

## Lesson Plan: Redistricting and Gerrymandering

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Featured resource

[KQED's The Lowdown: Redistricting: How the Maps of Power Are Drawn](#)

[KQED's Above the Noise: Gerrymandering and Your Right to Vote?](#)



KQED/Lauren Farrar

**Opening quick write prompt:**

Imagine dividing your city or town into five areas with a roughly equal number of people in each area. What would be the best way to do it? For example, would you use larger streets as borders or rely on areas that already exist, like school enrollment areas or different neighborhoods?

*A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.*

### Objective

- Students will define the practice of redistricting and gerrymandering and analyze how they work.
- Students will reflect on the practice of gerrymandering and why it's so controversial, and learn about efforts to reform the redistricting process.

### Essential Question and Lesson Context

**How do redistricting and gerrymandering work? Does gerrymandering silence voters? Who should decide how legislative districts are drawn?**

Every 10 years, after current population figures through the Census, most states redraw their legislative and congressional districts to ensure that each one has roughly the same number of people. It might seem like a boring, bureaucratic process, but it has a tremendous impact on the balance of power. In 37 states, the political party in power controls the redistricting process, and often redraws district lines that give them a clear political advantage over the opposing party. This is a process known as **gerrymandering**, and it often plays a major role in determining the outcome of future elections. In this lesson, students explore the redistricting process and consider possible reforms to make redistricting less partisan.

## Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the reading, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Demographics (n.)	Information about the characteristics (age, gender, income, etc.) of a particular group of people
Gerrymander (v.)	To change or manipulate the boundaries of a legislative district to favor one political party over others
Opaque (adj.)	Not clear, hard to understand or explain
Orchestrate (v.)	To organize or plan something, particularly something complicated
Redistrict (v.)	To divide into new districts, usually related to an election

## Direct instruction and guided practice

- Discuss the quick-write prompt. Students should focus on how they would make the political district divisions using things like roads, landmarks, existing boundaries or other factors.
- Explain that your town or city is already divided into legislative districts with roughly equal populations, but possibly not using the clearest boundaries. Show a map of the districts in your state and zoom on your city. (Find all state maps [here](#).)
- Ask: What comes to mind when you look at how your state or city is divided? Is it surprising? Do you think any factors besides population led to how the districts were drawn?
- As a class or in small groups, students watch [the Above the Noise episode: Is Geometry Silencing Your Right to Vote?](#)
- **Check for understanding:** Why do former President Obama, Eric Holder and others want to reform the redistricting process? Who do they think should make selections about how district lines are drawn?

## Independent practice

- In small groups or individually, students read [The Lowdown post](#).

- **Redistricting jigsaw:** Divide the class into three groups to jigsaw [the explainer](#) on The Lowdown post and the information in the Above the Noise episode. Group 1 will explain why we have legislative districts (Slides 3-9). Group 2 will describe why we redraw legislative districts and how this happens (Slides 10-17). Group 3 will report on some of the problems associated with gerrymandering and ways to reform the current system (Slides 18-29). If needed, subdivide the slides further or have more than one of each group.
- Working together, students read the interactive explainer found at the bottom of [The Lowdown post](#) and re-watch the Above the Noise episode before completing their group's task.
  - Model the process with the first few slides (Slides 3-5), if needed.

### Assessment/reflection

- Each group reports their findings to the whole class to build a common understanding of the issue.
- Students respond to the following questions in a discussion or as a written reflection:
  - Do you think gerrymandering silences votes? Why or why not?
  - Do you think we as a society should pay more attention to the issue of redistricting and gerrymandering? What should we do to address this issue?

*[Circle chats](#), small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.*

### Extension/homework

**Write/speak locally:** Students turn their opinions about redistricting into a letter, short speech or presentation, then research ways to make their voice heard in their community. (Example: Speaking during the public comment section of a city council meeting, posting on an online forum, etc.) For a list of how to contact local officials in your area, check out [KQED Learning's Local Election Toolkit](#).

### Common Core standards

<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1</a>	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7</a>	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W1</a>	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.