United Nations

LEARNING AIMS

At the end of this session, students will be able to:
- Understand the structure and workings of the United Nations
- Understand the role of the United Nations in different situations
- Consider how the perception of the United Nations changes according to the situation on which it is working
- Analyse the media's role in forming people's perceptions of the United Nations
- Relate media articles they may have seen outside of school to their classroom debate

Student numbers
Groups of 5-6 students followed by class discussion. Option for individual and group extension work.
Timing
15-20 minutes
Materials
'Structure of the UN' fact sheet– either access to or a printed copy for the students. J8 fact sheet on the UN is also a useful printout for students.
To do the extension work, you will need to have some newspapers with you, or have asked the students to bring one in with them from the previous week.
Suitability
Students aged 13-16

CONTEXT

The United Nations (UN) is an international organisation formed in 1945, when representatives of 50 countries met in San Francisco at the United Nations Conference on International Organisation to draw up the United Nations Charter.

The purposes of the United Nations are:
- to maintain international peace and security;
- to develop friendly relations among nations;
- to cooperate in solving international economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems and in promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- and to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in attaining these ends.

TASK

As a group, using the 'structure of the UN' diagram you will be exploring the workings of the UN. Whilst you are looking at the sheet, consider the following questions and write down your responses:
- With 191 members, is it possible for all the countries to have a say?
- Each country, regardless of its size or population, has an equal vote in the General Assembly – is this fair? What problems might this create?
- Is the UN too big to be effective?
- Why do you think some people criticize the UN?
- How does the media report the strengths and weaknesses of the UN?
- Does our opinion of the United Nations change according to the context in which these media reports are made eg in peacetime as opposed to during a war?

DISCUSSION

- How is it possible for all the countries in the UN to have a say?
- Is it fair that each country in the UN has an equal vote in the general assembly? What problems might this create?
- Is the UN too big to be effective?
- Why do you think some people criticize the UN?
- How does the media report the strengths and weaknesses of the UN?
- Does our opinion of the United Nations change according to the context in which these media reports are made?

PLENARY

The UN is a huge and complex international organisation that operates all across the world. Each country has one equal vote in the general assembly which can lead to criticism as some believe that small countries should have a smaller influence on the decisions made by the UN.

There is sometimes controversy over how the UN deals with different situations around the world, and these can be portrayed in different ways in the media.

EXTENSION WORK AS A HOMEWORK SESSION

Ask the class to bring in newspapers and use them to look for coverage of the UN. This could be on how the UN is responding to an international event or on comments or statements made by UN leaders. Ask students to focus on one key event and examine how the UN is portrayed.

FACTBOX

United Nations Day is celebrated on 24 October each year.