The League of Nations &
The United Nations (1920-Present)
You Mean Countries Try to Cooperate Sometimes?

International Organizations
In the 20th century, many international organizations formed. These organizations were designed to help member countries achieve a common goal. Two examples of these organizations were the League of Nations (1920-1946) and the United Nations (1945 – Present). A major goal of both of these organizations was to promote peace and prevent war through diplomacy. Though their goals were the same, the structures and functions of the two groups were very different.

League of Nations
The League of Nations was established at the end of World War I as part of the Treaty of Versailles. It was the only one of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points adopted in the treaty. At its start, member nations agreed that they would solve their problems through diplomacy within the League, instead of going to war. Unfortunately, the League of Nations faced many challenges which made it ineffective. It was officially dissolved in 1946, at the end of World War II.

Challenges for the League of Nations
Even though the League of Nations was the idea of the United States president, the United States did not join the League. This was a problem because the United States was a world power and would have influenced some of the decisions made by the League. Also, the League did not have a military force of its own to enforce its decisions (see below in the examples of Manchuria and Ethiopia). Lastly, to pass a resolution, the League had to have unanimous agreement. This led to failure in implementing many ideas, as only one country had to vote against and not allow the League to act.

In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, a province in northern China. Both Japan and China were members of the League of Nations, but the League could do nothing to stop Japan. Instead of cooperating, Japan left the League of Nations. Four years later, in 1935, Italy invaded fellow League member Ethiopia. Once again, the League was not able to do anything to stop Italy. These conflicts proved that diplomacy without a means of enforcement was not effective for peacekeeping.

United Nations
After World War II, another international organization was created to help prevent future wars. The United Nations (UN), formed in 1945, addressed some of the larger problems of the League of Nations. For example, the UN has the ability to deploy a military force. In addition to peacekeeping efforts, it also makes decisions on human rights and economic policies. Originally there were 51 member nations. Since 2011, membership has grown to 193 member nations.
Structure of the UN
The UN has a General Assembly where representatives of all member countries can vote on issues. There is also a fifteen member Security Council, the branch in charge of keeping international peace. The Council makes decisions about military action on behalf of the UN, recommends the appointment of the UN Secretary General, and can authorize sanctions on nations. Of the fifteen members of the Security Council, there are five permanent members: the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia and China. The other ten members of the Council are selected every two years from among the member nations in the General Assembly.

Key Vocabulary
International organizations: a collection of nations working together to reach a common goal
Diplomacy: political interaction between nations typically using discussions, treaties, and negotiations
Dissolve: to close down or dismiss

Fourteen Points: U.S. President Wilson's plan to keep peace after World War I
Resolution: the action of solving a problem or dispute
Authorize: to give official permission
General Assembly: meeting place for all members of the United Nations
Function: to work or operate in a particular way
Treaty of Versailles: treaty that ended World War I
Security Council: branch of the UN which is in charge of keeping international peace
Sanction: a penalty for disobeying a law or rule

Quick Review
1. What improvements were made in the United Nations that were not in the League of Nations?
   A. The UN can send military aid to enforce decisions.
   B. Countries can be removed permanently from the UN.
   C. The United States is not a member of the UN.
   D. Members can choose not to comply with UN decisions.

2. The main goal of both of these organizations was --
   A. to use diplomacy to keep peace
   B. to ensure free trade around the world
   C. to spread democracy to all nations
   D. to help colonies gain their independence

3. According to the cartoon, “Gap in the Bridge,” what was a major weakness of the League of Nations?
   A. Its members were lazy.
   B. There weren’t enough members.
   C. The United States did not join.
   D. It had too much power.


Connection to Today
Do you think it is possible for countries to resolve their differences peacefully? Why or why not? Can you think of any examples when the UN was or could be effective in handling modern crises?

Resources
ABC-CLIO
- The League of Nations
- United Nations