



# The Right to Housing

## Lesson Plan: Barriers to the Right to Housing

Grade Level: 9-12



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# Lesson Plan: Barriers to the Right to Housing in the U.S.

**Goal:** Build understanding about the barriers to housing faced by people in the United States and examine the government's role in helping others to fulfill that right.

**Objectives:**

- Students will identify the barriers individuals face in realizing their right to housing in the U.S.
- Students will critically examine the success of the U.S. government in fulfilling its obligations to realize the right to housing for all in the U.S.

**Essential Question:** Is the right to housing being addressed adequately in the United States?

**Resources:**

- Handout 1: Right to Housing Crossword Directions
- Handout 2: Housing Barriers Crossword
- Handout 3: Housing Achievements Crossword
- Discover Human Rights Fact Sheet: "The Right to Housing in the United States" - download at [http://discoverhumanrights.org/Right\\_to\\_Housing.html](http://discoverhumanrights.org/Right_to_Housing.html)

**Time Frame:** 1 class period

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Minnesota High School Social Studies Standards:**

- World History, I, #1: Students will examine human rights principles and how they have been supported and violated in the late 20th century.
- Government and Citizenship, B #2: Students will examine the tensions between the government's dual role of protecting individual rights and promoting the general welfare, the tension between majority rule and minority rights, and analyze the conflict between diversity and unity which is captured in the concept "E Pluribus Unum."



# Lesson Plan: Barriers to the Right to Housing in the U.S.

## Procedure:

1. **Brainstorm.** Have students come up with a list of achievements they see being made to fulfill the right to housing in the United States. Next have them brainstorm a list of barriers people face in achieving adequate housing.
2. **Explain.** Explain to the students that the right to housing means more than a roof over your head. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

*“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services....”* (UDHR, 1948).

The fulfillment of the right to housing requires that it be secure, easily accessible, affordable, adequately lit and ventilated, have safe infrastructure and protection from weather, and be safe from health hazards (such as lead paint or toxic waste). The United States government has a responsibility to ensure that all its citizens have shelter that is safe and secure.

3. **Crossword Activity.** This activity will help students better understand what defines adequate housing and the government’s obligations in ensuring that right for all its people. There are two crossword puzzles. One is on the barriers to housing and the other is on the achievements being made in fulfilling the right to housing. You could choose to have each student complete both of the crossword puzzles or split the class up into two groups having each half complete one of the puzzles. The directions are the same for both crosswords.

Give each student **Handout 1: Right to Housing Crossword Directions** and either one or both of the crosswords: **Handout 2: Housing Barriers Crossword** and **Handout 3: Housing Achievements Crossword**. It is helpful to go over the directions with the students before they start. The crossword directions are as follows:

- Step 1:** Read the statements in the italics. Each statement defines a different guideline that is necessary to fulfilling the right to housing.
  - Step 2:** Look at the clues. Each clue is an example of either a violation of the right to housing or an achievement in the fulfillment of the right to housing.
  - Step 3:** Match each right to housing guideline to a clue that shows how that guideline is being violated or achieved.
  - Step 4:** Fill out the crossword. The underlined words within the guideline statements provide the answers to the crossword. The clue matching the guideline provides the number for where the answer fits in the crossword.
4. **Read.** Give students at least 15 minutes to fill out the crossword(s). After students have had a chance to complete them have them read the **Discover Human Rights Fact Sheet: The Right to Housing in the United States**.



## Lesson Plan: Barriers to the Right to Housing in the U.S.

5. **Discuss.** Once everyone is finished reading the fact sheet, go over the answers to the crosswords with the students and discuss the following questions as a large group.

- What did you learn about the right to housing as a concern in the United States? Is the problem bigger or smaller than you imagined?
- Why do you think this problem exists?
- How well do you think the U.S. government is doing in meeting their obligations to fulfill the right to housing? Are they already doing enough? Can they do more?
- How might the inability to obtain adequate housing affect someone's ability to secure other rights?
- Now that you have finished this exercise how would you define the right to housing?

### Optional Extension Activity:

**Group Project.** As a class create a local fact sheet on the right to housing (state or city centered) similar to the national fact sheet on the right to housing the students just read. Break up students into 7 small groups. Give each group one of the seven right to housing guidelines: available, affordable, habitable, accessible, adequately located, culturally adequate, and secure of tenure. Have each of the small groups research how well their state is doing in their given area and come up with a short paragraph with detailed statistics. Have each group present their findings to the class and then compile the completed pieces into a local fact sheet on the right to housing. If students are interested, they could use the fact sheet to educate others and raise awareness about housing issues in their community.



# Right to Housing Crossword Direction

**Directions:** There are two crossword puzzles. One is on the barriers to housing and the other is on the achievements being made in fulfilling the right to housing. Your teacher may give you one or both to complete. The directions are the same for both crosswords.

- Step 1:** Read the statements in the italics. Each statement defines a different guideline that is necessary to fulfilling the right to housing.
- Step 2:** Look at the clues. Each clue is an example of either a violation of the right to housing or an achievement in the fulfillment of the right to housing.
- Step 3:** Match each right to housing guideline to a clue that shows how that guideline is being violated or achieved.
- Step 4:** Fill out the crossword. The underlined words within the guideline statements provide the answers to the crossword. The clue matching the guideline provides the number for where the answer fits in the crossword.

## Right to Housing Guidelines

- Housing must have sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation.
- Housing must be affordable meaning that the cost of housing should not compromise the satisfaction of other basic needs.
- Housing must be habitable meaning that inhabitants must be protected against the cold, heat, rain, wind, health threats or structural hazards.
- Housing must be secure of tenure meaning that tenants have legal protection against forced eviction.
- Victims of natural disasters and other vulnerable groups should be ensured some degree of priority consideration in housing.
- Housing must be adequately located so as to allow access to employment options, health and child care services and other social facilities.
- Housing must be culturally adequate which includes respect for the integrity of families.
- Governments must ensure non-discrimination to adequate housing due to class, race, gender, language or other factors.
- Governments must protect the right to housing by taking measures to prevent individuals such as landlords or third parties such as corporations from interfering with the right to housing.
- Governments must refrain from taking retrogressive measures or taking back funding or privileges that assist with the right to housing.
- Governments must monitor and report on the right to housing so they are held accountable.
- Governments are obligated to meet the minimum core of the right to housing by immediately addressing extreme situations of homelessness.
- Governments must take steps to achieve the right to housing based on all of their resources, not only the resources within the current budget.



# Housing Barriers Crossword

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See clues on next page ---->



# Housing Barriers Crossword

## Clues—Barriers to the Right to Housing

### Across

1. Over 14 million households in the U.S. pay more than 50% of their income on housing<sup>1</sup> and in no city in the U.S. can a worker at minimum wage afford a one-bedroom apartment.<sup>2</sup>
7. Racial justice activists have found hypocrisy in the report submitted by the U.S. government to the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). For example the government claims that the Minority Housing Initiative of HUD (Housing and Urban Development) is vigorously going after predatory lenders but fails to give examples of how. There will be an opportunity for organizations to provide a monitoring report to supplement the Government's information. The report will be used by the UN committee when it questions the United States.<sup>3</sup>
9. Often family homeless shelters do not allow men or teenage boys to stay at the shelter, causing separation for families with male members or forcing them to look elsewhere for emergency housing. In 1995, the U.S. Council of Mayors report documented that 64% of cities participating indicated that families might have to split up to be accommodated in shelters. Family separation is detrimental to the integrity of families.<sup>4</sup>
11. The federal budget for housing assistance dropped by \$28.1 billion between 1976 and 2002.<sup>5</sup> Yet today only one in three eligible households receive housing assistance. Such dramatic funding cuts, constitute taking a backward step in housing availability.<sup>6</sup>
12. Discriminatory renting practices and "racial steering" has created neighborhoods with high-minority concentrations that tend to be in older, more poorly-kept areas. Such segregation can also lead to decreased access to quality schools, public facilities and employment opportunities.<sup>7</sup>
13. As of July 16th, 2007 the war in Iraq has cost the U.S. \$443.7 billion. The money could have purchased housing 3,995,293 homeless families.<sup>8</sup>

### Down

2. While there are some significant exceptions, American Indian reservations are characterized by a high level of unemployment, long-term joblessness, and lack of gainful employment opportunities. The Bureau of Indian Affairs estimated that in 1995, 49% of the potential labor force living on or near reservations was unemployed.<sup>9</sup>
3. 70% of the housing damaged by Hurricane Katrina was affordable to low-income people, yet very little of federal funds have been used to repair such housing.<sup>10</sup> 14 months after Katrina, more than 4,000 families had not returned to New Orleans because public housing remains closed. Government agencies such as HUD and HANO have left boarded up buildings to deteriorate rather than repair them and have plans to demolish 5,000 public housing units, many of which could be saved.<sup>11</sup>
4. Since 1999, the Chicago Housing Authority and the U.S. Department of Housing have destroyed more than 13,702 low-income units with 8,298 additional units slated for demolition. Alarming, only 200 new low-income units have been created and waiting list numbers are sky-rocketing.<sup>12</sup> The destruction of public housing without replacement and the "forced evictions" that result constitute a violation of the right to housing.
5. The Texas Mexico border region has the largest concentration of households without basic sanitation in the U.S.<sup>13</sup> According to the EPA, There are more than 1,300 colonias (settlements) in Texas and New Mexico with an estimated population of over 300,000. These colonias typically do not have any basic infrastructure such as safe drinking water, sewage disposal or garbage collection.<sup>14</sup>
6. In 2005 the U.S. Supreme Court decided in a vote of 5 to 4 that the New London Development Corporation was authorized to take over an entire neighborhood for private development. Many members of the public see the outcome as a benefit to large corporations at the expense of individual homeowners.<sup>15</sup>
8. Approximately 824,000 children are homeless and in 1995, 4.2% of children under the age of one were homeless. Families with children are one of the fastest growing groups facing homelessness.<sup>16</sup>
10. Pollution-induced asthma, allergic reactions to insects or mold, lead poisoning and other unhealthy living conditions adversely affect more than a million American children, who may carry symptoms of this neglect throughout their lives.<sup>17</sup>

# Housing Achievements Crossword



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# Housing Achievements Crossword

## Clues—Achievements to the Right to Housing

### Across

1. Some communities have solved two problems at the same time. They have remodeled historic buildings that were falling into disrepair and through the cooperation of citizens, local government and housing groups have not only saved historic sites but have developed new units of affordable housing.<sup>18</sup>
5. Some states like Minnesota have programs that protect low-income households from having their heat turned off during the winter for failure to pay utility bills.<sup>19</sup>
11. Tough ordinances cracking down on landlords who rent to undocumented immigrants have been enacted by local governments. One such ordinance in Hazleton, Pennsylvania was struck down by a federal judicial decision. Simply put, the federal government did not allow a local government to enact a law that would essentially deprive individuals of access to housing.<sup>20</sup>
12. The State of Connecticut sued a landlord in 2005 for illegally billing renters for heating fuel that the tenants were misled to believe was included in the lease.<sup>21</sup>
13. Although the Habitat Agenda is non-binding, by signing it in 1996, the U.S. publicly committed to principles that would prohibit sweeps that remove homeless people from outdoor encampments without notice or relocation since such actions are a form of forced eviction.<sup>22</sup>

### Down

1. The Office of Housing, also known as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) underwrites home loans to assist the elderly, disabled and chronically mentally ill.<sup>23</sup>
2. At West River Health Services in rural North Dakota technology has helped to bring quality health care to patients who may live up to 50 miles from a clinic. For example, they have started using home health telemanagement services where blood pressure and blood sugar readings and other services can be done at home, the data put into a computer, and information accessed by a physician many miles away.<sup>24</sup>
3. Arizona's Indian tribes are discovering ways to increase tourism to enhance tribal economies on reservation lands while maintaining privacy during important ceremonies and protecting and respecting the culture of residents.<sup>25</sup>
6. In April of 2007 the U.S. government submitted its report to a United Nations Committee (CERD) to show the steps it has taken to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination. In the report the government offers some examples of lawsuits it has initiated to protect people against discrimination in the area of housing.<sup>26</sup>
7. A settlement filed on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency required developers to supply residents with drinking water until water mains could be constructed. "This case demonstrates that the U.S. will not tolerate practices which concentrate low-income families on lots lacking public water and sewer facilities," said Jane Saginaw the Regional Administrator of the EPA.<sup>27</sup>
8. The "Fair Housing Act" adopted in 1968 and amended in 1988 protects against discrimination in the sale and rental of housing based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status or handicap.<sup>28</sup>
9. In 2007 the state of MN doubled the permanent resources for the Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Programs from \$7.43 million to \$14.93 million.<sup>29</sup>
10. In 2007 the Minnesota state legislature increased funding to serve an additional 54 families with severe and persistent mental illnesses at risk of homelessness and also appropriated \$1 million for services helping unaccompanied youth left homeless due to abuse, neglect or exploitation.<sup>30</sup>



# Housing Crossword Footnotes

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