

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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# The United Nations

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. The United Nations (UN) is an international organization made up of 193 countries that aims to achieve equal rights and peace for all people through international cooperation. It holds the world's nations accountable for their actions and works with them to solve economic, social, cultural and humanitarian crises. The UN is not a world government, but due to the powers vested in its Charter and its unique international character, it can take action on the issues confronting humanity in the 21st century, such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development, human rights, disarmament, terrorism, humanitarian and health emergencies, gender equity, governance, food production and more.

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2. At the end of World War II, the Allied powers had an idea for an international peace organization that would help prevent future conflict. This idea led to the creation of the UN. The US, UK, Soviet Union (Russia) and China first met in October 1944 at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference. Representatives from each country outlined the structure of the UN and sent the outline to their governments for approval. At the Yalta Conference in 1945, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet (Russian) Leader Joseph Stalin created another draft of the proposal. This draft was sent to the San Francisco Conference, where other nations edited and revised it. Delegates at the San Francisco Conference debated the general purposes of the UN, its principles, membership and how to handle amendments to the Founding Charter. There were many clashes of opinions and many negotiations. After two months, the delegates all agreed to the rules and missions laid out in the Founding Charter. The charter was sent back to member countries' governments for final approval. On October 24, 1945, the majority of founding member countries approved the Charter, and the United Nations was born.

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3. The UN has six main branches:

1. The General Assembly discusses international issues, proposes solutions and votes on what action to take. It is made up of one representative from each UN country, who each gets one vote.
2. The Economic and Social Council makes suggestions to the General Assembly about economic, social, health-related and environmental issues. It is responsible for carrying out some of the General Assembly's decisions.
3. The Security Council is the UN's most powerful branch. It is responsible for keeping "international peace and security." It helps settle disputes between countries with sanctions, negotiations and/or peacekeeping troops, which are military personnel provided by member countries that try to enforce peace.
4. The International Court of Justice settles legal disputes between member countries. The court's rulings cannot be challenged.
5. The Trusteeship Council prepares developing territories for nationhood. The Trusteeship Council only meets when the Security Council deems it necessary. It hasn't met since 1994.
6. The Secretariat researches, organizes and carries out UN decisions. The Secretary-General is the head of the Secretariat and acts as the representative for the UN. The Secretary-General serves five-year, renewable terms.

4. The UN has five main missions. The first is maintaining international peace and security. The UN does this by working to prevent conflict, helping parties in conflict make peace, peacekeeping and creating the conditions to allow peace to flourish. The others are promoting sustainable development, protecting human rights, upholding international law and delivering humanitarian aid.

The UN utilizes three strategies to achieve these five missions: peacebuilding, peacekeeping and nation-building. Peacebuilding aims to reduce the risk of nations lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. Peacekeeping is a strategy that helps countries navigate the path from conflict to peace—if the UN and the host country think it's necessary, the UN can deploy peacekeeping troops from around the globe to that country to provide it with security and support. Nation-building is the process of establishing civic order and government functions in countries that are emerging from a period of war or conflict. There are four main steps to nation-building: securing the nation, political reform, economic reconstruction and strengthening legal institutions.

5. The Security Council is the most powerful branch of the UN and is made up of 15 members. The Big Five (the US, the UK, China, Russia and France) are permanent members. The remaining UN countries rotate to fill the other 10 Security Council seats. They serve two-year terms determined by geographical location. Some people criticize the structure of the Security Council, arguing that the Big Five countries have more power than other member countries because they always take part in setting the Security Council's agenda, and they are the only members on the Security Council with veto power. Veto power means that if one of the Big Five members objects to a Security Council proposal, the proposal cannot move forward. Others think that the Big Five steer the UN toward actions that benefit their specific interests and do not accurately reflect the world's diverse politics and beliefs.

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6. While many praise the UN's work, the organization has faced criticism. After the overthrow of Somalia's dictator in 1991, the country erupted in civil war. The UN worked to get the warring parties to agree to a ceasefire and sent peacekeeping troops and humanitarian aid to the country. Some Somali militias didn't like this, so they attacked UN personnel and prevented relief supplies from reaching people who desperately needed them. Refugees and civilians continued to suffer, and, in 1992, an estimated 300,000 refugees died of starvation. Many believe the UN could have done more to help Somali civilians. The UN was also denounced for its inaction during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Genocide refers to acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. In 1994, the Rwandan President was assassinated. During next 100 days, between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Tutsi, an ethnic minority, were killed by Rwanda's Hutu majority. While the UN deployed a few dozen peacekeeping troops to Rwanda, it largely stayed out of the conflict. The Rwandan Genocide is one of the worst genocides in recent history; the UN has since acknowledged its failures in this conflict.

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7. United Nations agencies help people across the globe. The World Health Organization (WHO) works to identify and prevent international diseases. It establishes health programs all over the world, and it helped eradicate smallpox. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) promotes international exchange of ideas. It is best known for protecting natural and historical sites. For example, the Egyptian pyramids were once threatened by the construction of a major highway, but UNESCO helped put a stop the project. The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) helps millions of refugees and asylum seekers every year. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) works for the rights of children and has saved 90 million children since 1990. These organizations, and dozens more, allow the United Nations to improve the lives of millions of people. As of 2016, the United Nations had facilitated more than 170 peace settlements and promoted the adoption of approximately 600 international treaties. These resolutions include post-war agreements, international sanctions, peace treaties and more. The UN has also blazed the trail for acknowledging and protecting human rights. To date, the United Nations has won 11 Nobel Peace Prizes.

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