

The Nobel Prize

A Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,585

Connections

Writing

Write a historical fiction story from Alfred Nobel's point of view. Explain why you created the Nobel Prizes and what you hoped they would do for society.

Social Studies

Write a biography about the life and achievements of a Nobel prizewinner. Include how his or her work continues to make an impact.

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The Nobel Prize



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Focus Question

What is the Nobel Prize, and why is it important?

Words to Know

committees	laureates
controversy	pacifist
diploma	physics
economics	physiology
engineer	radioactivity
foundation	Taliban

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Correlation

LEVEL Z	
Fountas & Pinnell	U-V
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	50

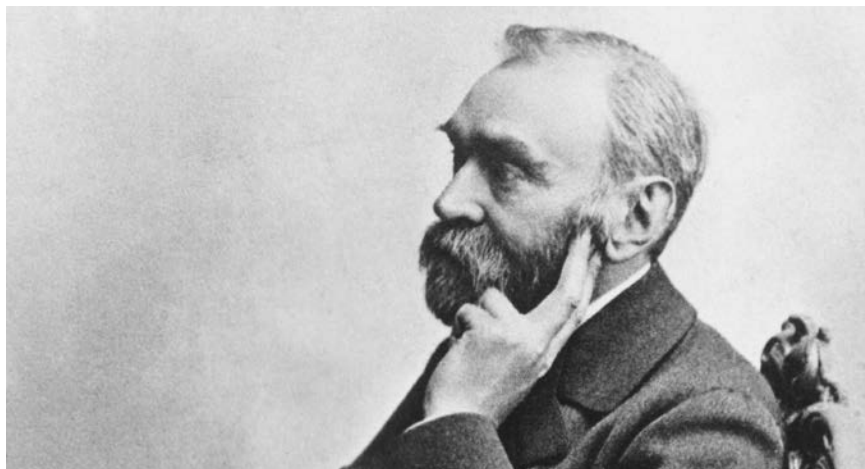


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The Most Coveted Prize

The Nobel Prize is the most distinguished nonmilitary award in the world. To be nominated for an award is considered the honor of a lifetime.

The prizes were first awarded on December 10, 1901—the fifth anniversary of Alfred Nobel’s death. Between 1901 and 2015, 874 exceptional individuals, known as Nobel **Laureates**, and 26 organizations have been awarded Nobel Prizes.

For years, five prizes were awarded annually in the fields of **physics**, chemistry, **physiology** or medicine, literature, and peace. A sixth award, for **economics**, was established in 1968. The prizes are the result of the vision of one extraordinarily talented individual, Alfred Nobel.

The Medal

All the medals feature an image of Alfred Nobel on the front. Each individual category has a different image on the back.



Nobel Medal
Front (all)



Peace



Physics
and Chemistry



Alfred Nobel

An Uncommon Life

Alfred Bernhard Nobel was born on October 21, 1833, in Stockholm, Sweden. He was one of four sons of Caroline and Immanuel Nobel. Immanuel was an **engineer** and businessman. He was especially interested in discovering ways to blast through rocks to make bridges and tunnels easier to build.

By 1842, Immanuel had moved from Sweden to St. Petersburg, Russia. There he successfully manufactured sea mines, or explosives, for the Russian navy. Mines were used to protect harbors and other bodies of water. Alfred and his brothers received a first-class education in St. Petersburg. By age seventeen, Alfred could speak Swedish, Russian, French, German, and English. He was also interested in chemistry.



Literature



Physiology
or Medicine

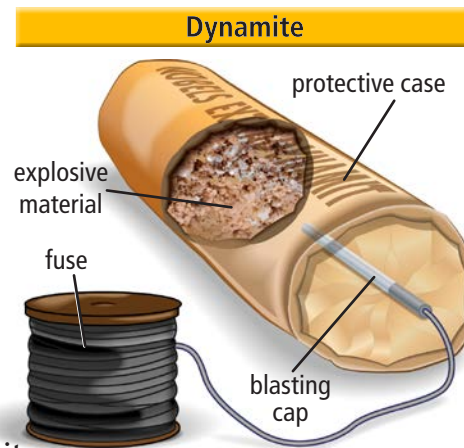


Economics

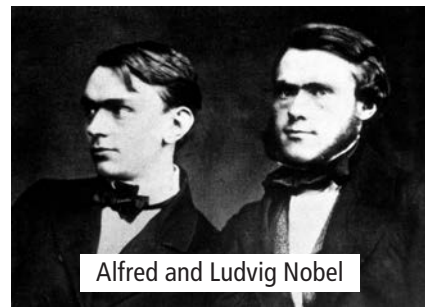
In 1850, Alfred's parents sent him to Paris to study chemical engineering. He worked with a highly explosive liquid called *nitroglycerine*, which had recently been invented. At that time, it was considered too dangerous for practical use. When Alfred returned to St. Petersburg, he worked with his father to develop nitroglycerine as a commercial explosive.

In 1859, the family returned to Sweden, where Alfred continued to experiment. His brother, Emil, who also experimented with explosives, was killed in a tragic accident in 1864.

However, Alfred did not give up. Before long, he was mass-producing nitroglycerine for commercial use, and he continued to try to make it less dangerous. In 1866, he discovered that by mixing liquid nitroglycerine with very fine sand, he could make a paste. This paste was then packed into rods to create a new explosive called *dynamite*. Alfred's invention of dynamite made him instantly rich and famous.



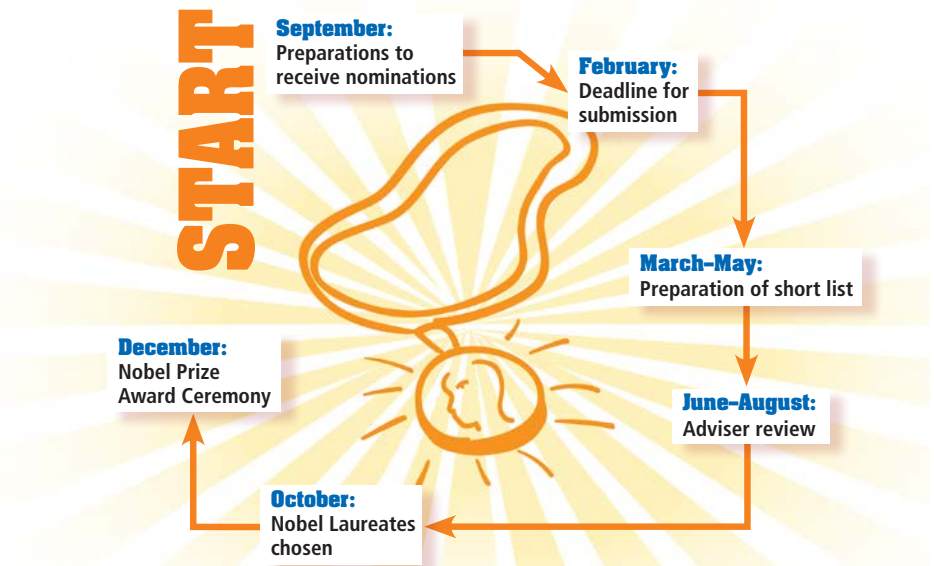
Compared with nitroglycerine, dynamite was much safer to use and transport. The invention of dynamite revolutionized the building of tunnels, canals, roads, and railways. However, while dynamite changed engineering, it also changed the way wars were fought. Nobel considered himself a **pacifist**. It was ironic that he saw his invention of dynamite put to use in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871).



The idea of the Nobel Prizes was revealed in Nobel's will after his death in 1896. His will established a **foundation** to manage and invest his fortune and award the prizes. Nobel's family was not pleased, and they kept the will tied up in lawsuits for five years. They were unsuccessful, though, and the Nobel Foundation was established.

Why the Prizes?

No one knows *why* Nobel used his fortune to create the prizes, and Nobel didn't say. One theory states that when his brother Ludvig died in 1888, the French press confused him with Alfred, whom they referred to as the "Merchant of Death." Perhaps Alfred Nobel wanted to change the way history viewed him before it was too late. We do know that the prizes reflect his enduring fascination with the five fields chosen for the awards.



The Nobel Prize Process

The great honor associated with the Nobel Prizes is due to the large amount of research put into the selection process. The prize **committees** change every year. They are made up of world-famous scholars, academics, scientists, and former Nobel Laureates. The committees invite thousands of leaders in each field to nominate candidates every year. The voting for candidates is top secret. The prizes are presented to the laureates annually on December 10—the anniversary of Nobel's death.

Three different institutions in Sweden carry out the selection process and award the prizes in economics, literature, and the sciences. A separate committee in Norway awards the Peace Prize.

Famous Recipients

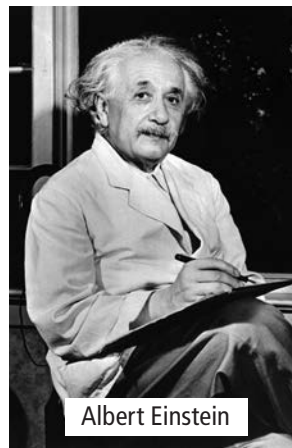
Nobel Prize recipients come from all over the world. They are young and old, male and female, and represent many cultures. Here are just some of the hundreds of prizewinners since 1901.

The Sciences

Marie Curie was the first woman to receive a Nobel Prize, in 1903 in physics. Born in Poland, Curie spent most of her life working as a scientific researcher in France. She shared the award with her husband, Pierre, and Henri Becquerel for their work in **radioactivity**. In 1911, she was awarded a second prize, in chemistry, for her discovery of two new elements. Curie is one of only two people ever to win Nobel Prizes in two different fields. Her daughter Irène Joliot-Curie (ee-REN ZHOH-lyoh KYUR-ee) also won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, making them the first and only mother-daughter pair to have been awarded Nobel Prizes.



Marie Curie



Albert Einstein

Have you heard of the formula $E = mc^2$? That formula, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, changed the way we think about our physical world. German-born Einstein was awarded the prize in 1921 for his work in theoretical physics. Winning the prize allowed

Einstein to continue a brilliant academic career. He influenced many of the greatest scientific thinkers of the twentieth century.

Danish physicist Niels Bohr (NEELS BOR) won the Nobel Prize in Physics the year after Einstein, in 1922. The prize was awarded for his "services in the investigation of the structure of atoms." As with Einstein, the award allowed Bohr to have a long and productive career as a physicist. His son Aage Bohr (OH-uh BOR) was awarded the prize in physics in 1975, along with two other men. Niels and Aage Bohr are one of six pairs of fathers and sons who have won Nobel Prizes.

In 1945, Sir Alexander Fleming of Scotland won the Nobel Prize in Medicine for the discovery of penicillin. His discovery changed medicine forever, saved many lives, and eased human suffering globally.

Women and the Nobel Prize

Few women have been awarded Nobel Prizes, especially in the sciences. Female scientists were once rarely able to advance far enough to be considered for awards. The situation is changing as opportunities for women continue to improve worldwide.

Economics

In 2003, Clive Granger and Robert Engle took the Nobel Prize in Economics for work that eased human suffering in a different way. Their research helped better our understanding of economic trends in order to avoid serious financial crises and resulting poverty.



Literature

The prize for literature is judged in a less specific way than the prizes for sciences, and usually recognizes a lifetime's work. American Ernest Hemingway received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. The prize recognized "his mastery of the art of narrative . . . and for the influence . . . on contemporary style."



Colombian-born Gabriel García Márquez, a writer with a very different style, won the prize in 1982. The committee praised his style, in which "the fantastic and the realistic are combined in a richly composed world of imagination." These

are just two examples of literature awards that have been given to influential writers.

Peace

Three very famous recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize were Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and Nelson Mandela. These three individuals fought to improve the lives of people suffering political and economic injustice. The 1964 Peace Prize honored Dr. King's fight for civil rights and equality for people of every color in the United States. Mother Teresa won the prize in 1979 for a lifetime of service caring for underprivileged people in Calcutta, India. Nelson Mandela received the prize in 1993 for his lifelong struggle against South Africa's repressive political system.



The youngest Nobel Laureate is Malala Yousafzai (muh-LAH-lah YOO-suf-zy), who received the prize in 2014 at age seventeen. The **Taliban** had taken control of some parts of her home country of Pakistan. They outlawed education for girls and destroyed hundreds of schools. Malala took to the Internet

and fought for equal educational opportunities for women. In 2012, a Taliban soldier attacked and nearly killed her, but Malala recovered and continues her fight for girls today.

Nobel Controversies

Some prizewinners cause **controversy**. When Yasser Arafat (YAH-sur AIR-uh-fat), the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), won the Peace Prize in 1994, many were stunned. Arafat and Israeli leaders Yitzhak Rabin (yits-HAHK ruh-BEEN) and Shimon Peres (shee-MOHN PAIR-iss), received the award for their work for peace in the Middle East.

American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was awarded the prize in 1973 for negotiating a cease-fire during the Vietnam War. Critics argued that Kissinger had been involved in the secret bombing of Cambodia—a country with which the United States was not at war. His North Vietnamese corecipient, Le Duc Tho (LE DUK TAH), turned down the prize to avoid being associated with Kissinger.



Even President Barack Obama's Peace Prize in 2009 was questioned. The election of an African American president was groundbreaking and inspired the world with hope. Yet in 2009, he hadn't done much more than get elected. The award surprised even the president himself.

The Reward

The Nobel Foundation awards cash, a **diploma**, and a gold medal with Alfred Nobel's image to each prizewinner. The ceremony takes place at the Stockholm Concert Hall. The King of Sweden hands the gold Nobel Prize Medal to the recipient in a box. At a later date, the recipient is given a document stating the amount of the cash prize. The amount varies based on whether the award is given to an individual or shared among a group. In 2015, the amount of an individual prize was eight million Swedish kronor, or just under one million U.S. dollars. If the prize is shared among multiple recipients, the eight million Swedish kronor are divided equally.

Then the guests are transported to the Stockholm City Hall for the Nobel Banquet. There are speeches, dancing, a full concert, and a fancy dinner. Formal dress is required.



The Nobel Banquet at the Stockholm City Hall



The award ceremony at the Stockholm Concert Hall

Conclusion

Although not without controversy, the Nobel Prize has had a lasting and positive global influence. The awards highlight the work and dreams of great thinkers from all over the world. The fame and cash prizes let these extraordinary individuals continue their work. The prizes honor freedom, peace, and the commitment to improving the lives of humankind.

Glossary

committees (<i>n.</i>)	groups of people who consider or decide on a course of action (p. 8)
controversy (<i>n.</i>)	a disagreement over an idea or issue (p. 13)
diploma (<i>n.</i>)	a document that records a special right, honor, or achievement (p. 14)
economics (<i>n.</i>)	the science or study of how goods and services are made, sold, and used (p. 4)
engineer (<i>n.</i>)	a person who designs, builds, or repairs machines, buildings, bridges, or other structures (p. 5)
foundation (<i>n.</i>)	an organization supported by donated money to help society or a particular cause (p. 7)
laureates (<i>n.</i>)	people who are honored with a prize or award for achievement in creative or scientific areas (p. 4)
pacifist (<i>n.</i>)	a person who is against war and violence (p. 7)
physics (<i>n.</i>)	the scientific study of matter, motion, and energy (p. 4)
physiology (<i>n.</i>)	the science or study of how living things and their parts work (p. 4)
radioactivity (<i>n.</i>)	the release of radioactive waves or particles; the property of emitting radioactive waves or particles (p. 9)
Taliban (<i>n.</i>)	a fundamentalist Islamic group based in Afghanistan and Pakistan (p. 12)