TEACHING PEBBLE HILL



Taking Count: Using Census Data as a Primary Source

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Taking Count – Using Census Data as a Primary Source

<u>AL Course of Study:</u> 4th grade - 6. Describe cultural, economic, and political aspects of the lifestyles of early nineteenth-century farmers, plantation owners, slaves, and townspeople. Conceptual Framework - Critique a variety of historical documents; Engage in historical analysis and interpretation

Objective: Students will analyze the 1850 and 1860 Ag Census as primary sources.

<u>Background Knowledge:</u> If students need practice using primary sources before or after this lesson, the <u>National Archives Educator Resources site</u> provides information and worksheets for document analysis practice.

Vocabulary:

Census – census is a count of the people who live in a country. It also tells things about those people—their backgrounds, what they own, and how they live. Governments and businesses use censuses to guide important decisions. (from Britannica Kids)

Agriculture – Agriculture is another word for farming. It includes both growing and harvesting crops and raising animals, or livestock. Agriculture provides the food and many raw materials that humans need to survive. (from Britannica Kids)

Primary Source - A primary source is a work that gives original information. It is something that comes from a time being studied or from a person who was involved in the events being studied. (from Britannica Kids)

Materials:

- Copies of primary documents:
 - o 1850 Ag Census
 - o 1860 Ag Census

<u>Hook:</u> Ask students if they know what the US census is. Watch the <u>YouTube video</u> about the 2020 Census (2:22 length).

Explore the <u>2020 Census Website</u>, showing students the wealth of data available. (You will want to become familiar with the site ahead of time to access interesting data quickly. Consider narrowing in on Alabama and Lee County. FYI – They use

the word "sex" for gender and we all know what can happen when students see that word. ☺)

<u>Discussion Prompts and Lesson Intro:</u>

Tell students that the US census was first taken in 1790. Looking at past census data can give us some insights into life at the time the data was collected. In addition to the census which counts people, there is a "census of agriculture" which farmers and ranchers must complete. We will look at an Ag Census from many years ago to see what information we can get from this primary source.

Give students (or project on a whiteboard) a copy of the 1850 Ag Census to answer the following questions:

- 1. What kind of document is it (letter, ad, newspaper, etc)? How do you know?
- 2. Is there a date on it? If so, what is it?
- 3. Is there a location indicated? What is it?
- 4. For whom was the document written or created? How do you know?
- 5. What is the purpose of the document? What made you think this?
- 6. What questions do you have about the document?

"You have just practiced doing what historians do when they find a primary source. Primary sources are the pieces of evidence that historians use to learn about people, events, and everyday life in the past. Just like detectives, historians look at clues, sift through evidence, and reach conclusions (History Explorer – Smithsonian Institute). The primary source we just explored is an inventory or counting of agriculture productions owned by men in Macon County, Alabama in 1850.

Now let's look at the Ag Census of 1860 and see if we can answer any questions about one of the men listed on both censuses."

Group or Partner Activity:

Using the 1850 and 1860 Ag Censuses, see if you can find a man named NJ Scott on both. Spend some time with your group comparing the row of information for NJ Scott. (His name is a little more than halfway down on the 1850 census and on the 5th line on the 1860 census.)

"Answer the questions on the handout with your group. What conclusion can you make about how Mr. Scott's farm changed from 1850 to 1860?"

Discuss with the class the advantages and disadvantages of using a primary source to learn information. (Guide for Teachers from History Explorer linked below is a great resource for strengths and limitations of each type of primary source.)

Additional Learning:

- Primary sources for Alabama History
- Guide for Teachers from History Explorer <u>Engaging Students with Primary Sources</u>

Assessment: "Mr. NJ Scott's Ag Census 1850 to 1860" worksheet

Mr. NJ Scott's Ag Census 1850 to 1860

Name
1. What is the total number of acres of Mr. Scott's land in 1850? Add the improved (450) and unimproved (550) totals.
2. What is the total number of acres in 1860? Did his farm increase or decrease in size?
3. How much more was his farm worth (Cash value of Farm) in 1860 than 1850?
4. What was the only animal Mr. Scott had less of in 1860 than 1850?
5. Make up your own question that can be answered with the data on the censuses. Be sure to record the answer to your question.
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