

United Nations set to meet in New York

An upcoming U.N. summit will focus on reducing nuclear weapons.

BASIC

The man on the left, Ban Ki-Moon, is the head of the United Nations, or U.N. **What is the United Nations?** (A group made up of most of the countries in the world.) The United Nations tries to solve big world problems and help nations get along. The building at right is the United Nations's main home, in New York City. On September 15th, representatives from the 192 member countries will meet here. On September 24th, a smaller part of the United Nations known as the Security Council will meet. This year, President Obama is in charge of the Security Council meeting, and he decided what the

group's main focus should be. Mr. Obama and some other leaders believe that the number of nuclear weapons in the world must be reduced. **What is a nuclear weapon?** (A very dangerous weapon that can kill large numbers of people that only a few countries in the world possess.) Obama would like to eventually see these weapons completely gone from the world. **Do you agree with that?** Let's learn more about the history of the United Nations. NEXT



GENERAL

Can you explain what the United Nations

is? (An organization made up of most of the countries of the world that tries to help people and work for world peace.) The building at right, located in New York City, is the headquarters of the United Nations. On September 15th, the U.N. General Assembly will open its 64th session and leaders and diplomats from 192 countries will attend. At left is Ban Ki-Moon, the U.N.'s highest-ranking leader, who has held the post since 2007. **Do you know what country he is from?** (South Korea.) And on September 24th, a smaller group within the United Nations, known as the Security Council, will hold talks. This year, the Security Council talks will be led by President Obama. He decided that the focus of the talks should be reducing nuclear weapons in all countries that

have them. Nuclear weapons are very dangerous technology that only a few nations have. **What makes them so dangerous?** (They are capable of killing large numbers of people at one time.) **Do you know which two countries have the most nuclear weapons?** (The United States and Russia.) Obama has vowed to take new steps to reduce the amount of nuclear weapons in our own country. He and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agreed in July to reduce their nuclear weapons by around one third from current levels. Obama had focused on these issues in a speech in April in which he pledged to eventually eliminate nuclear weapons. **Do you understand why he considers this so important?** But the issue is very complicated. So Mr. Obama's task will not be easy. Now, let's take a look at the history of the United Nations. NEXT

ADVANCED

Do you know where the U.N. building,

shown here, is located? On September 15th, the U.N. General Assembly will open its 64th session here, with leaders and diplomats from 192 countries attending. At left is Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations leader, who has held the post since 2007. **Who knows his nationality?** (South Korean.) The session has an ambitious agenda, including coaxing China and other developing nations to accept caps on emissions, reforming U.N. peacekeeping operations, and how to influence governments that recruit child soldiers. The summit of the group's Security Council will begin September 24th, led by President Obama. Its focus this year will be reducing nuclear weapons in all countries that have them. **Who is the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations?** (Susan Rice.) Ms. Rice said

the United States chose nuclear disarmament because it views this "as one of the principal and most pressing challenges of our time." **Do you agree?** Obama has vowed to take new steps to reduce U.S. stockpiles of nuclear weapons. He and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agreed in Moscow in July to reduce their Cold War arsenals of deployed nuclear warheads by around one third from current levels. Obama had focused on these issues in a speech in April, in which he pledged to eventually eliminate nuclear weapons. **Is this a realistic goal? Why or why not?** Complicating matters is that our country is one of only a few that has refused to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Many countries see ratification of the treaty as a test of U.S. commitment to phase out nuclear weapons. Now let's take a look at the history of the United Nations. NEXT

U.N. summit (cont'd)

The United Nations was formed in 1945 to solve international problems.

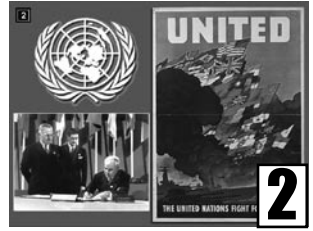
BASIC

After World War One ended in 1918, many leaders wanted to have a way that nations could talk to each other to work for peace. They wanted to keep another war from happening. One of these leaders was U.S. president Woodrow Wilson. He helped create a group called The League of Nations. The group began with 42 members. But one important nation was not one of them — the United States itself. This was because many people and lawmakers in the United States did not want to deal with any other countries after the war. **Why do you think they**

felt this way?

The League of Nations fell apart in the 1930s when another war

broke out in Europe and Asia. **What was it?** (*World War Two.*) Many nations had to join up to fight together, as the poster on the right shows. This led to the creation of the United Nations. The photo at left shows President Harry S Truman and other U.S. officials signing the official U.N. charter in June 1945. NEXT



GENERAL

The idea for the United Nations began after World War One. **When did World War One end?** (*1918.*) Several world leaders wanted an international organization to keep wars like this from ever breaking out again. U.S. president Woodrow Wilson came up with an idea called the League of Nations. But the United States never joined this group, because many members of Congress did not want to be involved in the problems of Europe anymore. **Do you think this was short-sighted thinking?** The League of Nations was not a strong organization, and it failed to stop World War Two. **Do you think the United Nations of today could have stopped this war?**

During World War Two, a group of countries called the Allies came together to fight the Axis Powers. **From your reading, what**

were the three main nations in the Axis?

(*Germany, Italy, and Japan.*) As more and more countries joined the Allied effort, the idea of forming a more permanent group caught on. The poster at right was created during World War Two. **How many flags do you recognize?** President Franklin Roosevelt, who helped set up the United Nations before he died in early 1945, said he hoped the United Nations would “make it possible for the Earth to have peace for 50 years, if not eternity.”

In the summer of 1945, before the war was even over, the United Nations was formed in San Francisco. The picture at left shows U.S. leaders signing the charter, or plan, for how the United Nations would work. The white-haired man standing in this photograph was president at the time. **Do you know his name?** (*Harry S Truman.*) NEXT

ADVANCED

In June of 1945, leaders from around the world gathered in San Francisco, California, to witness the signing of the U.N. Charter. **What is a charter?** (*A document laying out the procedures for a new venture.*) The photograph here shows the United States delegation signing this charter. **Who is the U.S. president shown in this picture?** (*Harry S Truman.*) But this was not the first attempt at creating an international organization to solve problems. President Woodrow Wilson and other world leaders had attempted to form another group called the League of Nations after World War One. This idea was quite popular after the ravages of the war, and 42 nations signed on. But one important nation did not — the United States. Despite Wilson’s best efforts, the U.S. Congress refused to join the League of Nations due to post-war

isolationism sentiment among Americans. **What does “isolationism” mean?** (*When a country tries to disengage from international affairs and focus on itself.*) **Why did this happen in the United States at that time?** (*There was an unwillingness to get further involved in European matters after World War One.*)

Without U.S. support, the League of Nations was severely damaged. Nations began to drop out of it during the 1920s, especially after it became clear that the League was powerless to stop growing threats in Europe and Asia. But when World War Two broke out, and many nations banded together to form the Allies, the idea gained more credibility. **Do you think the United Nations as it is structured today could have prevented World War Two?** NEXT

U.N. summit (cont'd)

This organization faces major challenges immediately.

BASIC

The United Nations does many things. It operates programs that help people around the world. These programs are called humanitarian programs. One of them is UNICEF, which helps children. **Have you ever trick-or-treated for UNICEF?** The World Food Bank helps stop hunger and malnutrition. **What is malnutrition?** (*When people get sick from not eating enough of the right foods.*) The United Nations also has the power to send soldiers to help stop war and other conflicts. These soldiers are called “peacekeepers.” Here, you see how the United Nations is structured.

After members vote on an issue, a smaller group called the U.N.

Security Council must also vote. There are 15 countries in this group. Ten of them change every year, and five stay the same. **Can you read the names of these nations?** Any of these “permanent members” can say no to any vote in the General Assembly. This is called a veto. **Do you think that is fair? Why or why not?** END



GENERAL

At first, there were only 50 countries in the United Nations. Since then, this organization has grown in responsibility as well as size. The United Nations has the ability to send soldiers to troubled spots in the world. These soldiers are called “peacekeepers.” **Where do these peacekeepers come from?** (*From the armies of its member nations.*) But the U.N. does many other things as well. It funds several humanitarian groups around the world — this means that these programs try to help people in need. One of them is UNICEF, which is a group that tries to help children stay healthy and safe. **Have you ever gone trick-or-treating for UNICEF?** Another one, UNESCO, is an organization that helps nations share scientific, educational, and cultural knowledge. The World Food Project, or WFP, tries to get food to

hungry people and eliminate malnutrition. **What is malnutrition?** (*Illness caused by lack of access to healthy food.*)

The diagram at bottom shows how the United Nations works. There are currently 192 member nations in the main body, which is called the General Assembly. Representatives from each of these nations get together and talk about important world issues. After discussion, some of these issues come up for vote. But in order for any vote to pass, it must also pass the 15-member Security Council. Ten of these nations change every year, but five of them are permanent members. Any of these permanent members can veto a vote at any time. **What is a veto?** (*A vote that can overturn a law or ruling.*) **Do you think this veto power is a good idea? Why or why not?** END

ADVANCED

Since 1945, the United Nations has grown in power and responsibility as well as size. From its headquarters, it now administers many different humanitarian programs around the world. UNICEF is the division of the United Nations that works to help children around the globe. UNESCO is an organization that gets countries to share their educational, scientific, and cultural knowledge with each other. The World Food Program is a group that tries to eliminate malnutrition by delivering food, and working with farmers to help them grow crops that can feed them in the future. **Do you know of any other U.N. humanitarian efforts?** (*The World Health Organization, UNHCR, and others.*) In addition, the United Nations sends troops to troubled spots around the globe to act as armed “peacekeepers.”

The United Nations consists of 192 member nations. Ambassadors from these nations gather in the General Assembly to learn about crucial issues around the world, and give their opinions in important votes. In these votes, tiny nations like Andorra and Tuvalu have the same power as large ones. But every vote in the General Assembly must also pass in the U.N. Security Council. This 15-member panel consists of ten revolving countries, and the five permanent members shown here. Each of these permanent member nations holds the power to veto any vote taken by the General Assembly. **Do you think it is fair that these nations have more power than the other 187? Why or why not? How do you think this veto power affects the ability of the United Nations to take action?** END