

## Lesson Plan: Using Census.gov to Understand Homelessness and Housing Challenges

This lesson is a standalone activity based on the themes and gameplay of Scene 4 from the Rebuilding Lives game. It introduces students to real-world data tools like Census.gov and teaches them to analyze and present findings that inform advocacy efforts.

### Lesson Overview

Title:

Exploring Census.gov: Data-Driven Advocacy for Community Issues

Grade Level:

10th–12th grade or early college

Duration:

50–60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

Use Census.gov to locate and analyze data relevant to homelessness, housing, and poverty.

Interpret datasets to identify trends and challenges affecting the local community.

Create a report or presentation connecting data insights to actionable solutions for housing and homelessness.

Develop skills in data visualization and advocacy communication.

### Lesson Structure

1. Warm-Up: Connecting Game Themes to Real Life (10 minutes)

Discussion Prompt:

Begin by asking:

"What are the biggest challenges unhoused individuals face in finding long-term solutions?"

"How do you think data helps policymakers and advocates make decisions about housing?"

Game Connection:

Show a brief clip or screenshot from Scene 4 where Maria uses the library tools to analyze data.

Explain:

"In the game, Maria uses real-world data to create a report for the Housing Commission. Today, we'll learn to do the same using Census.gov, a resource that provides data about demographics, income, and housing in our communities."

2. Exploring Census.gov: Tutorial (15 minutes)

Introduction to Census.gov:

Project the Census.gov homepage on a screen for the class.

Walk students through the key sections:

QuickFacts: Provides basic data for cities, counties, and states.

Data Profiles: Offers detailed demographic, housing, and economic data.

Advanced Search: Allows for customized dataset exploration.

Sample Search:

Conduct a live demonstration:

Search for local poverty rates in the class's community or a nearby city.

Show how to generate charts or download tables.

Highlight relevant data points:

“For example, in [City Name], the poverty rate is [X%], which is higher than the state average. This helps us understand economic barriers to housing.”

### 3. Student Activity: Research and Report (25 minutes)

Objective:

Students will use Census.gov to gather data on a selected topic and present their findings in a short report or visual presentation.

Topics to Choose From:

Poverty rates and their impact on housing.

Median household income and affordability.

Homeless population demographics (e.g., age, race, or gender).

Housing cost burdens (e.g., percentage of income spent on housing).

Guided Steps:

Step 1: Choose a city or county to research.

Step 2: Use Census.gov to locate relevant data.

Step 3: Create one of the following:

A chart or graph summarizing the data.

A brief report (2–3 paragraphs) explaining the findings.

Step 4: Answer this question in the report:

“How could this data help create programs like the Street Hero program from the game?”

Example Dataset Insights:

“The median income in [City Name] is \$42,000, which is 30% below the state average. This suggests many residents struggle to afford housing.”

“In [County], 40% of renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing, making it difficult to save or cover emergencies.”

#### 4. Presentation and Reflection (10 minutes)

Student Presentations:

Students share their findings with the class in small groups or individually.

Encourage connections to advocacy:

“How would you use this data to convince city leaders to fund a program like Street Hero?”

Class Reflection:

Discuss:

"What challenges did you face while using Census.gov?"

"What new insights did you gain about homelessness or housing?"

Assessment Criteria

Data Accuracy:

Did the student select relevant, accurate data from Census.gov?

Analysis:

Does the report or presentation connect the data to homelessness and housing challenges?

Visualization:

Are charts, graphs, or tables clear and effective in communicating the data?

Application:

Did the student explain how the data could inform real-world advocacy?

### Homework (Optional Extension)

Assign students to explore [Census.gov](https://www.census.gov) further, focusing on an issue of their choice (e.g., education, healthcare access). Have them write a short reflection on how data can support advocacy in that area.