

‘What is a country?’ activity for Year 5 & 6 students



This activity has been designed to engage students in Years 5-6 with issues facing unrecognised states around the world, and to encourage them to think differently about global governance. It explores communities that are excluded from the formal international system and raises questions around statehood. It offers an opportunity for students to develop public speaking skills, group work and critical thinking. The activity is designed for students in Years 5-6 but could be adapted for KS3 students.¹

Associated materials:

- Information Sheets on Kurdistan, Somaliland, Taiwan and Tibet

Equipment

- Materials for making posters
- Whiteboard and pen/ blackboard and chalk

Introduction to the activity

This activity is designed to be delivered in a 1 hour lesson. First, students are asked to think about what a country is and have discussions in pairs/ small groups. These ideas are pooled by the class teacher before introducing the main activity.

Students are then split into four groups of equal size. Each group is assigned an unrecognised country/ nation (Kurdistan, Somaliland, Taiwan, Tibet) and given an information sheet that provides a summary of that community. The groups design a poster about their community and prepare a presentation. Students then give short presentations (3-5 minutes) to the rest of the class about their community. Following the presentations, the teacher leads a class discussion on the differences and similarities between the communities. An extension activity is also included below.

¹ These materials have been developed by Prof. Fiona McConnell (University of Oxford) and Dr Liam Saddington (University of Cambridge), and the UNPO Secretariat. Funding for trialling these materials was provided by a Ray Y Gildea Jr Award from the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers). These materials have been developed in conjunction with a simulation activity for KS5 students. This activity enables teachers to run role-play debating exercises on issues of environmental justice, human rights and conflict resolution (<https://unpo.org/section/2/20>). Loosely based on Model United Nations simulations, the activity sees students represent non-state actors through the ‘Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation’ (UNPO; www.unpo.org).

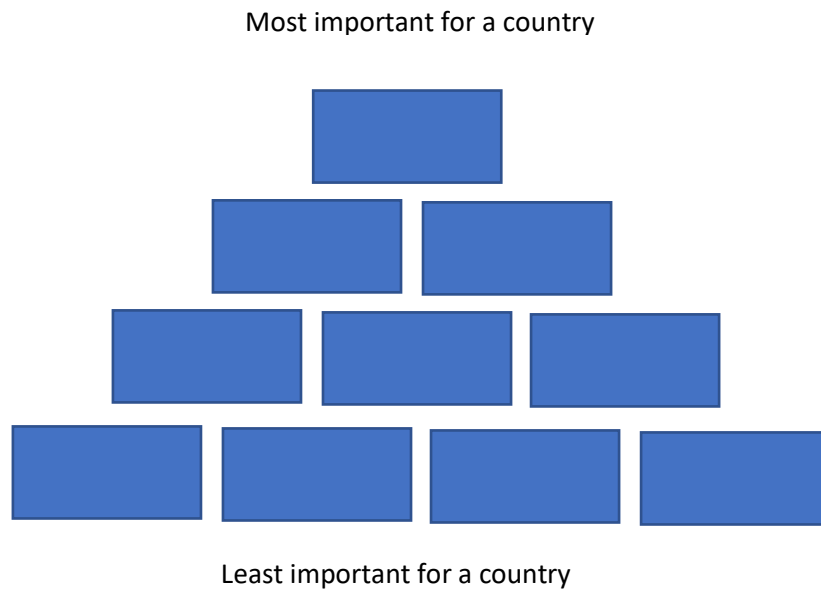
Lesson Plan:

Time	Activity	Description	Resources
5 minutes	Pair/ small group discussion	<p>Introduce to students that today we will be thinking about countries. Students should discuss three questions:</p> <p>What is a country? What do you need to be a country? Can anybody start their own country?</p> <p>Give the example of their own country. What makes their country a country? Students should be prepared to share ideas with the class after the discussion in pairs</p>	None needed
5 minutes	Group discussion	<p>As a class, collate ideas on what every country should/could have.</p> <p>e.g. Countries must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A populationA governmentRecognition by other countriesLand <p>Highlight the importance of recognition by other countries. A useful example comparison is that of the classroom. Whilst pupils may act as a population, the teacher as a government and the classroom as land, the classroom would not be recognised by other countries.</p>	Whiteboard and pen

25-30 minutes	Introduction of activity and presentation preparation	<p>Introduce the idea of the United Nations. Some nations/communities may be unrecognised and excluded from the United Nations, but they continue to act like or look like countries. They may have a flag, a government or even their own football teams.</p> <p>During this session, pupils will be thinking about some of these communities that are not recognised.</p> <p>Students should be split into four groups of equal size. Each group is given one community to represent. Students need to prepare a short presentation to teach the rest of the class about their community. They may design a poster to help their presentation but everybody in the group must speak. Students will have five minutes to present.</p> <p>Five minutes before students present the teacher should ask students to have a rehearsal.</p> <p><i>Younger students may need longer for this section. If so, reduce the presentation time to 3 minutes and extend this activity by 5 minutes.</i></p>	<p>Information sheets on Tibet, Taiwan, Somaliland and Kurdistan</p> <p>Large sheets of paper, scissors, glue and pencils</p>
15-20 minutes	Presentations	<p>Students should present to the rest of the class.</p> <p>Although 20 minutes is scheduled, presentations may be shorter. If so, extend the next section.</p>	
5 minutes	Class discussion	<p>Students discuss what they have learned from the presentations. Prompt questions might include:</p> <p>What do these communities have in common?</p> <p>What differences are there?</p> <p>Do they think these communities should be countries or not?</p>	

Extension Activity: Country Building Blocks

This activity is designed as an extension to the session. Students cut out the 16 cards on the following sheet and discuss which blocks are most important for a country. Below is a suggestion of how students could arrange the cards.



Country Building Blocks

Government	Recognition from other countries	Land	Courts
Religion	Territory	Army	Elections
Economy	King or Queen	National Anthem	Schools
Hospitals	Flag	Currency	Language