

Your Shortcut to... The United Nations

It's been helping solve global problems for almost 80 years, it brings nations together to keep the peace, and it can be both powerful and puzzling. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to the United Nations—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce, I was watching the news the other day....

Wait, hold up—you don't just listen to Squiz Kids?

Of course I do! But I do like to get lots of different perspectives on the news. Anyway, I was watching the news, and there were stories about climate change, conflict, and even food shortages. And in all of those stories, they kept saying the United Nations was involved. It got me thinking—what actually is the United Nations?

Oh, Christie, that's an easy one! The United Nations is... um... well, it's a whole heap of countries... from all around the world... that get together and, you know, do... stuff. Important stuff. In a united fashion ...

[laughing] Well, that's kind of what I already knew!

See? I'm a genius. We've covered it! What's next?

Not so fast, Bryce. The thing is, they're involved in solving some of the biggest problems the world is facing today, like climate change and helping countries after disasters. So we should probably know a bit more about them, don't you think?

Yeah... probably. It sounds like the kind of thing we should understand if they're sorting out all the serious stuff! Today, we're going to discover what the United Nations is, how it works, and why it matters—even to kids like you listening right now. Buckle up, as we dive into the world of international teamwork, diplomacy, and... maybe a bit more than just 'doing stuff.'

Listen carefully - there's a S'Quiz at the end!

WHAT

So, Bryce, you've got family right?

Yes, there's my wife and our two kids.

Anyone else?

Oh yeah, there's also our parents, siblings, nieces, nephews... It's a big crew.

And do you all agree on everything?

[laughing] Definitely not!

Now, imagine there are almost 200 of you, and you've all got to agree on something really important—like what to have for Christmas dinner. Think you could do it?

Oof! That's asking a lot, Christie.

Exactly, Bryce. Well, there are almost 200 countries in the world, and it's super hard for them to agree on big things too! After World War II—way back in 1945—everyone was sick of fighting and wanted to make sure a world war never happened again. So, lots of countries decided to come together and try to keep the world at peace. And that's how, on October 24, 1945, the United Nations was born! Today, we even celebrate it as the UN's birthday.

That's right, Christie. There were just 50 member countries at first, but today—wait for it—there are 193!

And the main mission? Keeping the peace around the world.

But, hang on—almost 200 countries working together? That sounds... impossible! How do they even manage that?

Great question! Every country in the UN has signed something called the United Nations Charter. It's basically a contract that spells out all the rules and goals: to maintain peace and security and to protect human rights. Human rights are basic rights and freedoms that apply to all humans regardless of your background, beliefs, or where you live. And here's the cool part—no matter how big or small a country is, every single one in the United Nations gets an equal voice in something called the General Assembly.

Did you say "assembly"? Ugh, I hate assemblies. Everyone has to sit still, be quiet, and listen to boring speeches...

[laughing] Well, I hate to break it to you, Bryce, but that's kind of what the General Assembly is—except it's way more exciting. Oh, and it's in loads of different languages, so people wear headphones to hear translations into the language they speak. The UN General Assembly runs from September to December every year!

Woah! That's one long assembly!

Yep, but it's definitely not boring! They talk about huge topics like the environment, climate change, human rights, war, hunger, the protection of the world's culture and heritage. Pretty important stuff.

So, it's like the biggest club in the world, where everyone has a say and helps out when needed?

Exactly!

Hmm... well, that does sound more interesting than I thought. But, Christie, how does it all actually work?

HOW

So, Bryce, we mentioned the General Assembly, where representatives from almost every country gather at the UN Headquarters in New York City each September.

Yep.

And, of course, every assembly needs someone to lead it—someone to keep things moving, keep order...

And announce when it's time for lunch, obviously!

[laughing] Yes, that too! The person who leads the UN is called the Secretary-General. Every five years, the General Assembly vote to elect a new Secretary-General. It's their job to manage the day-to-day running of the UN, report on what's happening around the world, and most importantly, help stop disputes and arguments before they turn into something bigger.

Woah! That sounds like a huge responsibility.

It really is. The current Secretary-General is a man named António Guterres, from the country of Portugal.

But what happens if there's something too big or urgent for one person to handle?

Well, they've got that covered too. That's where the United Nations Security Council steps in. It's a smaller, more powerful group within the UN that's responsible for maintaining international peace and security. There are 15 members in total—5 permanent members: France, the UK, the United States, China, and Russia. Plus, 10 other countries that get voted in every two years.

But hang on—some of those permanent members don't always agree with each other, right?

You're spot on, Bryce. That's one of the criticisms of the UN. Those five permanent members have a lot of power. In fact, they each have something called "veto power." That means if 14 countries on the Security Council vote to do something, but one of those permanent members says no, the whole plan gets stopped.

So one country can stop the whole show? That doesn't sound fair...

It's tricky, for sure. Some people think that having those permanent members with veto power makes things a bit uneven. But the Security Council's main goal is to prevent

conflicts and keep the peace, even when the world's biggest players don't always agree. It may not be perfect but it's the best we've got.

I can't imagine how tricky it must be to get almost 200 countries to agree on anything! But, Christie, this all sounds like stuff adults would worry about. How does it affect us? Why should Squiz Kids care?

WHY

So, why should Squiz Kids care about the United Nations? Well, here's something super important: the UN created something called The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which outlines what every kid in the world should have and be able to do.

Oh yeah? Like what?

For starters, things like having clean water, nutritious food, and a safe environment. Plus, the right to go to school and get a good education.

That all makes sense. Clean water, good food, a safe place to live... but what else?

Here's the fun part—the right to play and to rest!

[excited] Now that is a rule I can get behind! Playing and resting should definitely be on every kid's list!

Exactly! The Convention on the Rights of the Child makes sure that kids everywhere are protected and get the basic things they need to grow up healthy and happy. You've probably also heard of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

I have. They're 17 goals the UN has to end poverty, take care of the environment and fight inequality by 2030. But how does the UN actually help with all that?

Good question! The UN has different organisations that focus on making sure these rights are upheld. For example, UNICEF works to keep kids healthy and safe—whether it's delivering food, making sure kids get vaccines, or helping them get an education.

So they're looking out for kids right now?

Yes, and for the future too! The World Health Organisation makes sure people around the world stay healthy, while UNESCO helps protect important places in the world of historical or environmental or cultural significance and ensures kids everywhere can go to school.

So they're not just helping kids—they're looking after the whole planet, right?

Exactly. The work these organisations do isn't just about today—it's about making sure kids have a safe and healthy future, with things like clean air, clean water, and protected places to live and learn.

Wow. I didn't realise the UN did all that. They're pretty much looking out for everyone—from kids to grown-ups, and even future generations!

That's right! The UN's work affects everyone—whether it's helping people in emergencies, fighting disease, or tackling climate change. And that's why kids should care. The UN is helping build a better world for all of us.

So, next time I hear about the UN in the news, I won't just think of a bunch of countries arguing—I'll know they're working hard to help kids and to make the world a better place.

THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening..."

1. How many member countries are there in the United Nations today? (193)"
2. In which city is The United Nations headquarters found? (New York City)
3. How many permanent member countries are there on the UN Security Council? (Five)

Well, that's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, where, when, why and how of The United Nations. Teachers, there are excellent classroom resources related to this topic on the Squiz Kids website and there's a link to them in the episode notes.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.