

# Introduction to the United Nations: The Basics

## OBJECTIVE(S)

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand the basic structure of the UN
2. Be familiar with the basic history of the UN
3. Share some fun facts of the UN

## REQUIREMENTS

**Level:** 7-12 Grade(s)

**Time:** 45 minutes – 1 hour

### Materials Needed:

Because this activity is an introductory one, and the students will have to answer questions they most likely do not know the answers to, access to some resources on the UN is necessary to undertake this activity. These resources can either be electronic, ie: Internet resources and web-pages, or they may be paper based, ie: pamphlets, brochures, and books. It is best to have access to both kinds of resources. It is probably easiest to run this session in your school's computer lab, if possible. However, with an abundance of paper-based resources, the students can work independently or in groups to search for the correct answer without constant supervision of their internet use.

You will also need to include copies of any handouts you wish to include for your students, especially Handout 1/2.

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## PROCEDURE

### I. Lesson Introduction/Activation of Prior Knowledge

This activity is an introductory one. The majority of students will know very little about the UN. This activity is intended to introduce them to some facts and figures that will give them a richer understanding about what the UN is, what its purpose is, and what it does to fulfill that purpose.

### II. Activity (Indicate if activity is independent, pair or group work)

Introduce the general concepts you want students to take away from the experience. Take a few minutes to explain what the UN is, how it works, and how it will be important to what you want to cover in class or at the club this year. You may wish to pass out the UN system chart.

Questions about the UN, its main bodies, its structure, and its history, are then given to students. This can be done either verbally, or the questions can be listed on a sheet of paper. Students can work independently or together, either in groups or as a class, to complete this activity.

Some examples of possible questions are provided along with the answer to each. These can be found without answers on the worksheet below. You may wish to add to and expand upon this list.

- **How many member states are there in the UN?** 193 member states
- **What are the 6 main bodies of the UN?** General Assembly; Secretariat; Security Council; Economic and Social Council; Trusteeship Council; and the International Court of Justice
- **Who are the permanent five members of the Security Council?** United States, United Kingdom, France, Russian Federation, People's Republic of China

- **Name the other 10 current members of the Security Council.** (elected in shifts each September for two-year terms, can be found at <http://www.un.org/sc/members.asp>)
- **What are the 6 main languages of the UN?** English, Spanish, French, Russian, Arabic, Chinese
- **Where are UN headquarters located?** New York City
- **Who is the current Secretary-General of the UN?** António Guterres
- **How many Secretary-Generals has the UN had since its conception?** 9
- **Who is the US Ambassador to the UN?** Linda Thomas-Greenfield
- **When and where was the UN founded?** The charter was written in June 1945 in San Francisco, California at the United Nations Conference on International Organization. Formally, it came into existence on October 24, 1945 when the UN charter was ratified by its major signatories. This is why UN Day is celebrated on October 24<sup>th</sup> every year.
- **What organization whose purpose was similar to the UN's preceded the UN?** The League of Nations, an organization conceived in similar circumstances to the UN during the First World War and established in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles "to promote international cooperation and to achieve peace and security." ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))
- **How many original members to the UN signed the treaty that created it?** 51 original members of the UN Charter. 50 states were present at the United Nations Conference on International Organization where the UN Charter was drawn up. They all signed it, and then Poland, who was not present, signed it later, to make 51 original signers on the charter.
- **What are the color/s of the UN?** Light blue and white
- **What is displayed as the symbol/emblem of the UN?** The current United Nations emblem was approved on 7 December 1946. The design is "a map of the world representing an azimuthal equidistant projection centered on the North Pole, inscribed in a wreath consisting of crossed conventionalized branches of the olive tree, in gold on a field of smoke-blue with all water areas in white. The projection of the map extends to 60 degrees south latitude, and includes five concentric circles". Symbolism: Olive branches symbolize peace. The world map depicts the area of concern to the United Nations in achieving its main purpose, peace and security. ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))
- **Which country was the last to join the UN?** South Sudan, in 2011.

### III. Closing/Wrap-Up

Ask each student/group/pair of students to provide an answer to one question. Repeat the process until every group/student/pair has provided an answer, going over the correct answer should they have been incorrect, and reviewing any differing answers to the one(s) which you have on the answer key.

#### **OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Future In-class Follow-Up for Teachers: Ask the students questions that gradually increase in difficulty as the year progresses, providing them with fewer resources with which they may answer them.

Homework: (High School Level) Provide students with a vocabulary list of useful terms for students involved with MUN to know in many situations. You may want to give a quiz on them later. (Middle School Level) Ask the students to create/draw/color their own symbol of the UN and write a short statement explaining the significance of their symbol and how it represents the UN.

## The United Nations: An Introduction

**Directions: Answer the following questions using the resources available to you.**

1. How many member states belong to the UN?
2. What are the 6 main bodies of the UN?
3. Who are the permanent five members of the Security Council?
4. Name the other 10 current members of the Security Council.
5. What are the 6 main languages of the UN?
6. Where are UN headquarters located?
7. Who is the current Secretary-General of the UN?
8. How many Secretary-Generals has the UN had since its conception?
9. Who is the US Ambassador to the UN?
10. When and where was the UN founded?
11. What organization whose purpose was similar to the UN's preceded the UN?
12. How many original members to the UN signed the treaty that created it?
13. What is/are the color/s of the UN?
14. What is displayed as the symbol/emblem of the UN?
15. Which country was the last to join the UN?