

International Governmental Organizations with Free Content for K-12 teachers

Most of the major organizations now have sections of their sites dedicated to students who want more information. They are much better than they were even a few years ago. Some have just information. Some have complete lesson plans and activities. Overall, these sites are useful ways to introduce students to the organizations that manage the international political system.

United Nations:

United Nations Cyber School Bus:

<http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/>

This is the main UN source of information for K-12 students and teachers. It is designed to be a portal that gives you access to a wide range of information provided by the UN. While the information is generally good, especially if you want basic information about what the UN is and what it does, more advanced high school students may prefer the United Nations Online Documents Service.

United Nations Online Documents Service

<http://www.un.org/Pubs/onlinepubs.htm>

This is the main UN source of basic online information that is free. It has links to basic information about what the UN does, especially in areas like peace-building. The information tends to be a bit older, but it is still accurate and can be an excellent resource for basic information about the UN. The target audience is adults, but the information is readily accessible for older high school students looking for more detailed information. It is also an excellent resource for teachers who want to get some basic, clear information about the UN.

The UN “About” Page:

<http://www.un.org/aboutun/>

This is the more official “about us” page for the UN. It has a mix of nice, simple to understand information and complicated bureaucratic reports. It has excellent brief summaries of major UN activities, so it’s a great place to start if you want to explore what the UN does. Most of the main pages are accessible to high school students, but the more technical reports will put students off as they are written for policy professionals. The majority of what’s here is good for students who want to get an idea of what is going on at the UN.

The UN Global Agenda:

<http://www.un.org/issues/>

This is a page that provides a series of links to UN organized sections that are involved with current UN projects. It is an excellent place to find out more of what is happening at the UN. It is also an excellent source of information for students who want to explore some of the UN's daily operations. The information here is generally aimed at adults, but in most cases high school students should not experience any difficulty.

UN Special Reports:

The UN publishes (and often posts for free download) specialized reports on a wide range of issues. Reports exist on genocide in Darfur and Rwanda, global climate change, world trade, and health issues in Africa. These reports are generally written for a professional audience and can be quite dull. But if students are motivated and want more detail, these can be a useful place to look. The problem is that they tend to move around. Unlike the World Bank and IMF, the UN moves its reports around and the hyperlinks change. So this may take more time to implement.

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (The World Bank)

World Bank Information for Teachers:

<http://youthink.worldbank.org/4teachers/>

This page is an excellent set of classroom tools for teachers who want to incorporate ideas about economics and development issues into their classrooms. The site is easy to navigate and includes pre-planned lessons and activities related to these issues. The information is in plain English so that you do not need a strong understanding of economics or politics in order to review the information. It is an excellent site for teachers who want to incorporate topical and relevant information regarding development issues in their classrooms.

Youthink Youth Site:

<http://youthink.worldbank.org/4kids/>

This is generally a good place to find information on economic and development issues. There are some excellent resources that focus on issues as they apply to kids across the world. In my view it is a little too focused on younger kids to appeal to older high school students, but I may be wrong. The stories regarding basic issues (such as the role of clean water in health) are generally very good.

Main Youthink Portal:

<http://youthink.worldbank.org/>

This is the main Youthink site. It's a portal to all the same content as the other two, just with a general interface.

World Bank Research Page:

<http://econ.worldbank.org/external/default/main?menuPK=469435&pagePK=64165236&piPK=64165141&theSitePK=469382>

This is a page that will let you search through all of the research that the World Bank makes available for free on line. For the most part, this will not be useful for most students. The majority of what you will get here is work aimed at policy professionals. Pretty much anything labeled “working paper” will be for trained economists (although if you want to show students how the ideas of economics are applied, you could easily use some of these). What you can find on this site are what are called “briefs”. These are short (usually 4-6 page) short reports on various topics that the Bank is researching. These can be very useful as they are generally written in very accessible plain English and drop all the technical jargon. They are excellent for older high school students. And there are hundreds of them on a wide range of topics. You can also find a significant number of what are labeled “publications” by which they mean books. These cover a wide range of topics from the role of China in African development to the impact of globalization on poverty. What may be most useful for teachers of economics or world history are the World Development Reports. These are summaries of the world economy focused on a particular theme for the year. They have a lot of information, but they are also pretty good at keeping the jargon to a minimum. All of these are free in .pdf format. This includes several books that are very expensive in hardcopy form.

There is a search engine for the publications page:

<http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/0,,menuPK:577939~pagePK:64165265~piPK:64165423~theSitePK:469382,00.html>

While this source can be very useful, it is also much harder to navigate than the Youthink pages. It is an excellent source of information, but set aside some time. Generally, I would also suggest downloading the files and keeping them rather than frequently returning to the site.

The International Monetary Fund

The IMF Students' Page:

<http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/st/eng/index.htm>

This is the main portal for the IMF's youth programs. It is an excellent source of information on monetary policy and issues related to currencies and finance. It is also nice because it splits things by age level.

The IMF site is very good at producing clear and concise materials to explain complex issues. They have a series of streaming media videos that discuss major economic issues and the role of the IMF in managing them:

<http://www.imf.org/external/mmedia/index.asp>

Overall, the IMF is probably the most balanced of the sites, but it is also the least slick of the “youth” sites. It is a bit clunky looking. But the information is good. I would especially recommend the short articles on major themes in economic, especially those that talk about currency exchange. They are nice and simple discussions of what can seem a complicated topic.

The World Trade Organization

The WTO Students' Page

http://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/students_e/students_e.htm

This is the main page with information for students. The page styling is a bit out of date compared to the other sites, but it has top-notch information on how the world trade system works. It has information that ranges from very basic to highly technical (although you need to make several jumps to get to it). You can also find out a great deal about how world trade works in practice. They were one of the first to set up a youth “who are we” page and the information has been refined pretty well over the years.

There are also some videos on the site that explain how the WTO works. The upside is that the information is great. The downside of the videos is that they may be the most boring videos ever produced.

DVD's that cover critical information in useful ways:

Commanding Heights: The Battle for the World Economy

This is a three DVD set that contains the entire PBS program. It relates the battle over economic ideas in the twentieth century. It explains in plain language and some nice anecdotes, how economic ideas developed and changed into the form we have today. It is very well done and covers the ideas in a range of contexts.

Life and Debt:

This is a documentary about the complicated relationships between developing countries (in this case Jamaica), the US, and the IMF. It traces the development problems in Jamaica by contrasting the things tourists see and the life of the average person outside the tourist areas. It focuses on how the Jamaican economy has changed since independence from Britain. It is critical of the IMF's role in development and there is a strong tone of criticism of the US trade policies regarding smaller countries, so it should be used with caution. I would recommend that this be used as a means of promoting discussion of the trade offs that must be faced in development issues. While it could just be watched as a stand alone program, without discussion it generally gives students a one-sided view of development policies as bad. When used to prompt discussion, it can work very well. There are chapters that move from one sector of the Jamaican economy to the other so it can be broken up into roughly twenty minute segments.

Fog of War:

This is Robert MacNamara's film about rising to head the Defense Department during the war in Vietnam. It is a good way to cover how policy gets made and what pressures policy-makers face. It is a bit dull, but it can be watched in segments as a spur for discussion.

International Non-Governmental Organizations

In theory groups like Doctors Without Borders can be excellent sources of information. They put their information on line freely and they usually have easy to navigate web sites. The downside is that they all have very powerful agendas. They do not produce unbiased information and sometimes they may skew their reports to fit their policy goals. This is not a problem if students are encouraged to look at this and see how these ideas may be used, but it requires a major investment in time and energy to make that work. I have found that INGO sites are most useful when students are looking for information on topics of interest. I generally avoid them when there is not time to place their work in context.

A very partial list of organization (all can be easily googled)

- Human Rights Watch – pretty much what the name implies
- Amnesty International – started out focused on political prisoners but has broadened to cover most human rights issues
- Heifer International – Provides animals for poor people to help them improve their quality of life
- Doctors Without Borders – provides medical services to developing countries, disaster zones, and refugee populations
- Oxfam International – A humanitarian organization promoting development
- Greenpeace – Global environmentalism
- World Wildlife Fund – Protecting endangered species
- Christian Children's Fund – Feeding hungry kids
- Reporters Without Borders – Monitoring the treatment of reporters in dangerous places
- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – Research and teaching to prevent the spread of serious disease
- Transparency International – Monitors corruption
- Freedom House – Publishes a report on "Freedom in the World" listing states that are free, partly free, or not free. They produce a "map of freedom" every year