

Grade 8

Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum: Social Studies

Students will continue the process of:

- Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries
- Applying Disciplinary Tools and Concepts
- Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence
- Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

Grade 8

Social Studies – United Nations Project

Students will participate in a class discussion and conduct independent research about the life skills Ralph Bunche developed because of the influences of others, his life experiences, and the obstacles he had to overcome as a youth. They will then construct a piece of writing, art, or a presentation that illustrates what they have learned about Bunche.

Students will be invited to participate in a mock United Nations Session.

Model United Nations Activity

In this activity, students will conduct a "model United Nations General Assembly" session. The activity is designed to acquaint students with issues in international relations and the structure, aims and procedures used by the United Nations to resolve disputes between nations. Students will learn about the early history of the United Nations by examining the contributions made by Ralph Bunche to the organization during the first 25 years of its existence.

BIOGRAPHY

Ralph Johnson Bunche (1903-1971), an African American scholar, educator, Africanist, and diplomat, achieved national and international prominence in 1949 after negotiating armistice agreements between Israel and 4 Arab states, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. A political scientist, professor and diplomat, Bunche advocated the peaceful resolution of conflict and championed the cause of justice and equality for all people regardless of race or economic status and played a major role in decolonizing much of the colonial world. Bunche was appointed Undersecretary-General for Special Political Affairs at the United Nations, the highest post ever held by an American in the world organization.

Born in modest circumstances and orphaned at an early age, Ralph Bunche grew up under the guidance of his maternal grandmother, Mrs. Lucy Taylor Johnson. Overcoming economic difficulties and racial prejudice to excel in academics, he graduated valedictorian both at high school and at UCLA, winning a scholarship for graduate work at Harvard University. At Harvard he became the first African American to receive a Ph.D in political science in the United States. Extensive field research for a doctoral dissertation on colonialism in Africa and scholarly investigation of international race relations culminated in the classic book *A World View of Race* (1936). Later, he served as chief researcher and writer for Gunnar Myrdal's pivotal study of American race relations, *An American Dilemma* (1944).

Bunche's career as a scholar and civil rights activist began at Howard University in 1928. He reorganized and headed the political science department at the university and became one of the leaders of a small cadre of radical Black intellectuals whom W.E.B. Du Bois labeled the "Young Turks". Bunche was the youngest member of this group which included Sterling Brown, E. Franklin Frazier, Abram Harris and Emmet Dorsey. These men represented a new generation of African American intellectuals who approached the "Negro problem" from a perspective that was radically different from that of their predecessors.

Bunche and the other "Young Turks" argued during the '30s and '40s that "focusing on issues of class, not race" was the key to solving the "Negro problem". DuBois and other older Black intellectuals did not share this point of view. Even during the Great Depression, Du Bois favored reform through racial solidarity. In contrast, Bunche's approach to race relations was essentially integrationist -- a perspective that would become the hallmark of Black leaders such as A. Philip Randolph and Martin Luther King, Jr. Later, during the Civil Rights Movement of the '60s, this position would also set Bunche apart from, and sometimes in opposition to, Black nationalists such as Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael.

Between 1931 and 1943, he and his wife -- Ruth Ethel Harris -- had three children, Joan Harris Bunche, Jane Johnson Bunche Pierce, and Ralph Johnson Bunche, Jr.

In 1941, he moved from Howard University to wartime service at the Office of Strategic Services. From the OSS he was appointed to a senior post at the State Department during World War II. As advisor to the US delegation to the San Francisco Conference, Bunche played a key role in drafting Chapters XI and XII of the United Nations Charter.

Bunche joined the UN Secretariat in 1946 as director of the Trusteeship Division. In this position he was responsible for overseeing the administration of the UN Trust Territories and their progress towards self-government and independence.

Bunche's successful mediation of the Palestine conflict, which resulted in the signing of Armistice Agreements in 1949 between Israel and four Arab states, was a feat of international diplomacy that is unparalleled in the long history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It won him the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize, the first time that a person of color had been so honored.

During the McCarthy era in the 1950's, the search to identify Communist sympathizers in international organizations led to Bunche. His attackers focused on his involvement with the National Negro Congress, an organization he helped found to advance the common interests of Black and white workers. Bunche was eventually cleared of all charges and continued his work at the UN. He played significant peacekeeping and mediation roles in major international conflicts, including the Suez War of 1956; the Congo crisis; conflicts in Yemen, Cyprus and Kashmir and the Six-Day War of 1967. He is considered the "Father of Peacekeeping" because he conceived and implemented many of the techniques and strategies for international peacekeeping operations that are still in use today by the UN.

Bunche spoke out against racism in the US, though his position at the UN did not allow him to publicly criticize US policy, and he was criticized for doing so. In the 1960's, he actively supported Martin Luther King, Jr's non-violent tactics and marched with King in the 1963 March on Washington and again in 1965 in the Selma-to-Montgomery Voting Rights March.

In the decades following his Nobel Peace Prize award, Bunche became one of the most revered public figures in America and the world. President Truman asked him to become Assistant Secretary of State, and President Kennedy approached him about joining the administration as Secretary of State. In each instance, he declined in favor of continuing his work as Undersecretary-General at the UN. He was also offered a full professorship at Harvard University and was awarded 69 honorary doctorates from America's leading universities. His numerous awards include the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest award the country can give its citizens.

Successfully fostering decolonization, negotiating conflicts and championing human rights and peace in the world in collaboration with Eleanor Roosevelt, he came to be identified as the "embodiment of the United Nations actively, but pragmatically, pursuing its high ideals."

Beyond UN accomplishments, Bunche was a symbol of racial progress, as the first African American to cross over in a field other than sports and entertainment. Bunche always maintained his modesty and constantly reminded his Black audiences that he was not free as long as they were not free. Yet in many ways he had risen above race.

Today his name is seldom mentioned in American history books, the media, the academic community or the African-American community -- even in the corridors of the UN. But the legacy of his work lives on in the UN and wherever people fight for equality, justice and human dignity. Perhaps the final words of Sir Brian Urquhart's book *Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey* best summarize the essence of Bunche's contribution.

In his journey ... through the universities and the capitals, the continents and the conflicts, of the world, Bunche left a legacy of principle, fairness, creative innovation, and solid achievement which deeply impressed his contemporaries and inspired his successors. His memory lives on, especially in the long struggle for human dignity and against racial discrimination and bigotry, and the growing effectiveness of the United Nations in resolving conflicts and keeping the peace. As Ralph Johnson Bunche would have wished, that is his living memorial.

The Making of a Leader: Research Worksheet

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Using library and internet resources, answer the questions below in as much detail as you can. Be sure to record facts accurately and supply detailed answers.

1. Ralph Bunche grew up in three very different cities. Describe the type of neighborhood and people Bunche was exposed to in these various neighborhoods.

Detroit:

Albuquerque:

Los Angeles:

2. Describe the role Bunche's grandmother played in shaping his personality and values. Give specific examples, quotations, and descriptions of incidents.

3. In what ways was Bunche directly affected by racism? Find at least 3 specific examples of these in your research. Describe the incidents in detail.

4. The following comments were made to Bunche by his family members.

How do you think each of these people shaped Bunche as a person?

Bunche's mother said, "My boy, don't ever let anything take away your hope and faith and dreams."

Bunche's grandmother said, " Our family is as fine as any on earth. We are poor in money, all right, but we're all rich in character, spirit, and decency and we believe in God. That's a lot more important than money—or color."

Directions: Consider the second part of the research to be a sort of "scavenger hunt". Find information about the questions below. Again, be as specific as possible with your answers.

5. What were some of the various jobs Bunche had as a youth to help support himself and his family?

6. What was the precious memento that Bunche's father gave to him as a child? Why do you think Bunche cherished it so?

7. Which teacher did Bunche say had the most effect on him growing up. Why?

Web sites concerning Ralph Bunche

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1950/bunche/facts/>

<https://www.notablebiographies.com/Br-Ca/Bunche-Ralph.html>

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/ralph-bunche-on-the-united-nations-video>