WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT A WHITE HAIRED GERMANY?

Objectives:

*Students will interpret population pyramids and make predictions about societies based on that information.

*Students will identify causes and challenges of an ageing society.

*Student will recognize that there are always trade-offs to government policy

*Students will evaluate possible solutions to cultural, political, and economic challenges, and make recommendations based on those evaluations.

Age and discipline:

High School Economics

Time Required:

One or two class periods

Materials:

Internet access
One copy of Student Handout 1 for every student

Procedures:

1. Divide students into small groups (2-3) and have them access the following web site: (http://www.nationmaster.com/country/gm/Age_distribution). Have them complete Section A on student handout 1.

2. Discuss Section A

3. Have students work in their small groups to answer the questions in Section B.

4. Discuss the students' ideas about the causes and challenges of the population trends.

5. After the full class discussion of causes and challenges, allow the small groups to brainstorm their own "solutions" to Germany's demographic problems and complete Section C.

6. Conduct a full class discussion and allow the students to evaluate each other's possible solutions.

7. Individual students should then draft the policy memo in order demonstrate a grasp of the problems faced by Germany, causes of these challenges, and possible solutions and their costs.

Assessment:

Have the individual students create a formal memo to the Chancellor of Germany describing the population trend, giving 3 policy recommendations along with a description of challenges those recommendations will cause to elected officials, and a concluding with a paragraph urging the Chancellor to act now before the problem gets worse.

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT A WHITE HAIRED GERMANY? STUDENT HANDOUT 1

Population Pyramids are bar graphs that demonstrate the distribution of a group of people by age and gender. Access the following website http://www.nationmaster.com/country/gm/Age_distribution and answer the questions in SECTION A.

SECTION A:
Look at population pyramid for Germany in the year 2010.

1. How many female Germans will be between the ages of 10 and 14?

2. How many male Germans will be between the ages of 30-34?

3. What age groups are the largest in the German population?

4. Compare the male pyramid to the female pyramid. What differences do you find? Why do you think these differences exist?

5. Describe the overall shape the pyramids.

Now look at the pyramid for Germany in 2050.

6. How many female Germans are predicted between 10-14?

7. How many males between 30-34?

8. Describe the overall shape of the population pyramids for the year 2050.

9. Describe three differences between the population of Germany in 2010 and Germany in 2050?

SECTION B

10. Identify three possible causes of this population trend.

11. Identify three challenges (cultural, economic, political, etc…) that Germany may face because of these population changes.

SECTION C

12. Identify 3 solutions to these challenges. Discuss the benefits (cultural, economic, political, etc…) and costs of each of your solutions.

Solution	Benefits of solution	Costs of the solution

SECTION D

You work for the German government and have been charged with making recommendations to the Chancellor about the upcoming demographic challenge. You will write a 5 paragraph memo to the Chancellor

 A. describing the demographic challenges ahead for the German People;

 B. recommending the three "best" solutions to take on the problems, as well as describing possible problems these recommendations may cause;

 C. and ending with a final paragraph urging the Chancellor to enact reforms as soon as possible.

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT A WHITE HAIRED GERMANY? ANSWER SHEET

Population Pyramids are bar graphs that demonstrate the distribution of a group of people by age and gender. Access the following website http://www.nationmaster.com/country/gm/Age_distribution and answer the questions in SECTION A.

SECTION A:
Look at population pyramid for Germany in the year 2010.

1. How many female Germans will be between the ages of 10 and 14?
   (2 million)

2. How many male Germans will be between the ages of 30-34?
   (2.5 million)

3. What age groups are the largest in the German population?

   (45-49)

4. Compare the male pyramid to the female pyramid. What differences do you find? Why do you think these differences exist?

   (possible answers—many more 80+ women than men)
   (Wars in 20th century killed many men, life expectancy of women is longer than men)

5. Describe the overall shape the pyramids.

   (age cohorts get larger until peak 35-39 to 55-59, then begins to decline)

Now look at the pyramid for Germany in 2050.

6. How many female Germans are predicted between 10-14?

   (1.5 million)

7. How many males between 30-34?

   (2 million)

8. Describe the overall shape of the population pyramids for the year 2050.

   (age cohorts are much more equal until 80+)

9. Describe three differences between the population of Germany in 2010 and Germany in 2050?
   (Smaller total population-German population in 2009 is 82 million; in 2050 it is estimated to be less than 75 million)
   (more equal distribution of age cohorts, larger share of population will be elderly)

SECTION B

10. Identify three possible causes of this population trend.

Answers will vary in discussion but be sure to stress some
--Women are having fewer children—need 2.1 children per woman, now German women average 1.3
--People living longer-- 2009 life expectancy 79, 2050—84
--immigration

11. Identify three challenges (cultural, economic, political, etc…) that Germany may face because of these population changes.

Answers will vary but stress some of the problems
--less workers to produce goods and services—risk of the economy shrinking
--older workers tend to be less productive
--larger % of population on state pensions will fewer workers are contributing
--businesses will have to offer different products that aging population will desire
--older people vote in greater numbers than others. Politicians will have to adjust

SECTION C

12. Identify 3 solutions to these challenges. Discuss the benefits (cultural, economic, political, etc…) and costs of each of your solutions.
Answers will vary, but stress than no decision is free

--Immigration—immigrants bring new culture that natives may not like
--Raise retirement age—people will have to work longer than people before them
--Government incentives to have more kids—expensive and mixed results in world
--Borrow money to fund pensions—increases national debt and possibly raises interest rates
--Reduce pension benefits—older voters tend to punish politicians who reduce their benefits
--Devote a larger share of government budget to pensions—less resources for education, defense, infrastructure, etc
--Raise taxes on those still working—reduces incentives to work when Germany needs as many workers as possible

SECTION D

You work for the German government and have been charged with making recommendations to the Chancellor about the upcoming demographic challenge. You will write a 5 paragraph memo to the Chancellor

A. describing the demographic challenges ahead for the German People;

B. recommending the three "best" solutions to take on the problems, as well as describing possible problems these recommendations may cause;

C. and ending with a final paragraph urging the Chancellor to enact reforms as soon as possible.