Prize for Literature

Written by Britannica editors The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica
Article History

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The Nobel Prize for Literature is awarded, according to the will of Swedish inventor and philanthropist Alfred Nobel (1833–1896), to the author, being the prevailing poet, prose writer, or historian who has produced the "most outstanding work in an ideal direction." See all Nobel Prize winners in Literature.

Nobel Prize winners by category (literature)

	name	country	Nobel Prize year
1901	Sully Prudhomme	France	first
1902	Theodor Mommsen	Germany	historian
1903	Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson	Norway	novelist
1904	José Echegaray	Spain	dramatist
	Frédéric Mistral	France	poet
1905	Henryk Sienkiewicz	Poland	novelist
1906	Giosuè Carducci	Italy	poet
1907	Rudyard Kipling	U.K.	poet
1908	Rudolf Christoph Eucken	Germany	philosopher
1909	Selma Lagerlöf	Sweden	novelist
	Paul Johann Ludwig Heyse	Germany	novelist
1910	Maurice Maeterlinck	Belgium	dramatist
1911	Gerhart Hauptmann	Germany	dramatist
1912	Rabindranath Tagore	India	poet
1913	Henri Bergson	France	philosopher
1914	Verner von Heidenstam	Sweden	poet
1915	Romain Rolland	France	novelist
1916	Verner von Heidenstam	Sweden	poet
1917	Karl Gjellerup	Denmark	novelist
	Henrik Pontoppidan	Denmark	novelist
1918	Carl Spitteler	Switzerland	poet
1919	Carl Spitteler (declined)	Switzerland	poet
1920	Knut Hamsun	Norway	novelist
1921	Anatole France	France	novelist
1922	Jacinto Benavente	Spain	dramatist
1923	William Butler Yeats	Ireland	poet
1924	Władysław Stanisław Reymont	Poland	novelist
1925	George Bernard Shaw	U.K.	dramatist
1926	Grazia Deledda	Italy	novelist
1927	Henri-Louis Bergson	France	philosopher
1928	Sigrid Undset	Norway	novelist
1929	Thomas Mann	Germany	novelist
1930	Sinclair Lewis	U.S.	novelist
1931	Erik Axel Karlfeldt (declined)	Sweden	poet
1932	John Galsworthy	U.K.	novelist
1933	Ivan Bunin	Russia	novelist
1934	Luigi Pirandello	Italy	dramatist
1935	Eugene O'Neill	U.S.	dramatist
1936	Pierre Benoit	France	novelist
1937	Roger Martin du Gard	France	novelist
1938	Pearl S. Buck	U.S.	novelist
1939	Frans Eemil Sillanpää	Finland	novelist
1940	Johannes V. Jensen	Denmark	novelist
1941	Eugenio Montale	Italy	poet
1942	Gabriela Mistral	Chile	poet
1943	Thomas Stearns Eliot	U.K.	poet
1944	Jens Peter Jacobsen	Denmark	novelist
1945	Hermann Hesse	Switzerland	novelist
1946	Gabriela Mistral	Chile	poet
1947	André Gide	France	novelist
1948	T.S. Eliot	U.K.	poet
1949	William Faulkner	U.S.	novelist
1950	Bertrand Russell	U.K.	philosopher
1951	Pär Lagerkvist	Sweden	novelist
1952	François Mauriac	France	novelist
1953	Winston Churchill	U.K.	statesman
1954	Ernest Hemingway	U.S.	novelist
1955	Halldór Kiljan Laxness	Iceland	novelist
1956	Juan Ramón Jiménez	Spain	poet
1957	Albert Camus	France	novelist
1958	Boris Pasternak (declined)	Russia	novelist
1959	Salvatore Quasimodo	Italy	poet
1960	Saint-John Perse	France	poet
1961	Ivo Andric	Yugoslavia	novelist
1962	John Steinbeck	U.S.	novelist
1963	Giorgos Seferis	Greece	poet
1964	Jean-Paul Sartre (declined)	France	philosopher and novelist
1965	Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov	U.S.S.R.	novelist
1966	Samuel Joseph Agnon	U.S.S.R.	novelist
	S.Y. Agnon	Israel	novelist
1967	Miguel Ángel Asturias	Guatemala	novelist
1968	Yasunari Kawabata	Japan	novelist
1969	Samuel Beckett	Ireland	dramatist
1970	Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn	U.S.S.R.	novelist
1971	Pablo Neruda	Chile	poet
1972	Heinrich Böll	West Germany	novelist
1973	Patrick White	Australia	novelist
1974	Eyvind Johnson	Sweden	novelist
	Harry Martinson	Sweden	novelist
1975	Eugenio Montale	Italy	poet
1976	Saul Bellow	U.S.	novelist
1977	Vicente Aleixandre	Spain	poet
1978	Isaac Bashevis Singer	U.S.	novelist
1979	Odysseus Elytis	Greece	poet
1980	Czeslaw Milosz	U.S.	poet
1981	Elias Canetti	Great Britain	novelist
1982	Gabriel García Márquez	Colombia	novelist, social critic
1983	Sir William Golding	U.K.	novelist
1984	Jaroslav Seifert	Czechoslovakia	poet
1985	Claude Simon	France	novelist
1986	Wole Soyinka	Nigeria	dramatist, poet
1987	Joseph Brodsky	U.S.	poet
1988	Naguib Mahfouz	Egypt	novelist
1989	Camilo José Cela	Spain	novelist
1990	Octavio Paz	Mexico	poet, essayist
1991	Nadine Gordimer	South Africa	novelist
1992	Derek Walcott	St. Lucia	poet
1993	Toni Morrison	U.S.	novelist
1994	Oe Kenzaburō	Japan	novelist
1995	Seamus Heaney	Ireland	poet
1996	Wislawa Szymborska	Poland	poet
1997	Dario Fo	Italy	dramatist
1998	José Saramago	Portugal	novelist
1999	Günter Grass	Germany	novelist
2000	Gao Xingjian	China	dramatist, novelist
2001	Sir V.S. Naipaul	Trinidad	novelist
2002	Imre Kertész	Hungary	novelist
2003	J.M. Coetzee	South Africa	novelist
2004	Elfriede Jelinek	Austria	dramatist, novelist
2005	Harold Pinter	Great Britain	dramatist
2006	Orhan Pamuk	Turkey	novelist
2007	Doris Lessing	U.K.	novelist
2008	Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio	France	novelist
2009	Herta Müller	Germany	novelist
2010	Mario Vargas Llosa	Peru	novelist
2011	Tomas Tranströmer	Sweden	poet
2012	Mo Yan	China	novelist
2013	Alice Munro	Canada	novelist
2014	Patrick Modiano	France	novelist
2015	Svetlana Aleksiyevich	Belarus	dramatist, prose writer
2016	Bob Dylan	U.S.	poet, songwriter
2017	Kazuo Ishiguro	U.K.	novelist
2018	Olga Tokarczuk	Poland	novelist, philosopher
2019	Peter Handke	Austria	novelist, playwright
2020	Louise Glück	U.S.	poet
2021	Abdulrazak Gurnah	Tanzania	novelist
2022	Annie Ernaux	France	novelist, memoirist
2023	Jon Fosse	Norway	dramatist, novelist
2024	Han Kang	South Korea	novelist

Nationality given is the citizenship of the recipient at the time of the award, not necessarily the country in which the work was produced or the country of which the author is a native citizen. (e.g., Wislawa Szymborska was a Polish citizen, but her work was produced in Poland and in France.)

Prize winnerships marked in bold are those of the Nobel Prize winners in Literature.

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Nobel Prize

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Ask the Chatbot in Economics

Nobel Prize, the prestigious award for achievement in chemistry, literature, physics, physiology or medicine, and peace, instituted in accordance with the wills of Swedish inventor and philanthropist Alfred Nobel. The Nobel Prizes are awarded annually by institutions in Sweden and Norway and are generally considered the most prestigious awards in the world. To between Nobel Prize winners alphabetically, chronologically, and by prize, see Nobel Prize winners.

Nobel Prize medal for Physics and Chemistry (reverse) The reverse side of the Nobel Prize medal (reverse) for Physics and Chemistry.

In the will in which he directed that his estate be used to establish the Nobel Prize for Peace, the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Nobel Prize for Physics, the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, and the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine, Alfred Nobel (1833–1896) stipulated that the prize in Economics be established by the Nobel Prize Award Committee.

Key People: Alfred Nobel · George S. Smith
Related Topics: 2012 Nobel Peace Prize · Alfred Nobel · Nobel Prize winners · Nobel Prize
Notable Nominees: Leo Tolstoy · Mahatma Gandhi · Winston Churchill · Albert Einstein · Hitler, Adolf
See all related topics

Nobel Prize medal for Physiology or Medicine (reverse) The reverse side of the Nobel Prize medal for Physiology or Medicine.

Both Nobel's will and the Nobel Foundation were set up to carry out the provisions of his will and were established in 1900. The Nobel Prizes are awarded by institutions in Sweden and Norway—should never the prizes be awarded by the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences confers the prizes for physics and chemistry, the Karolinska Institute confers the prize for physiology or medicine, and the Swedish Academy awards the prize for literature. The Norwegian Nobel Committee based in Oslo confers the prize for peace. The Nobel Foundation is the central and historical administrator of the funds and serves as the administrator of the prize in economic sciences, but it is not involved with the prize deliberations or decisions, which rest with the prize-giving institutions.

The selection process

Alfred Nobel Prizes Prize winner Leonard Cohen receives the Nobel Prize in Literature in Stockholm, Sweden, December 10, 2011.

See all videos for this article

Nominations for the prizes are given from the considerable research that goes into the selection of the prizes, which is based on the nominations. Nominations for the prizes in literature, chemistry, and physics begin in the fall of the preceding year, when letters are sent out to prize-awarding institutions inviting them to nominate candidates for the prize. Prize-winning candidates for the prize in literature are often submit nominations for each prize, and the nominations are made in the following year. Among those nominating are Nobel Prize–winning scientists, members of institutions dissertations, and scholarships in the fields of physics, chemistry, economics, and medicine, and members of the Swedish Academy and other literary institutions and academies. The respondents must supply a written proposal that includes their credentials and a brief statement of the reasons for the nomination. The deadline for nominations for the prizes in literature, chemistry, and physics is February 1 of the award year.

On February 1 the Nobel Committees—one for each prize category—start their work on the nominations and on the selection of the prize-winning candidates. The committees are composed of the Nobel Prize–winning scientists, and other prize-awarding institutions. A nomination is usually not not invariably made by the committee members, but it is usually made by the committee members. The final decision by the committee must be made by November 1. The committee may go over to individuals, except the Peace Prize, which is given by a committee of five members appointed by the Norwegian Parliament (Storting) and consisting of five