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Activity 1: What do you know about the United Nations?

Purpose:

To introduce the unit, and to encourage students to consider what they already know, and would like to know, about the United Nations; to familiarize students with the history of the United Nations.

Standards:

Social Studies: NCSS standards

V: Individuals, Groups and Institutions

VI: Power, Authority and Governance

IX: Global Connections

English Language Arts: NCTE Standards

1: Reading for understanding

7: Evaluating data

8: Developing research skills

Materials:

Activity 1 Student Materials: What do you know about the United Nations? Quiz

Activity 1 Student Materials: What do you know about the United Nations? Answer Sheet

Activity 1 Student Materials: An Introduction to the United Nations

Description:

1. Introduce the unit, and give students the “What do you know about the United Nations?” quiz. Allow students to answer the questions independently.
2. Once they are done, distribute the “What do you know about the United Nations” answer sheet (or read the answers aloud to the class). Ask students to score themselves. What was their level of knowledge about basic facts on the UN?
3. Have students read “An Introduction to the United Nations”. Ask students to develop at least three questions that they have about the UN that could be answered through research.
4. Have students with similar questions about the UN form research groups to find out the answers, and report back to the class.

Suggested Internet resources include:

United Nations website:

www.un.org

“Image and Reality”:

<http://www.un.org/geninfo/ir/index.html>

“Basic Facts About the UN”:

<http://www.un.org/aboutun/history.htm>

“The UN in Brief”

<http://www.un.org/Overview/brief.html>

UN Cyberschoolbus website:

From: <http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/unintro/unintro.asp>

Follow up activity:

1. Have students take a virtual tour of the UN at
<http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/untour/>

2. Ask students to write a short essay on their reactions to the following statement:

“It is often said that if we did not have the United Nations, it would have to be invented.”

Collect their essays and return them to the students at the end of this unit on the UN. At that point, students can be asked to reflect on whether what they have learned has influenced their view about the need for the United Nations, and US membership.

Activity 1 Student Materials

What do you know about the United Nations? Quiz

Write your answers in the space below each question:

1. True or False: The United Nations is a world government.
2. How many countries are members of the United Nations?
A. 58 B. 191 C. 213 D. 109
3. True or False: Countries that join the United Nations give up their sovereignty.
4. What is the name of the organization that preceded the United Nations?
A. The European Union C. The League of Nations
B. The World Parliament D. The Organization of American States
5. In what year was the UN founded?
A. 1780 (after the American Revolution) B. 1867 (after the Civil War)
B. 1920 (after World War I) D. 1945 (after World War II)
6. Who coined the term “United Nations”?
A. Franklin D. Roosevelt B. Kofi Annan C. Nelson Mandela D. Gandhi
7. Why is October 24 celebrated as UN Day every year?
A. It is the day that the First World War ended.
B. It is the day that construction of the UN office in New York was completed.
C. It is the day that the UN Charter was ratified.
D. It is already a national holiday in many countries that are UN members.
8. True or False: The main work of the United Nations is peacekeeping.
9. True or False: The UN has no standing army.
10. True or False: The UN and its agencies all have their headquarters in New York City.

Activity 1 Student Materials

What do you know about the United Nations? Answer Sheet

1. True or False: The United Nations is a world government.
False. The United Nations is an organization of sovereign states, and can only do what its members tell it to do.
2. How many countries are members of the United Nations? 191.
3. True or False: When countries join the United Nations, they give up their sovereignty.
False. Countries retain their sovereignty when they join the UN, but most voluntarily agree to work together on world problems because to do so is in their common interest.
4. What is the name of the organization that preceded the United Nations?
The League of Nations.
5. In what year was the UN founded?
The UN was founded in 1945, in the aftermath of World War II.
6. Who coined the term “United Nations”?
US President Franklin D. Roosevelt first used the term in 1942, during World War II, when 26 nations signed a “Declaration by United Nations” to fight Axis powers.
7. Why is October 24 celebrated as UN Day every year?
The UN came into existence on October 24, 1945, when its Charter was ratified.
8. True or False: The main work of the United Nations is peacekeeping.
False. In addition to peacekeeping, the UN is also involved in promoting economic and social development, humanitarian aid, human rights and international law.
9. True or False: The UN has no standing army.
True. When the UN sends peacekeeping troops to a country, it relies on troops that are made available by UN member states.
10. True or False: The UN and its agencies all have their headquarters in New York City.
False. The main offices of the UN Secretariat, General Assembly, Security Council, and Economic and Social Council are based in New York. But the UN has offices in countries around the world. The International Court of Justice is based in The Hague, Netherlands. The World Health Organization is based in Geneva, Switzerland; UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is based in Paris, France.

Activity 1 Student Materials

An Introduction to the United Nations

The United Nations is an international organization of 191 sovereign States, representing virtually every country in the world. Member States agree to abide by the principles of the UN Charter, an international treaty that spells out their rights and duties as members of the world community. The UN cannot act independently of its Member States; it can only do what member countries decide it can do. According to the Charter, the UN has four purposes: to maintain international peace and security; to develop friendly relations among nations; to cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights; and to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations.

International organizations before the UN

The UN was not the first organization in which countries cooperated. The International Telecommunication Union was founded in 1865 as the International Telegraph Union, and the Universal Postal Union was established in 1874, to enable countries to cooperate on standards for international communication. (Both are now United Nations specialized agencies.)

In 1899, an International Peace Conference was held in The Hague to develop agreement between countries on how to settle disputes peacefully, prevent wars and create rules by which wars should be conducted.

The idea for a League of Nations came about during World War I, and the League was established in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles "to promote international cooperation and to achieve peace and security." The League of Nations ceased its activities after failing to prevent World War II. Its failure can be attributed to a number of causes. It had no military power of its own, and members were reluctant to use economic or military sanctions. Some powerful countries never joined, including the United States; others joined but then left, such as Germany, Japan, and Italy. Countries that had always acted independently found it difficult to cooperate on international concerns. But the League laid the groundwork for the United Nations.

The creation of the United Nations

The name "United Nations" was first used by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and appears in the "Declaration by United Nations" of 1 January 1942, during the Second World War, when representatives of 26 nations agreed to fight together against the Axis Powers. During WW II, the leaders of Britain, China, the US and the USSR discussed how a post-war international organization might function. In 1944 representatives of China, the UK, the US and the USSR met in Washington, DC, and drew up a draft of what a new international organization might look like. Between April and June of 1945, representatives of 50 countries met in San Francisco to work on a document that would be the basis for international cooperation. This was the Charter of the United Nations, signed on 26 June by 50 countries.

The United Nations officially came into existence on October 24, 1945, when the Charter was ratified by China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States and by a majority of the other countries who signed the Charter. "United Nations Day" is celebrated on October 24 each year.

The United Nations today

The UN is not a world government and it can only do what its Member States agree to do. It does, however, provide the means to help resolve international conflicts and formulate policies on matters affecting all of us. At the UN, all the Member States — large and small, rich and poor, with differing political views and social systems — have a voice in this process.

The UN's wide range of activities can be grouped into five main categories:

1. Peace and security

The United Nations is often called upon to prevent disputes from escalating into war, to persuade opposing parties to use negotiation rather than force, or to help restore peace when conflict breaks out. Avoiding military conflict is not enough to establish a secure and lasting peace. Such security can only be achieved by helping countries to develop sound economies, social justice, human rights protection, good governance and the democratic process.

2. Economic and social development

The majority of the UN's resources are devoted to economic development, social development and sustainable development, because international peace and security are possible only if the economic and social well-being of people everywhere is assured. Wealthy and poor countries increasingly have common interests in solving problems that cross national boundaries. Issues relating to poverty, the environment, refugees, organized crime, drug trafficking and AIDS in one region can quickly affect other parts of the world, and require global cooperation.

3. Human rights

All the United Nations bodies and specialized agencies are involved in the protection of human rights. The UN has created an internationally protected code of human rights to which all nations can subscribe, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly in 1948. Since then, the United Nations has expanded human rights law to address the special concerns of women, children, disabled persons, minorities, migrant workers and other vulnerable groups, providing protection against discrimination.

4. Humanitarian affairs

The UN coordinated humanitarian relief operations in Europe following the Second World War. Today, the UN is a major provider of emergency relief and longer-term assistance during both natural and man-made disasters. Civil war is a leading cause of emergency situations; refugees and other war victims require shelter, food, water and medical care. Floods, droughts, storms and earthquakes kill tens of thousands of people each year and cause economic losses. More than 90 per cent of all disaster victims live in developing countries. The United Nations seeks to bring immediate relief to the victims, and to prevent emergencies from arising in the first place.

5. International Law

The United Nation has played a key role in the development of international law — conventions, treaties and standards — that help promote economic and social development, as well as international peace and security. Among the issues addressed by international law are the regulation of the use of oceans, protecting the environment, regulating migrant labor, stopping drug trafficking, copyright protection, protection of cultural heritage, and combating terrorism.

Read more about the UN!

United Nations website:

www.un.org

To find out more about the UN's history and structure, start with these links:

“Image and Reality”:

<http://www.un.org/geninfo/ir/index.html>

“Basic Facts About the UN”:

<http://www.un.org/aboutun/history.htm>

“The UN in Brief”

<http://www.un.org/Overview/brief.html>

UN Cyberschoolbus website:

From: <http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/unintro/unintro.asp>

To find out more about the five main areas of UN activity, start with these links:

Peace and security

<http://www.un.org/peace/index.html>

Economic and social development

<http://www.un.org/esa/index.html>

Human rights

<http://www.un.org/rights/index.html>

Humanitarian affairs

<http://www.un.org/ha/index.html>

International Law

<http://www.un.org/law/index.html>