

# Nobel Prize

The Nobel Prize is an international award given annually for outstanding achievement in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and promoting peace.

## Alfred Bernhard Nobel

Alfred Bernhard Nobel was born in Stockholm, Sweden, on Oct. 21, 1833, the third son of Immanuel Nobel, a self-taught inventor and building contractor. Soon after Alfred's birth, Immanuel was forced into bankruptcy and moved his family to Finland. He eventually ended up in St. Petersburg, Russia, where he became a military contractor for the Russian army. Alfred obtained his education in Russia and traveled widely as a young man. His interests included literature, poetry and the theater. Alfred was fluent in five languages.

Financial problems soon plagued Immanuel again, and he moved his family back to Sweden. Upon his return, he and his sons, Alfred and Emil, began experimenting with nitroglycerin. On Sept. 3, 1864, an accidental explosion killed Emil and several workers. The shock of his son's death caused Immanuel to have a stroke from which he never fully recovered.

## Dynamite

Alfred Nobel continued experimenting with nitroglycerin after his brother's death. His attempts to stabilize the volatile nature of nitroglycerin paid off when he discovered that mixing it with a fine porous powder (kieselguhr) made a safe portable explosive. His mixture, dubbed dynamite, was patented in 1867. Dynamite use became widespread in construction, mining and the military and amassed Nobel a great fortune.

## The prize

The conception of a prize was said to have been brought about after a premature obituary for Nobel was published by a French newspaper in 1888. In the obituary Nobel was condemned for his invention of dynamite. It was said that he became rich finding more ways to kill people faster than ever before and that "the merchant of death is dead."

On Nov. 27, 1895, Nobel signed his last will and testament in Paris. It left the bulk of his estate in a trust that would be used to award prizes annually for outstanding achievement in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and promoting peace.

*The peace prize was the brainchild of Nobel's secretary, Bertha Von Suttner. She later became a recipient of the peace prize in 1905.*

*The value of the Nobel estate that was put in trust for the prize was 31 kronor million or \$233,976,085 in 2007 U.S. dollars.*

*The first award was presented in 1901.*

Young Alfred Nobel

## The medal

The face side of each medal bears the likeness of Alfred Nobel. The back sides vary according to the category it represents.

- Weight: **200 grams (12.5 oz.)**
- Diameter: **66 mm (2.6 in.)**
- Gold content: **18 karat with 24 karat gold plate**  
Originally 23 karat (until 1980)

The medals, with the exception of the peace medal, were designed by Swedish sculptor Erik Lindberg and are minted in Sweden.

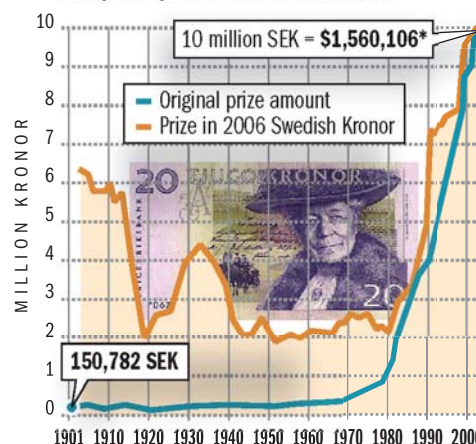


## The peace medal

The peace medal was designed by Norwegian sculptor, Gustav Vigeland. It is minted in Norway and presented in Oslo annually.

## Prize money

The original prize of 150,782 kronor (SEK) has been expanded to 10 million SEK or more than \$1.5 million. The graph below plots the rise in the amount of the award and its fluctuating value from year to year in 2006 Swedish Kronor.



\*Exchange in 2007 U.S. dollars



## Stamps

The Swedish government began honoring Nobel laureates by issuing commemorative stamps. The first was issued in 1946 and bore the likeness of Alfred Nobel.



**Medal backs** The face of each medal bears the likeness of Alfred Nobel.



## Nominations/selection

Nobel committees send out thousands of invitations annually to members of academies, university professors and scientists for nominations. Great care is taken to ensure that a wide range of nations and universities are represented. The winners are selected from these.

## Presentations

Presentations of the Nobel Prize are made annually in Stockholm, Sweden, by the king of Sweden (King Carl XVI Gustav). The ceremony is preceded by days of lectures. Each laureate is presented with a medal, diploma and a cash award. The peace prize is bestowed in Oslo, Norway, in the presence of the king of Norway (King Harald V).

## Medal count

United States	270
United Kingdom	101
Germany	76
France	49
Sweden	30
Switzerland	22
Netherlands	15
Russia	14
Italy	14
Denmark	13
Japan	12
Austria	11
Canada	10
Spain	6
Australia	6
Ireland	5
Israel	5
Poland	5
South Africa	5
Argentina	5
India	4

777

Total number of awards presented since 1901

20

Total number of awards presented to organizations

34

Total awards presented to women

## Youngest

Lawrence Bragg, age 25 (Physics, 1915)

## Oldest

Leonid Hurwicz, age 90 (Economics, 2007)

## Declined

Jean-Paul Sartre (1964)  
Le Duc Tho (1973)

## Trivia



Marie and Pierre Curie (1903 prize)

## Family members awarded

Married couples	4	Father/son	6
Mother/daughter	1	Brothers	1
Father/daughter	1		

SOURCE: The Nobel Foundation, nobelprize.org