



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 Secondary 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 explores India's upcoming census and the history of the caste system. It encourages students to learn about India 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, civics, world issues, law

Materials:

- Notebook or paper
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Labels

Specific Expectations and Learning Goals:

Students will:

- Discuss issues of identity and stereotypes
- Learn about the purpose of a census, why they happen and why they are important
- Have an in-depth discussion about the caste system in India and its social, political and economic implications
- Apply what they have learned to their own lives and understanding of their own identity

Knowledge and Understanding:

1. Label game:
 - a. Each participant is given a label defining them in light of a different stereotype (e.x. jock, nerd, school president, teacher, criminal, drug addict, etc.).
 - b. The labels will be placed on the participants back so they are blind to the label they have been cast into. Students are not to share the labels they have been given with each other.
 - c. Tell students they have been invited to a social gathering and must interact with everyone there based upon the way they think society and their local/global community treats people of a certain stereotype.
 - d. After all of the participants have had a chance to mingle, choose two participants to separate the group into two based on the labels on people's backs. The two candidates cannot discuss what criteria they will use to divide the group and are instructed to complete the task in absolute silence while everyone is still mingling.
 - e. Once the group has been divided into two, have everyone sit down in two lines based upon the division. With the labels still on their back, each participant will be given the opportunity to share how they were being treated, how that made them feel and what they thought their stereotype was. Then they can remove the label to see if their guess was right.
 - f. Discuss with students the outcome of the game, how it made them feel and how this game relates to society.
 - i. What were some of the things you heard and how did that make you feel?
 - ii. Will this activity change the way you treat others in society? If so, how? If not, why?

This activity was created by Me to We leadership. www.metowe.com

Thinking:

1. Read the Global Voices column independently or 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 used in the column.
2. Media literacy:

- a. Who is Babu Dhula? How does the use of her story either add or take away from this column?
- b. How would a story from a member of a different caste change this column?
- c. Whose voice is missing?

Communication:

1. Caste system discussion:
 - a. As a class, discuss India's caste system using the column and the information sheet.
 - b. Ensure that all students understand what the caste system is, how it came into being and why it was established.
 - c. Discuss and brainstorm with students 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.). If beneficial, list these on chart paper under each category.
 - 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?
2. 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. (What challenges will officials face in conducting this? Will it work and provide the information sought?)
 - ii. The choice to leave out information about caste on the identity cards. Are there advantages? Are there disadvantages?
 - iii. Have students explore their personal thoughts and how they think Canadian society would respond to finger-print; iris-scan and photographic documentation of everyone over fifteen from a privacy and protection standpoint ([refer to FIPPA - Freedom of Information Privacy and Protection Act](#)) if these types of procedures were to be proposed for Canada.
 - 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.

Application:

1. School census:
 - a. Divide students into small groups.

- b. Ask students to come up with a plan for conducting a school-wide census focused on information of their choice.
 - c. Encourage students to consider the following as part of the plan:
 - i. What information do you need to collect? Why is it important to collect this information?
 - ii. How would you go about collecting this information?
 - iii. What would you do in case of absentees?
 - iv. How would you then analyze the data and distribute identity cards to each person?
 - d. Encourage students to brainstorm complications they can foresee and possible solutions.
 - e. Have students write up a report on their plan and submit.
 - f. Have students discuss the complications of their own proposed census, as well as the complications that would arise in India given a population of over one billion, extreme poverty and lack of technology.
2. Research assignment:
- a. Encourage students to research the life of Kumari Mayawati. This Indian politician is from the Dalit caste, traditionally know as “the untouchables.”
 - b. What are some of the challenges that she faced as a member of this caste? How did she overcome them?
 - c. Write a journal entry about what her rise as a politician might mean to other people who are Dalit.

Extensions:

1. Film discussions:
 - a. Have students watch Hotel Rwanda (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0395169/>) and discuss the similarities and differences between India, with the British use of the caste system, and Rwanda with the Belgian categorization of Rwandans into Tutsi and Hutu.

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