



United Nations
Visitors Services
New York



Bringing the UN to Your Classroom!

UNITED NATIONS HISTORY



United Nations Permanent Headquarters - Completed Steel Work
©UN Photo

A one-stop-shop for educators with useful UN resources
and curated content to teach and learn about the UN for kids grade K-12



UNITED NATIONS HISTORY

Overview:

Grade:

- 5 - 12

Subjects:

- History; Social Studies

Key Words:

- World War II; San Francisco Conference; UN Charter

Goals:

- Students will be able to describe the origins of the UN and to place the UN's establishment within its historical context.
- Students will be able to explain the mission of the UN.
- Students will be able to explain the role of the UN.

Historical Background:

- The idea of the United Nations was born during World War II.
- The name “United Nations” was coined by United States (US) President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The term was first used in the “Declaration by United Nations” on 1 January 1942, when representatives of 26 nations pledged that their governments would fight together against the Axis powers.
- The leaders of countries which had worked together to end the war felt a strong need for an institution that would help bring peace and stop future wars. They realized that this was possible only if all nations came together to create a global organization. The UN was to be that organization.



The San Francisco Conference, 25 April - 26 June 1945: The United States Signs
The United Nations Charter ©UN Photo



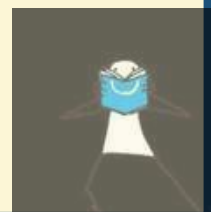
The San Francisco Conference:

- In 1945, delegates from 50 nations met in San Francisco.
- Their main objective was to produce a document acceptable to all countries, the United Nations Charter, which would guide the work of the new organization.
- The delegates at the San Francisco conference were determined to set up an organization that would preserve peace and help build a better world.
- Despite some disagreements and clashes of opinion, the delegates were resolved to come together and set aside their differences to create a new global organization.
- On 25 June 1945, the UN Charter was adopted unanimously.



The San Francisco Conference: A View of the US Delegation, Including its Chairman, Edward R. Stettinius, Jr.

©UN Photo

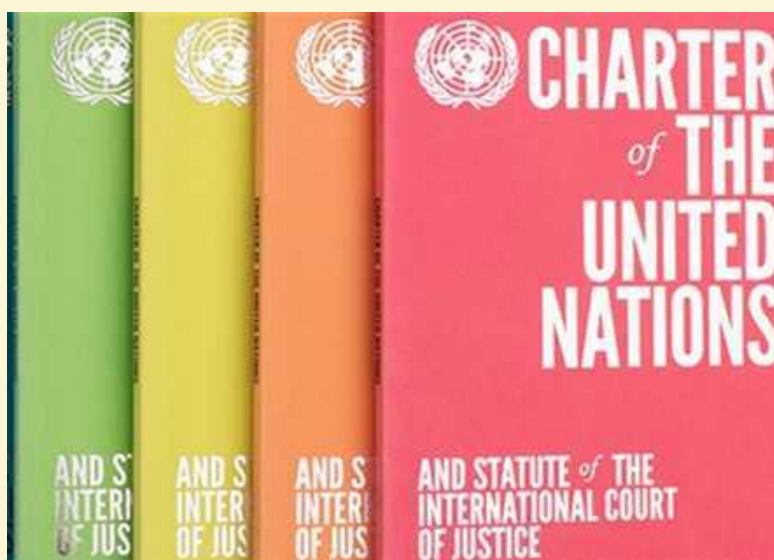


The UN Charter:

- The UN Charter is the founding document of the United Nations.
- To this day, the UN operates under the guidelines and parameters laid out in the Charter.

UN's Goals (according to the Charter):

- Save succeeding generations from the scourge (devastation) of war.
- Reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights.
- Establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.
- Promote social progress and better standards of living.



©UN Photo



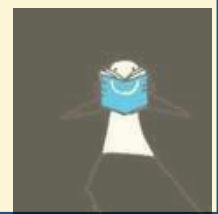
Suggested Activities:

Overview:

- By learning about the founding of the UN and analyzing primary sources from the early years of the Organization, students will learn about the UN's significance in the post-war era and its unique role in maintaining international peace and security.

Discuss:

- How did the creation of the UN reflect the historical time period?
- What can we learn from the birth of the UN about the post-war world?



Activities based on Primary Sources:

Overview:

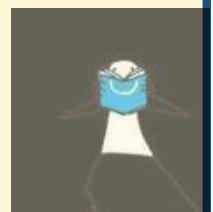
- Depending on grade level and preference, choose one of the primary source options below.
- Have the students complete the recommended activity that matches the chosen primary source.

Primary Sources:

- The UN Emblem and Flag
- The Preamble of the UN Charter
- Sights and Voices of the San Francisco Conference
- San Francisco Conference in the first person



The San Francisco Conference, 25 April - 26 June 1945:
Peru Signs the United Nations Charter ©UN Photo



Primary Source #1: The UN Flag and Emblem

Overview:

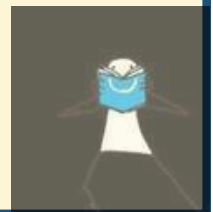
- The original UN emblem was created by a team of designers, led by Oliver Lincoln Lundquist, for the 1945 San Francisco conference.
- The design is a “map of the world” representing a projection centered on the North Pole. The UN flag depicts the UN emblem in white on a blue background.

Discuss:

- Describe the flag. What colors, objects and elements do you see? What do they symbolize?
- How is the UN flag used? Where can you find it? Look for answers on the [UN Photos](#) website.
- If you could design a new emblem and flag for the UN, how would they look? Consider colors, shapes, symbolic elements, and composition.



©UN Photo



Primary Source #2: The Charter's Preamble

Overview:

- Read the Preamble to the UN Charter, or
- [Listen to a recording read by Sir Lawrence Olivier](#)

Discuss:

- Who do you think is the audience?
- What is the purpose of the UN according to the Preamble? Use your own words.
- The Charter opens with the words “We The Peoples of The United Nations.” What do the words “United Nations” mean in this context?
- Reflect upon global history from the establishment of the UN until now. Do you think that the UN has been successful in its mission, as defined in the Preamble? Base your argument on concrete examples.

CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED

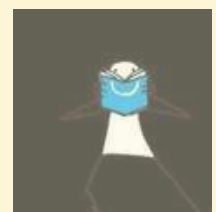
to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

AND FOR THESE ENDS

to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and
to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and
to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and
to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS.

Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.



Primary Source #3: Sights and Voices from the San Francisco Conference

Overview:

- Watch these videos from the San Francisco conference:

1. [US President Harry Truman addresses the delegates.](#)

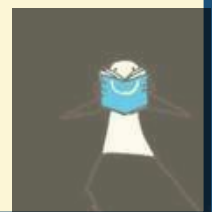
2. [Lord Halifax of Britain puts the UN Charter to a vote.](#)

Discuss:

- Describe what you see in the videos. What is your impression of what is being conveyed and how it is being received?
- Look up the list of countries that participated in the conference. Imagine you were a conference delegate. Choose one of the following activities:
 1. Draft your own speech for the conference. What message would you like to convey to your fellow delegates and the wider public?
 2. Write a letter home or create a social media post describing your experience at the conference and the overall atmosphere.



The San Francisco Conference, 25 April-26 June 1945
© UN Photo



Primary Source #4: The San Francisco Conference in 1st Person

Overview:

- Read the following excerpt from Harold Edward Stassen, a US delegate to the San Francisco conference or [listen](#) to his speech.
- *"There was a certain amount of viewpoint in the world, that the whole thing was a waste of time because there would certainly be another world war in 15 or 20 years. There was a lot of that kind of expression, that no way could 40 or 50 countries reach an agreement."*
- [Interview with Governor Harold Edward Stassen / \(un.org\)](#)

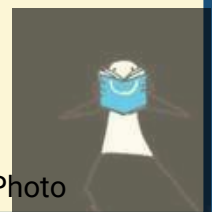
Source: United Nations Oral History Project, 29 April 1983

Discuss:

- What is the historical context in which the San Francisco conference took place?
- According to Stassen's statements, what was the significance of the conference?
- What, according to Stassen's statements, were the challenges facing the delegates to the conference?



Harold E. Stassen Addressing a Meeting at The San Francisco Conference ©UN Photo



UNITED NATIONS HISTORY

For more information:

UN History:

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un>

UN Charter:

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>

For more information on Teach the UN:

<https://www.un.org/en/teach>

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