

Manchester Science Festival: ONS activities

1. Doing a doll house census

This is an activity for younger children. It practices sorting and counting skills and how to record information in a table.

You will need:

- Small “houses”
- Dolls
- “Census” form with a table to fill out number of dolls and number of rooms
- Information on real census houses from the past
- Children

How to play

Children sort the dolls into houses, then they count the dolls and the rooms and record them in the table.

You can talk to them about what they notice about the number of dolls and the number of rooms and how this may compare with their own house. This can be extended into a discussion about what counts as overcrowding and undercrowding.

You can also talk to them about which rooms count as room – the hallway? The downstairs loo?

2. Being a census investigator

This activity involved interpreting census forms from the past. This extends children’s knowledge of data collection and gives them a chance to practice some analytical skills as they look for the information on the forms that will give them the answer.

Several examples of past census forms were shown and had to be matched to 6 pictures.

For example, we had a picture of Harry Houdini and this matched to a census form from 1911 which showed Houdini was staying in a house in Huddersfield on census night.

3. Census quiz

The aim of this activity was to raise awareness of data collection how questions on the census have changed over time and how they might change in the future.

It can also be extended to discussions on how people can misunderstand questions on census forms, the implications of this and how we can avoid it.

Example question

In 1921, how many pets or animals were included on the census forms as family members?

- A. 91
- B. 182
- C. 273

Answer: B. 182 pets or animals were included on census forms as animals in 1921.

Fun fact: In the 1921 census, we discovered 7 horses, 144 cats, 3 goldfinches, 2 ferrets, 7 chickens, 1 rooster and 1 tortoise all listed as family members.