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## **Activity 6: US membership**

**Purpose:** To familiarize students with differing perspectives on US membership in the UN, and to encourage them to think critically about those perspectives.

### **Standards:**

Social Studies: NCSS standards

V: Individuals, Groups and Institutions

IX: Global Connections

English Language Arts

8: Developing research skills

12: Applying language skills

Follow-up Activity:

Mathematics: NCTM Standards

Number and Operations 9-12

Connections PK-12

### **Materials:**

Activity 6 Student Materials: The US and the UN: Points of View 1

Activity 6 Student Materials: The US and the UN: Points of View 2

### **Description:**

1. Ask students if they have heard differing points of view on US membership in the UN. Allow time for them to share their ideas.

2. Divide the class into two groups. Tell one group that they will be researching views that are unfavorable to US membership in the UN. Give them the handout “The US and the UN: Points of View 1” to use as a basis for their research, explaining that these are some views that have been expressed about the UN, and that there are many others as well. Encourage them to look for the reasons for these unfavorable views in newspapers, the Internet, on television, or in discussions with people in the school or community.

Tell the second group that they will be researching views that are favorable to US membership in the UN. Give them the handout “The US and the UN: Points of View 2” to use as a basis for their research, explaining that these are some views that have been expressed about the UN, and that there are many others as well. Again, encourage them to use a variety of sources to find reasons for these views.

3. Organize a class debate or role play in which students represent opposing viewpoints on UN membership. Alternatively, each student can be paired with another who represents an opposing point of view, and they can be allowed 20 minutes to make their case to each other.

4. Following the role play or debate, ask students to mention which arguments they found most compelling. If assertions were made that raise questions, have the group decide how they would go about getting the information they need to resolve those questions.

**Follow-up activity:**

Research how the UN is funded. A major source of controversy around US membership in the UN has to do with the US share of the UN's budget.

Have students learn more about UN funding by reading Image and Reality, Chapter 5, "Is the United Nations good value for the money?". This available online at <http://www.un.org/geninfo/ir/ch5/ch5.htm>

Have students find out how much their State's budget is. Compare this to the annual budget of the UN. How do they compare?

Have students calculate the per capita contribution of the United States to the UN budget. To do this, divide the amount the US contributes to the UN each year by the total US population. Information on the population of the US and other countries can be found by using the InfoNation feature of the UN Cyberschoolbus website ([www.cyberschoolbus.un.org](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org)). The result is the per capita contribution, or how much the US contributes to the UN per citizen. How does this compare with the per capita contributions of other countries? Should the US contribution be changed? Why or why not?

How fair do you think the UN's system of assessing contributions from Member States is? Should it be changed? If so, how?

The US has not always paid its contributions to the UN budget in a timely fashion. Research the reasons for this. Information on timely payments to the UN by other countries in the world can be found at:

<http://www.un.org/News/oss/hon2003.htm>

## Activity 6 Student Materials

### The US and the UN: Points of View 1

#### Effectiveness:

The United Nations today is a glorified debating society without the power or ability to deal effectively with the world's growing threats. It issues resolutions but it can't enforce them. The number of wars and global problems keeps growing.

#### Efficiency:

The UN is a bloated bureaucracy that is inefficient and not accountable.

#### Funding:

The US pays 22% of the UN's budget; the other 190 countries in the UN should start paying their fair share, and stop relying on the US.

#### Membership:

The countries of the UN are mostly dictatorships that support terrorism and anti-American views. Third world countries outnumber industrialized countries, and the UN follows their agenda, no matter how radical.

#### Sovereignty:

The United Nations should not have the right to tell the United States what it can and cannot do. The US has both the right, and the responsibility to its citizens, to defend itself, and to look out for its economic interests in the world.

#### Peacekeeping:

UN peacekeeping operations divert US troops from their real purpose, which is fighting terrorism and other US wars, and protecting the security of the US.

#### Engagement in the UN:

It's time for the US to pull back from involvement in the UN. The US has urgent problems of its own – unemployment, education, health care, social security, and dealing with the threat of terrorism. It can't afford to put any more resources into an ineffective organization.

## Activity 6 Student Materials

### The US and the UN: Points of View 2

#### Effectiveness:

The United Nations is the only world forum for the exchange of ideas on issues that cross national boundaries. It could be more effective if all countries paid their contributions to the UN budget in a timely fashion.

#### Efficiency:

Since 1997, UN reform measures have cut operating expenses, cut administrative positions, and kept budget growth flat. Money saved on administrative costs has been used for development activities. The Security Council members are also involved in reforming their policies.

#### Funding:

UN regulations say that no country will pay more than 22% of the UN budget. The US pays 22% of the UN budget, the highest contribution of any Member State. The US share of the gross national product of UN Member States is 27%. The US is in arrears with payments to the UN and to peacekeeping operations.

#### Membership:

The majority of UN member states today are representative democracies to varying degrees. The majority of UN Security Council members are democracies. In many parts of the world, countries see the US as dominating UN policy because of its military and financial power.

#### Sovereignty:

The UN can do only what its Member States agree it can do. The US holds veto power in the Security Council. The United States signed the UN charter, and was one of its principal authors.

#### Peacekeeping:

Economic and military power alone cannot make the US safe, and may create more resentment around the world. A US commitment to global peace and justice is in our own self-interest. The US must remain actively engaged in the UN.

#### Engagement in the UN:

Along with economic and military power come responsibilities. As the world's only superpower, US involvement and leadership are crucial to the UN's success.