of the page under Genealogy Tools select HeritageQuest Online
  - Students will then be asked to type in their library card number
  - Under US Census Records click on 1930 or 1940
  - A search box will appear where students will need to type the family member's information.

- If students don't immediately find their family member, suggest that they search using a different method, such as:
  - Search using last name only
  - Fill in the state but not the city
  - Try different spellings of a name
- 8. Once students have located a census record with their family member listed they will answer the questions on the Census Record Activity Handout.
- 9. Have students repeat the process, making sure they have viewed both the 1930 and 1940 census records and answered questions for both.



SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS		FOR PERSONS OF ALL AGES				FOR PERSONS 14 YEARS OLD AND OVER				FOR ALL WOMEN WHO ARE OR HAVE BEEN MARRIED						
Line No.	Name	PLACE OF BIRTH OF FATHER AND MOTHER		MOTHER TONGUE	Language spoken in home in earliest childhood.	VETERANS		SOCIAL SECURITY		Usual Occupation	Usual Industry	Usual class of worker	CODE (leave blank)	Has this woman been married more than once? (Yes or No)	Age at first marriage.	Number of children ever born. (Do not include stillbirths.)
		Father	Mother			Is this person a veteran of the United States military forces or the wife, widow, or under 18-year-old child of a veteran?	If child, is veteran-father dead? (Y or N)	War or Military Service	CODE (leave blank)							
14																
29																

**Col. 5 VALUE OF HOME, IF OWNED:** Where owner's household occupies only a part of a structure, estimate value of portion occupied by owner's household. This the value of the unit occupied by the owner of a two-family house might be approximately one-half the total value of the structure.

**Col. 10 COLOR OR RACE:**

White	W
Negro	Neg
Indian	In
Chinese	Chi
Japanese	Jp
Filipino	Phi
Hawaiian	Hin
Korean	Kor

Other races, spell out in full.

**Col. 11 AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY:** Enter age of children born on or after April 1, 1939, as follows: Born in:

April 1939	1112
May 1939	1012
June 1939	912
July 1939	812
August 1939	712
September 1939	612
October 1939	512
November 1939	412
December 1939	312
January 1940	212
February 1940	112
March 1940	012

**Col. 14 HIGHEST GRADE OF SCHOOL COMPLETED:**

None	0
Elementary school, 1st - 8th	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
High school, 1st - 4th year	H-1, H-2, H-3, H-4
College, 1st - 4th year	C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4
College, 5th or subsequent year	C-5

**Col. 16 CITIZENSHIP OF THE FOREIGN BORN:**

Naturalized	Na
Having first papers	Pa
Alien	Al
American citizen born abroad	Am Cit

**Col. 21 WAS THIS PERSON AT WORK?** Enter "Yes" for persons at work for pay or profit in private or nonmerchancy Government work. Include unpaid family workers - that is, related members of the family working without money wages or salary on work (other than housework or incidental chores) which contributed to the family income.

**Col. 24 DID THIS PERSON HAVE A JOB?** Enter "Yes" for a person (not seeking work) who had a job, business, or professional enterprise but did not work during week of March 24-30 for any of the following reasons: Vacation, temporary illness; industrial dispute; layoff not exceeding 4 weeks with instructions to return to work at a specific date; layoff due to temporarily bad weather conditions.

**Col. 30 and 47 CLASS OF WORKER:**

Wage or salary worker in private work	PW
Wage or salary worker in Gov't work	GW
Employer	E
Working on own account	OA
Unpaid family worker	NP

**Col. 41 WAR OR MILITARY SERVICE:**

World War	W
Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection or Boxer Rebellion	S
Spanish-American War & World War	SW
Regular establishment (Army, Navy or Marine Corps) Peace-Time Service only	R
Other war or expedition	O

National Archives and Records Administration

NARA's web site is <http://www.archives.gov>

NA 14129 (6-09)

## Collecting and Interpreting Information using census records.

Go to [www.bcpl.org](http://www.bcpl.org) and click on Local History. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click on the link for HeritageQuest Online. You will be prompted to enter your library card number. Click on the link for either the 1930 or 1940 census record. Search for your family member using their name, date and place of birth, then complete the table below. Take the data from your table and answer the questions that follow.

	1930	1940
Write the name of the person you were looking for the way it appeared in the 1930 and 1940 censuses.		
Give the county and state the person you were looking for lived in during the 1930 and 1940 censuses.		
What was the age of the person in 1930 and 1940?		
What was the relationship of this person to the head of household in 1930 and 1940? If the person was a child, write the names of their parents.		
Look at the marital status for this person in both the 1930 and 1940 census and record it.		
What was the occupation of this person in 1930 and 1940?		
Did the person you are researching attend school in 1930? Looking at the 1940 census, find the highest grade attended.		

**Use the data in your table to answer the following questions.**

1. Did you notice any changes in the members of the household from 1930 to 1940. If so, what were they? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Did your family member move from 1930 to 1940? \_\_\_\_\_

3. If they moved, did they stay in the same state? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Was the name of your family member recorded the same way in both census records? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Is the person you searched for related to you and, if so, do you know how?  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. List three things you learned about this person from looking at the 1930 and 1940 census records. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_