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# The Nobel Prize: Facts and stories

**The Nobel Prize provided an outlet for the issues that had engaged Alfred Nobel during his lifetime. Science and research, especially with explosives such as nitroglycerine and dynamite, granted him a global lifestyle with friends and connections worldwide, not to mention a considerable fortune. It also resulted in tragedy; an explosion deprived him of his brother in 1864. The Nobel Prize was a tool to enable science to become a vehicle to make the world an even better place. But science is not everything. Here are the things you didn’t know about the Prize.**

**Fascinating facts**

* **The oldest Nobel Laureate**: Leonid Hurwicz, who won the Economics Prize in 2007 at the age of 90. He passed away six months after the ceremony.
* **The youngest**: Lawrence Bragg was a mere 25 years old when he shared the physics prize with his father, William Bragg, in 1915. The average age of all Nobel Laureates in all prize categories between 1901 and 2013 is 59 years.
* **Gandhi and Peace Prize**. Mahatma Gandhi was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times, but never received it. In the year of Gandhi’s death, in 1948, the Peace Prize was not awarded on the grounds that there was no suitable living candidate to receive the prize.
* **Less than successful prize**: Portuguese physician Egas Moniz was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1949 for his lobotomy technique. The method was abandoned in the 1960s once it became clear that many patients died from the severe brain injuries caused by the procedure.
* **Prize winning Stockholmers**. Of the 28 Nobel laureates, all but three were active in the Stockholm-Uppsala region. Of the laureates in physics, chemistry and medicine only one worked outside the Stockholm. Here are all the Stockholmers.
  + Physics: Gustaf Dalén (1912), Manne Siegbahn (1924), Hannes Alfvén (1970) and Kai M Siegbahn (1981).
  + Chemistry: Svante Arrhenius (1903), The Svedberg (1903) and Arne Tisselius (1948).
  + Physiology or medicine: Hugo Theorell (1955), Ulf von Euler (1970), Torsten N Wiesel (1981), Sune K Bergström (1982) and Bengt I Samuelsson (1982).
  + Literature: Erik Axel Karlfeldt (1931), Pär Lagerkvist (1951), Eyvind Johnson (1974), Harry Martinson (1974) and Tomas Tranströmer (2011).
  + Peace: Klas Pontus Arnoldson (1908), Hjalmar Branting (1921), Nathan Söderblom (1930), Dag Hammarskjöld (1961) and Alva Myrdal (1982).
  + Economic Sciences: Gunnar Myrdal (1974) and Bertil Ohlin (1977)

**Impeded award**

* **Part of the divorce settlement**: Robert E. Lucas was awarded the Economics Prize in 1997 for his work on the theory of rational expectations. He had to share the prize with his ex-wife as part of their divorce settlement seven years earlier. She had been promised half the money if Lucas ever won a Nobel Prize. The theory of rational expectations does not assume that everyone always guesses exactly right, but rather that people make best use of the available information, which his ex-wife obviously did.
* **3 x literary refusals**: Jean-Paul Sartre refused the Prize in Literature in 1964 because he did not want to be transformed into an institution – Jean-Paul Sartre, Nobel Laureate. Boris Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1958, but was coerced by the Soviet authorities to decline. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970, but did not receive his prize until after he was forced into exile in 1974.
* **3 x inconvenient peace**: Le Duc Tho was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973 for his role in the Vietnam peace negotiations. Since peace had not yet been achieved in that country, Le Duc Tho declined. In 1991 Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Peace Prize for her peaceful struggle for democracy and human rights. Since she was under house arrest at the time of the awards ceremony, her sons and husband accepted the price on her behalf. Lu Xiaobo was awarded the Peace Prize in 2010, while still in prison, for his long struggle for human rights in China. Outraged authorities denounced the award.

**Nobel – it runs in the family**

Married couple Marie and Pierre Curie shared the 1903 Physics prize with Henri Becquerel. Marie Curie was also awarded the Chemistry Prize in 1911 when she discovered the elements radium and polonium. Their daughter, Irène Joliot-Curie, shared the Chemistry Prize together with her husband Frédéric in 1935. Radioactivity was the red thread that tied the family together. However, Henry Labouisse, another son-in-law, was awarded the Peace Prize in 1965 for his role as head of the UN children’s fund, UNICEF.

Swedish Nobel families include Manne and Kai Siegbahn, who were awarded the Physics Prize in 1924 and 1981 respectively, as well as Hans and Ulf von Euler-Chelpin, who received prizes in chemistry in 1924 and medicine in 1970, respectively.

**The housekeeper behind the Peace Prize**

Alfred Nobel never had a family of his own. He lived alone. In 1876 he advertised for someone to take care of his household in Paris. Bertha Kinsky von Chinic und Tettau got the job. After a short period of service, she returned to Austria to marry Count Arthur von Suttner. Alfred and Bertha remained friends for life and corresponded faithfully. Bertha von Suttner became an activist in the peace movement and authored the book “Lay down your arms!” which one day would find itself among the books burned in Nazi bonfires in the Germany of 1933. Her commitment inspired Alfred Nobel to also create a prize for efforts in the service of peace; Bertha von Suttner was the first woman to win that prize in 1905.

**Noble women**

Alice Munro is the Nobel Laureate in Literature 2013, but she belongs to a minority. Of the 561 Nobel Prizes awarded between 1901 and 2013, only 44 went to women. Only one woman, Marie Curie, has been honoured twice, with the 1903 Nobel Prize in Physics and the 1911 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Selma Lagerlöf, Nobel Laureate in literature in 1909 is the only Swedish woman ever who did not have to share her Nobel Prize with a man: Alva Myrdal shared the Peace Prize in 1982 with Alfonso García Robles, while German native but Swedish resident Nelly Sachs shared the 1966 Literature Prize with Shmuel Yosef Agnon. Women can mostly be found among the Peace and Literature Laureates.

**The Red Cross – a prize-winning organization**

Many prizes, especially the Peace Prize, were not awarded at all during the war years 1914-1916 and 1939-1943. When the awards resumed in the aftermath, the Red Cross organization won. The International Red Cross has received the Nobel Peace Prize three times – in 1917 and 1944 for its efforts in war-torn Europe, as well as in 1963 to honor 100 years of service to mankind. Its founder, Henry Dunant, was also awarded the very first Peace Prize in 1901.

**One of you may get the Nobel Prize!**

The Nobel spirit in Stockholm is contagious. Every year, eighth grade students at the Rinkeby School in Stockholm participate in a project with the Nobel Prize as its theme. The first time was in 1988, when students who received instruction in their native language, Arabic, put together a booklet on Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz, Nobel Laureate in literature that year. Since then, new eighth graders have written and illustrated booklets on the Nobel Laureates each year. The international Literature Prize provides inspiration in an area where children from all over the world live.

In 1997 Dario Fo was invited to visit the classes and ever since, almost all of the literature laureates have taken the opportunity to meet these young people. In Rinkeby, the Laureates have been treated to a Lucia procession, puppet theatre, poetry and drawings – memorable experiences that differ from diplomas, medals and prize money. And each fall, the project opens with the words “One of you may get the Nobel Prize!”

Learn more about the Laureates at the official Nobel Prize website and the Nobel Museum

www.nobelprize.org

www.nobelmuseum.se

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