

UN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION, THE UNITED NATIONS AT A GLANCE, UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATIONS, NEW YORK NEW YORK, 2012. ISBN: 978-92-1-101252-1

Review by:

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At one hundred and sixty pages, the title The United Nations at a Glance is something of an understatement. The primer, put together by the UN's Department of Public Information is aimed at high school students and teachers and meant to give the reader a general feel for what exactly the United Nations is and what it does. It is divided into seven sections, which detail the creation of the UN, the main objectives of the UN, and information for readers who wish to get involved. The primer also uses information boxes called "Focus On" and "Did you know?" "Focus On" sections use real world examples to further the point of the chapter, while the "Did You Know?" boxes provide interesting secondary information about the topics. Each chapter ends with a "Test Your Knowledge" sheet to test the reader's knowledge of the content.

Approaching this book, as a future educator and former high school student, this primer is something of a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the information it gives is both well written and fairly well organized. The writers kept their target demographic in mind while compiling the information, and the wording never feels too technical or too dumbed down. Everything in the main text is both well organized and well written. The book's use of recent examples of UN involvement makes it easier for students to understand what it is the UN does by mentioning things they have probably heard about in the news, such as the "Focus On" that talks about the civil war in Libya. Although the "Did you Know?" information is not essential to understanding the text, for the most part it is good supplemental text and does stay with the reader.

That being said, the "Focus On" and "Did you know?" sections suffer from poor placement and occasionally lack of focus. A particularly jarring example comes from the beginning of the book. More time is spent discussing the UN's emblem, flag and anthem (or lack thereof) than is on stating the main purposes of the UN, which is instead relegated to a small "Did You Know?" box. The problem with such boxes is that many high school readers will skip over such sections, thinking them to be unimportant to the main text. At the same time, at certain places there are too many supplementary boxes crowded together, and distract from the main text. A few times, two or three supplementary boxes come directly after one other and awkwardly break up the main text. Still, there are more affective uses of the supplementary boxes than negative and the problems can be easily overlooked.

As a teacher's resource, the primer does a fairly good job of providing extra materials for the classroom. The best of this comes at the end of the primer. Here, the book provides the readers with a list of dates, an FAQ, and a surprisingly large index of references and outside resources. The authors were also good enough to provide a list of resources for students who want to get involved in the UN. They even supply the readers with a link to Job Opportunities within the UN. The Test Your Knowledge sections on the other hand, vary in quality. Some questions are basic and easily answered ("Does the United Nations have its own army?") to more complex and vague questions that challenge the students to make their own inferences on the text (Why do you think it is important for the United Nations to publish information that can help people and potentially saves lives on the Internet?). It would have been a great idea to have added, at the end of each chapter, a brief summary of what was covered in the section. Other than that, I would say that as a teacher's guide these sections are helpful and informative.

Overall, The United Nations at a Glance is an excellent and informative addition to a teacher's resource collection. It is a concise and well organized primer, and is an easy read for students looking to learn more about the United Nations. While there are some points where the writing is awkward and the supplementary text gets in the way of the primary text, the overall book is very well done. I especially recommend the Additional Resources sections, which believe to be a great guide for students looking to get involved with the UN. Although the book did not go into depth about the actions of the United Nations, it provides students with an insightful peak into the world of the UN.