

History of the Census

Comprehension Questions

1. What language is the word 'censere' from and what does it mean?

2. Give two uses of the census.

3. Name three things that the census tells us about an individual.

4. What is the penalty for not completing the census?

5. Why did Emily Wilding Davison spend a night in a broom cupboard?

6. Give one example of a famous census and explain its significance?

7. Why might the 2021 census be the last of its kind?

8. What is the writer suggesting when they conclude 'hence the name census rather than perfectus'?

9. Why should we treat census results with a degree of scepticism?

10. Why do you think that J. M. W. Turner went to such lengths not to be counted?

Extension

- Select one of the unusual occupations given in previous censuses and explain what you think it entails.
- What would you most like to find out from a past census and why?
- What questions do you think should/shouldn't be asked in the next census?

History of the Census

Comprehension Answers

1. What language is the word 'censere' from and what does it mean?

Latin; to estimate

2. Give two uses of the census.

Any two from: to provide data about society; to help authorities plan for the future; to tell us about the past.

3. Name three things that the census tells us about an individual.

Any three from address, age, occupation, religion, place of birth or marital status.

4. What is the penalty for not completing the census?

A £1,000 fine

5. Why did Emily Wilding Davison spend a night in a broom cupboard?

The census records where you reside on one particular day so she secreted herself in the House of Commons as a means of a protest; there is an irony in a disenfranchised woman having her address listed as the nation's seat of power.

6. Give one example of a famous census and explain its significance?

Answers could include the 1801 census as the originator of the modern-day census, the Domesday Book as the first thorough survey of England or the Caesar Augustus decree that is part of the Nativity story.

7. Why might the 2021 census be the last of its kind?

Statisticians might be able to obtain the data by other, cheaper means. It could also be argued that technological advancements undermine the usefulness of the data.

8. What is the writer suggesting when they conclude 'hence the name census rather than perfectus'?

Perfectus is Latin for 'perfect' so the writer is saying that the census is aptly named because it is not 100% accurate, it is only an 'estimate'.

9. Why should we treat census results with a degree of scepticism?

Answers could explore respondents' looseness with the truth, the room for human and technological error, and/or a general distrust of data and its limitations.

10. Why do you think that J. M. W. Turner went to such lengths not to be counted?

Answers could consider an individual desire for privacy, an artistic tendency to non-conformism and/or a mischievous sense of humour.

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History of the Census

What, When, Where, Why?

The word *census* originated in Ancient Rome from the Latin word *censere*, meaning 'to estimate'. It is a survey of the population and is intended to provide a snapshot of society that helps government and local authorities to plan and fund community services. For example, if there is a spike in the birth rate in a certain area then a new school or playground might need to be built to cater for the increase in young people.

The UK census takes place every ten years. And it takes nearly a full decade to prepare, even though many questions remain the same from census to census. The Office for National Statistics is responsible for developing the census for England and Wales (Scotland and Northern Ireland are administered separately) and have been busy conducting research, testing questions and even running roadshows since the last one in 2011. The questions, as well as the answers, reflect changing social ideologies so in 2021 respondents will be asked for the first time to give their gender identity as well as their biological sex.

The primary purpose of surveying every household in the UK is to obtain data about the here and now that will help officials plan for the future. However, such national records are also rich in historical information.

Back in Time

Want to know who lived in your house before you? Previous censuses will tell you the occupants of the property, plus personal details such as age, occupation and religion. This can be traced all the way back to 1801, although there are inevitably gaps in the records: no census was carried out in 1941 because of the Second World War, and the entire 1931 census was lost in a fire. On a smaller scale, the 1841 records from Wrexham went missing for a time before turning up in a bookshop! And though it is compulsory to complete the census – dissenters today risk a £1,000 fine – individuals have gone to great lengths to avoid doing so; in 1841, Romantic artist J. M. W. Turner rowed a boat into the Thames so that he could not be counted as being present at any property. Indeed, one of the great anomalies of this form of record-keeping is that it testifies where somebody was on one particular day; in 1911, the Suffragettes mounted a campaign to disrupt the census and protestor Emily Wilding Davison spent the night hiding in a Parliament broom cupboard so that her address would be recorded as the House of Commons!

The census as we know it today might have begun at the start of the nineteenth century but head counts have been happening since the Babylonians nearly 6,000 years ago. The first methodical attempt to survey England and its populace was in 1086, when William the Conqueror ordered a detailed listing of land and property that was compiled in what came to be known as the *Domesday Book*, two volumes totalling 888 pages

What's in a Job Title?

The 2021 census will ask about a person's occupation, industry and travel to work to create a profile of the nation's labour force. Bygone censuses have thrown up the following professions, though it's not clear if all were true trades or written in jest...

Artificial Eye-Maker

Bee Dealer

Bottie Washer

Boy for General Purposes

Curer of Smokey Chimneys

Drowner

Ferret Weaver

Knight of the Thimble

Proprietor of Midgets

Sampler of Drugs

In 1911, James Little from Dulwich, London listed Roger (Airedale Terrier) as a family member and his occupation as 'watchdog...employed on own account...looking after house'. The same year, Tom Cat of Birkenhead was listed as being an 8-year-old, married Mouse-Catcher, Soloist and Thief with 16 children!

written in Medieval Latin. The book's name alludes to the Day of Judgement because it was considered such a definitive document that common citizens were in awe of it. The most famous census of all also carries a biblical association. The second chapter of the Gospel of Luke begins 'In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world' and proceeds to tell of Joseph's return to his hometown of Bethlehem in the company of the heavily-pregnant Mary.

End of the Line?

The census might be useful for tracing ancestry, but in a digitally-connected world with higher than ever rates of migration, how useful is transient local data? Well, the answer's in the question. The 2011 census revealed that the number of Poles living in England and Wales had risen tenfold, from 58,000 in 2001 to 579,000 a decade later. The total population had seen a 7% increase, 55% of which was due to migration. Such figures helped fuel the Brexit vote that saw the UK leave the European Union and end free movement in the ensuing decade. Yet we all know the adage of 'lies, damn lies and statistics', which urges us to treat data with caution, and the census is a case in point... before the 1951 census, the nation's women were implored to be more honest about their age, and income (no longer included) was also found to be prone to exaggeration, in the opposite direction!

Though there were 56 translation booklets available for the last census, the actual questionnaire must be completed in English, raising the question of how much is lost in translation. The 2011 census was also the first that could be completed online, so typos and erroneous clicks replaced indecipherable handwriting as the prime cause of misinformation. It has been mooted that the 2021 census could be the last of its kind, with statisticians seeking to extract the same information from other sources such as GP lists and council tax records at a much lower cost. A decision is likely to be taken after the latest results have been evaluated, probably in 2023. Even after two millennia, the means of collecting data on a vast scale is yet to be perfected, hence the name census rather than *perfectus*.



History of the Census Vocabulary

What do the following words mean? Can you work out the meaning from their context? Use a dictionary if you need to.

spike

administered

ideologies

inevitably

compulsory

dissenters

anomalies

testifies

mounted

methodical

populace

compiled

volumes

alludes

definitive

decree

ancestry

migration

transient

ensuing

adage

implored

prone

erroneous

indecipherable

mooted

extract

History of the Census **Vocabulary - Answers**

What do the following words mean? Can you work out the meaning from their context? Use a dictionary if you need to.

spike **Sudden rise**

administered **Managed and processed**

ideologies **Ways of thinking**

inevitably **Certain to happen; unavoidably**

compulsory **Must-do; required by law**

dissenters **Those who reject or express disagreement**

anomalies **Oddities; inconsistencies**

testifies **Provides evidence**

mounted **Organised; launched**

methodical **Systematic; disciplined**

populace **General public**

compiled **Gathered; put together**

volumes **Parts**

alludes **Makes reference to**

definitive **Final; decisive; complete**

decree **Order; command**

ancestry **Family background**

migration **Movement from one area to another**

transient **Temporary; fleeting**

ensuing **Following**

adage **Saying**

implored **Urged; begged**

prone **Disposed to**

erroneous **Wrong; misplaced**

indecipherable **Illegible; unclear**

mooted **Suggested**

extract **Obtain; get**