LESSON PLANS ON AGING ISSUES:
Creative Ways to Meet Social Studies Standards

Participation in Government

USING DEMOGRAPHICS TO PREDICT THE FUTURE

Ithaca College Gerontology Institute
www.ithaca.edu/aging/schools

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Introduction
This one-period lesson begins with a discussion of U.S. demographics – the fact that the percentage of the U.S. population over 65 will greatly increase over the next 30 years. This shift is driven by two factors: 1) increased longevity in the U.S. and 2) the baby boom generation beginning to reach “senior status”. The teacher discusses this demographic shift briefly with students, distributes graphs with detailed data, and then arranges the students in groups to think about the impact on society of an aging population – in terms of politics, housing and popular culture. A video of a teacher implementing this lesson is available by contacting the Ithaca Gerontology Institute at 607-274-1965 or aging@ithaca.edu.

Objectives
Students will:
- Understand the demographic shift that will occur in the U.S. over the next 30 years
- Practice interpreting data from graphs
- Work together to predict how this shift will affect our society

Key Terms
chronic conditions, demographics, dependency ratio, long term care, mean age, median age, Medicare, older adult, percentage increase, projections, Social Security

Materials
Handout: Set of charts with demographic data
Handout: Group assignment predicting the future

Lesson Steps
1. Ask the students how old they will be in 2030. How old will their parents be? What will life be like? Discuss the “baby boom” generation (people born between 1946 and 1964). Why is it often called “the trend generation”?

2. What are some of the effects on society as this generation reaches retirement age? Briefly discuss the importance of Social Security and Medicare issues in the U.S. over the next 50 years.

3. Distribute the demographic packet and the prediction assignment worksheet. Arrange the students in groups and assign two topics from the assignment to each group.

4. After 20 minutes have each group report on their conclusions. Discuss. Compare the conclusions of different groups.

Adapted from a lesson written by Suzanne Johnson, social studies teacher at Vestal High School in Vestal, NY

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Extension Activities

1. Research the current and projected characteristics of older people in more detail. Write a paper or report to the class. Start with the websites of the U.S. Census Bureau and the Population Reference Bureau.

2. Read Alfred Toffler’s book, *Future Shock*, published in 1971. Which of his predictions are coming true? In what cases does he seem to have been wrong? Write a paper or report orally to the class.

3. Read other futurologists. What are they predicting? Write a paper or report orally to the class.
STUDENT ACTIVITY

Using Demographics to Predict the Future

U.S. Population 65 and Over: 1940 to 2060

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Growth of Older Population
Actual and Projected 65+ and 85+ Years of Age

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Percent of U.S. Population
65+ Years of Age

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Changes in Longevity Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Life Expectancy at Birth</th>
<th>At 65</th>
<th>M / F</th>
<th>M / F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>47.9/50.7</td>
<td>11.5/12.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>65.5/71.0</td>
<td>13.0/15.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>66.8/73.2</td>
<td>13.0/15.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>73.6/79.4</td>
<td>15.9/19.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Active Life Expectancy at 65:  
M = 12 more years  
F = 13.5 more years

Source: *Older Americans 2000: Key Indicators of Well-Being*
Population Pyramid of the U.S. in 2000 and 2030

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Elderly Americans by Race and Ethnicity

Population Age 65+: 2000 and 2050

Source: Older Americans 2000: Key Indicators of Well-Being
Current Marital Status of Persons 65+
2001

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Poverty Rates Among Persons 65+
2000

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Living Arrangements for Females and Males 65+

2000

**Women**
- Living Alone: 40%
- Living with Spouse: 41%
- Other: 19%

**Men**
- Living Alone: 17%
- Living with Spouse: 73%
- Other: 10%

Source: *A Profile of Older Americans: 2002*, Administration on Aging, Department of Health and Human Services
Percent Distribution by Household Income
65+ Person as Head of Household

2001

Source: A Profile of Older Americans: 2002, Administration on Aging, Department of Health and Human Services.
Percent with Disabilities by Age
1997

Group Activity: Predict the Future!!

Use the statistical information in the demographic charts to hypothesize about the impact of an aging population on each of the following. Be thorough!

IMPACT ON LIFE

SOCIAL SECURITY:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

MEDICARE:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

HEALTH CARE (JOBS, CONCERNS):
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

RECREATION:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

HOUSING/LIVING ARRANGEMENTS/COMPANIONSHIP:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
After doing this exercise, discuss what you might do as a young person that could help when you become older?