



**United Nations**  
Visitors Services  
New York

**Teach  
the UN**

Bringing the UN to Your Classroom!

# ART OF THE UNITED NATIONS



*Untitled (Mural For Peace) ©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

# ART OF THE UNITED NATIONS

## Overview:

- The United Nations Gifts collection is a group of artworks, historical objects and architectural components that have been officially donated to the United Nations by Member States, foundations, and individual donors since 1950.
- The collection represents a diversity of cultures and periods throughout history.
- The art is of high aesthetic quality and is symbolically appropriate, representing Member States while maintaining relevance to the work of the United Nations.

Source: [UN Gifts](#)

## Grade:

- 5 - 12

## Subjects:

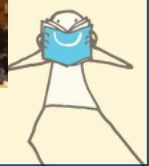
- Visual Arts; Social Studies; Modern History

## Keywords:

- Abstract Art; Figurative Art; Painting; Sculpture; Mural; Mosaic



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## **Goals:**

- Understand and explain some of the ideals of the United Nations.
- Recognize, describe, analyze, and interpret the messages and functions of the art, especially as they relate to the work of the United Nations.
- Compare and contrast artwork that address similar themes using a variety of techniques, styles, and media.

## **National Core Arts Standards Addressed:**

### **Responding:**

- Explain how the method of display, the location, and the experience of an artwork influence how it is perceived and valued.
- Interpret art by analyzing characteristics of form and structure, contextual information, subject matter, visual elements and use of media to identify the ideas conveyed.
- Consider how relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas within the artwork.

## Connecting:

- Analyze how art reflects histories, traditions, and cultures.
- Consider how responses to art change depending on knowledge of the time and place in which it was made.
- Compare uses of art in different societal, cultural and historical settings and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.

This resource features an array of activities that can be customized for specific grade levels and classes, to be completed in one or two 45-minute sessions.



Mosaic Replica of the *Dove of Peace* ©UN Photo





## Historical Background of the United Nations:

*Check out the “UN History” resources on our website for more information.*

- The idea of the United Nations was born during World War II.
- The name “United Nations” was coined by United States 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.
- In 1945, delegates of 50 countries met in San Francisco with the goal to preserve peace and help build a better world. On 25 June 1945, the UN Charter was adopted unanimously by all the delegations to guide the work of the new organization.
- 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.

According to its Charter, the UN aims do the following:

- Save succeeding generations from the scourge 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 life in larger freedom.

Sources: [Essential UN](#); [History of the UN](#)



*Titans* ©UN Photo



## The UN Emblem and Flag:

- The original UN emblem was created by a team of designers, led by Oliver Lincoln Lundquist, for the 1945 San Francisco conference.
- The idea was to create a simple but effective design that would fit in a round pin worn by the delegates to the conference.
- The design is a map of the world centered on the North Pole, inscribed in a wreath made of olive tree branches.
- The flag depicts the emblem of the UN in white, centered on a blue background.

Source: [UN Flag](#)



## The UN Emblem and Flag:

### Discuss:

#### Responding:

- Describe the flag. What colors are used? What objects or elements are present?
- What do you think each element symbolizes?
- Do you think the UN flag is a good or effective design? Why or why not?

#### Creating:

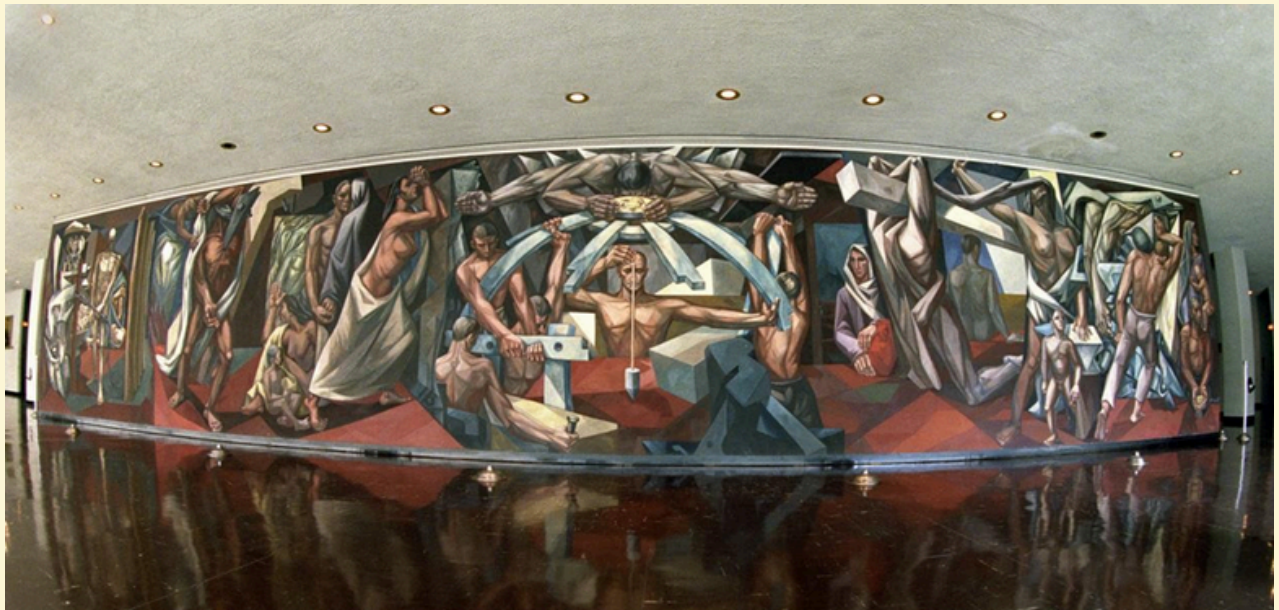
- If you could design a new emblem and flag for the UN, how would they look? Consider the colors, shapes, symbols and composition.





## Perceiving and Analyzing a Work of Art:

- This is a mural titled Mankind's Struggle for a Lasting Peace, painted by the Spanish artist José Vela Zanetti in 1953. It was one of the first works of art installed in the United Nations Secretariat building, and it is painted on a wall that measures 10' x 60'10". In the artist's words, it "symbolizes the essential purposes of the United Nations".



*Mankind's Struggle For a Lasting Peace* ©UN Photo



## Perceiving and Analyzing a Work of Art:

### Discuss:

- What materials do you think this is made of?
- How big do you think it is? In what kind of setting is it displayed?
- What colors, shapes and figures can you see?
- Where are your eyes drawn to first? What is depicted?
- After the brief introduction, divide students into groups, each tasked with analyzing one third of the mural. Ask them to study their section for 5 - 7 minutes, discussing new details that they notice and preparing a few observations to share with the class.
  - What is being depicted in their portion of the mural?
  - What observations can they share about the figures, colors and overall composition?



## Section 1:

- This is the first section of the mural on the left-hand side, which represents the destruction and chaos of the World Wars.
- Students can analyze the poses of the figures and the harsh, expressive style in which they are represented.



©UN Photo





## Section 2:

- The center of the mural depicts a large four-armed figure above, representing the four corners of the world, holding the emblem of the United Nations with two hands.
- The figures below symbolize reconstruction after the wars, as they build the dome of the General Assembly Hall. Students can consider how the composition changes in the center of the mural by identifying the focal point and the new objects and materials depicted in this section.



©UN Photo





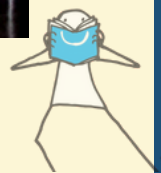
### Section 3:

- The final section of the mural, on the right-hand side, depicts healthier and stronger figures living in prosperity after the creation of the United Nations.
- Students can compare the poses of the figures with those of the first section and look for symbols such as the grain held by the man in the lower-right corner.

Source: [UN Guided Tours](#)



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## Comparison 1: Non-Violence and War & Peace

- *Non-Violence* is a bronze sculpture that depicts a 45-calibre revolver with its barrel tied in a knot.
- The artist, Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd, created this work in 1980 after learning of the murder of his friend, John Lennon.
- Replicas of the sculpture are installed in many countries; this one was purchased by the government of Luxembourg and was offered to the UN in 1989. The sculpture, measuring 79" x 44" x 50", was once described as "a symbol that encapsulates, in a few simple curves, the greatest prayer of man: that which asks not for victory, but for peace".

Source: [UN Gifts](#)



*Non-Violence* ©UN Photo



## Comparison 1: Non-Violence and War & Peace

- *War and Peace* are two large murals measuring 46' x 34', painted by Brazilian artist Candido Portinari beginning in 1952.
- They were painted specifically for the United Nations and hang outside the General Assembly. In these paintings, Portinari chose to represent how war and peace affect everyday people.
- While figures like the four knights of the Apocalypse can be seen in the War mural, his focus is on civilians.
- In 2015, then-Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said of the murals: "*War and Peace* are more than magnificent works of art – they are Portinari's call to action. Thanks to him, all leaders who enter the United Nations see the terrible toll of war – and the universal dream for peace".
- Students can compare how these artists used very different materials to create large works about peace.

Source: [UN Secretary-General](#)



*War and Peace* ©UN Photo



## Comparison 1: Non-Violence and War & Peace

### Discuss:

- What materials do you think this is made of?
- How big do you think it is? In what kind of setting is it displayed?
- What colors, shapes, and figures can you see?
- Where are your eyes drawn to first? What is depicted?
- What do you think these artworks are trying to say? In your opinion, is one message clearer than the other?
- How would you communicate a message of peace using the arts?





## Comparison 2: The Golden Rule and the Moroccan Mosaic Panel

- *The Golden Rule* mosaic was made in 1985 by the Coop Mosaic Artistico Veneziano, and is a copy of Norman Rockwell's 1961 painting with the same title.
- It measures 10'6" x 9'. Rockwell once stated: "Like everyone else I am concerned with the world situation and like everyone else, I'd like to contribute something to help. The only way I can contribute is through my pictures... I suddenly got the idea that the Golden Rule – Do unto others as You Would Have them Do Unto You – was the subject I was looking for. Right away I got intensely excited. But how could I picture the Golden Rule? I began to make all sorts of sketches".



*The Golden Rule* ©UN Photo



## Comparison 2: The Golden Rule and the Moroccan Mosaic Panel

- The Mosaic Panel is a 1963 gift from Morocco; it measures 187 x 97  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 6 in and was made in Fez.
- It features three inscriptions: the one on the wood frame reads: "Oh, mankind! We created you from a male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that we may know each other. The most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you" (Surah al-Hujurat 49:13, Quran).
- The inscription in the red mosaic circle reads "Charter of the United Nations", and the text on the green portion of the mosaic is the Preamble of the United Nations Charter translated into Arabic.
- Students can compare each artwork's message promoting righteousness, represented in different languages and artistic styles, but using the same medium of mosaic

Source: [UN Gifts](#)



Moroccan Mosaic Panel ©UN Photo



## Comparison 2: The Golden Rule and the Moroccan Mosaic Panel

### Discuss:

- What materials do you think this is made of?
- How big do you think it is? In what kind of setting is it displayed?
- What colors, shapes and figures can you see?
- What do you think these artworks are trying to say?
- How do they convey their message?
- How do you think these messages speak to different audiences?
- Do you think these artworks mean different things to different people?
- How would you create art with a similar message for your community?



Experience this art in person and discover other famous works at the United Nations! Book a guided art tour for your class:

<https://www.un.org/en/visit/tour>



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For more information:

UN News:

<https://news.un.org/en/spotlight/un-art-and-gifts>

UN Photos:

<https://media.un.org/photo/en/collections/united-nations-headquarters/art>

UN Gifts:

<https://www.un.org/ungifts/>

For more information on Teach the UN:

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

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