



Global Voices Secondary Information Sheet

India's Census



Courtesy of www.worldmapnow.com

History of India's Caste System

- The caste system in India has roots over 2,000 years ago. At the time, people were categorized based on their occupations.
- The system had four main groups: the **Brahmin** (priests), **Kshatriya** (warriors or nobility), **Vaishya** (farmers, traders and artisans), and **Shudra** (servants). Those born outside the caste system were known as the “untouchables.”
- In Hinduism, reincarnation is a basic belief. It was believed that your conduct in your previous life allowed you to move up or down this social system.
- India's caste system evolved over its history. When the British took power of India in 1757, they used the system to exert control. At first, they encouraged the system, then tried to end discrimination against lower castes. During the annual census, they used to divide people by caste. This contributed to the hardening of the system.
- Today, the caste system is not officially recognized by the Indian government. It is not often seen in urban settings, but in many rural areas it is still a major part of local governance and daily life.
- For the first time, the 2011 census will not list people by caste. Many feel this is an important first step in moving towards a casteless society.

Key Terms

- **biometrics** – the measurements of physical characteristics, such as fingerprints, DNA, or retinal patterns, for use in verifying the identity of individuals
- **birth certificate** – an official form recording of the birth of a baby that includes name, sex, birth date, parents and location
- **identity** – things that mark you as yourself and not someone else (ex. fingerprints)
- **identity card** - a card that identifies its owner using their name, address, photo and other personal information
- **poverty line** – an income level below which people cannot sustainably nor adequately access nor self-procure the basic necessities of life
- **reincarnation** – the belief that the soul, upon death of the body, comes back to earth in another body or form
- **stereotype** – a simplified image of a group that is often applied to an individual

Global Voices Elementary Educator Resources

India's Census

Note to Educators:

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Extension and conclusion activities are included to challenge students and finally, encourage them to reflect on the issues at hand.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

General Expectations:

The Global Voices column and Youth Story explore India's upcoming census and the history of the caste system. It encourages students to learn about India in greater detail and the issues that the poorest people in the population face.

Themes and Course Connections:

- Identity and identification systems
- Class systems
- Poverty and development
- Stereotypes and prejudice
- Government functions
- Population
- Politics, geography, history, social studies, world issues

Materials:

- Notebooks or paper
- Pencils and markers
- Chart paper or black board

Specific Expectations and Learning Goals:

Students will:

- Discuss what the term identity means and how it affects people's lives
- Learn about issues in India, in particular the caste system
- Apply what they have learned to their own lives

Knowledge and Understanding:

1. Class census/class bingo:
 - a. Ask students to move around the room and find a classmate that fits the following descriptors. Students must write a different classmate's name beside each descriptor below.
 - b. Find someone who:
 - i. Has six people living in their house
 - ii. Has four people in their immediate family
 - iii. Has seven people in their immediate family
 - iv. Lives in an apartment
 - v. Lives in a house
 - vi. Is male
 - vii. Is female
 - viii. Was born in June
 - ix. Was born in November
 - x. Has a brother
 - xi. Has a sister
 - xii. Is of Irish decent
 - xiii. Is of Italian decent
 - xiv. Can speak more than one language
 - xv. Whose parents came from another country
 - xvi. Was born in another country
 - xvii. Has a job
2. What is a census?
 - a. Discuss with students the information that they found out about their classmates through the census activity.
 - i. Why is this information important?
 - ii. Why do we need to know this information?
 - iii. What can students do with this information?
 - iv. What can the classroom teacher do with this information?
 - b. Explain to students that in the same way that they just collected this information about their classmates, the government also holds an official count of the population of the country.
 - c. Ask students if they know what this count is called and how often it is held?
 - d. Explain to students what a census is and why they are conducted (consult information sheet if necessary).

Thinking:

1. Read the Global Voices column or Youth Story as a class:

- a. Discuss what students learned from this column.
 - b. Review key terms from the information sheet (census, etc.) and how they were addressed in the column.
2. Caste system discussion:
- a. As a class, discuss India's caste system as presented in the column or Youth Story.
 - b. Have students identify what the caste system is, how it came into being and why it was established.
 - c. Discuss how the system divides Indian citizens and how the caste system affects daily life in India.
 - d. Have students identify how social classification can affect economic, political, and social aspects of daily life as well (i.e. being able to vote, go to certain public places and do certain things, etc.).
 - e. Ask students:
 - i. In what ways do social classes in India determine one's role in society?
 - ii. Why does the caste system still exist in India?
 - iii. If it were to suddenly be abolished, what do you think would or would not change?
 - iv. Is it possible for a "classless" society to exist? Why or why not?
 - f. Have students consider the questions above in a Canadian context. Do social classes exist in Canada?
3. Caste system - Think, pair and share:
- a. Ask students to think about:
 - i. The benefits of the census in India and the new identity cards.
 - ii. The choice to leave out information about caste on the identity cards. Are there advantages? Are there disadvantages?
 - b. Ask students to share their thoughts with a partner.
 - c. Ask pairs to share their thoughts with the class or write their thoughts in point form on the board.

Communication:

1. Stereotypes:
 - a. Begin by discussing how people often use labels or categories to describe others and how these labels can be based on such characteristics as clothing, looks, the way a person talks or the groups to which he or she belongs.
 - b. Explain that categorizing things or people is a natural human inclination. However, people often make assumptions about groups of people they don't even know.
 - c. Ask the class to brainstorm categories that are used at school to group people. Categories could include labels such as "jocks" or "brains." Write each category the class generates on the board and then have students narrow the list down to five major categories.
 - d. Write these major categories onto five separate pieces of flip chart paper and post these around the room. Give the class 10-15 minutes to travel to each posted sheet and write down adjectives related to the category headings. Remind students that they should only add new descriptions to the list.
 - e. When they are finished, ask students to take a moment to look at the adjectives that the class has generated under each group heading. Use the following questions to lead a discussion about what they recorded:

- i. Do assumptions apply to everyone in a group?
 - ii. Do most people hold the same assumptions about a group? Why or why not?
 - iii. Do assumptions tell us anything definite about a categorized individual?
 - iv. How do assumptions affect your behavior toward others?
- f. Explain that when we make assumptions about an entire group of people, those assumptions are referred to as stereotypes. When assumptions and stereotypes influence our attitudes, we may find that making a fair judgment about someone or something is difficult. This influence on judgment is called a “bias.”
- g. Take another look at the adjectives recorded and hold a class discussion around the following questions:
 - i. Do these adjectives describe stereotypes?
 - ii. How can they be unfair or hurtful?

Application:

1. Independent work:
 - a. Divide students into five groups, and assign each group one of the five social classes in India (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vashya, Sudra, and Dalit).
 - b. Have each group research the economic, social and political “rules” of this class during independent time.
 - c. In a future class, have students present their research to the class for further discussion on the caste system.
2. Identification activity:
 - a. Ask students to look at their birth certificate, immigration certificate, health card or other identification when they get home. Have students answer the following questions in their notebook and bring back class:
 - i. What information is on it?
 - ii. Why do you think this information is important?

Additional Resources:

Official Website of the Census of India: <http://censusindia.gov.in/>

Explaining the Census and the Identity Card in India: Bloomberg Video - India’s Census to Record Fingerprints, Photographs: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uLrmuJ2RkQ>

Dalit Freedom Network: www.dalitnetwork.org