

The 2017 Nobel Prize in Literature

Since 1901 the Nobel Prize has been presented to the Laureates each December 10, but in October we learn who they are.

Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Prize

Alfred Nobel lived between 1833 and 1896. During his lifetime he made many inventions, with the best-known being dynamite.

Alfred Nobel was thus an inventor, but also a chemist, entrepreneur and industrialist. When he died, he left behind a large fortune. In his will, Nobel declared that a large part of this money should be used to establish a prize for “those who shall have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind.” The Nobel Prize is divided into five equal parts, with the Literature Prize being one part.



The Nobel Prize in Literature

Alfred Nobel is best known as an inventor and industrialist. But when he was young, he actually dreamed of becoming a poet. He enjoyed reading and wrote his own poems. He eventually gave up his dreams of a literary career but remained interested in fiction throughout his life. In his library, the shelves were full of novels, plays and poetry collections. Late in life he also resumed writing, including a play.

The Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded to “the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction.”



This year's Literature Prize

The 2017 Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded to the British author Kazuo Ishiguro, “who, in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world,” the Prize citation says.

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in 1954 in Nagasaki, Japan. When he was five years old, he moved with his family to the United Kingdom, where he grew up and still resides. Ishiguro mainly writes novels, but also short stories as well as film and television scripts. His first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, appeared in 1982. Since then he has published seven more books. Among his best known books are *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go*, which were both turned into films.

Ishiguro writes in different genres. His later novels include elements of fantasy. But although Ishiguro varies and mixes different genres, there are themes that he often comes back to, for example friendship and love, memory and identity, truth and lies.

Never Let Me Go is about a group of teenagers growing up at a boarding school in the English countryside. Their teachers make them feel special, but at the same time they know nothing about why they are there, or why they have no parents. One day, when they are 15 years old, a teacher finally tells them the truth:

If you're going to have decent lives, then you've got to know and know properly. None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you.

Discussion questions



Below are a few questions about this year’s Nobel Prize in Literature. Think about them by yourself or discuss them in groups, as your teacher suggests.

1. What did the Laureate do?

Read through the citation explaining why Kazuo Ishiguro has been awarded the Prize. Look up the words “uncover” and “illusory”, if you don’t know what they mean. Then think about what the Prize citation actually says about Kazuo Ishiguro’s writing.

- What does it mean to say that Ishiguro’s books have “great emotional force”?
- How can his novels show “the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world”?
- How well does the Prize citation match the brief excerpt above from *Never Let Me Go*?

2. Who is the Laureate, and what kind of literature does he write?

Imagine that you are asked to explain the Laureate to someone aged around 13.

- Who is this year’s Nobel Laureate in Literature?
- What kind of books does he write? What are they about?

3. Living a lie

The book *Never Let Me Go* is about children growing up isolated from the world around them, without any parents. There are many things they don’t know, both about their own history and their future.

- Is it right for adults to lie about important things, if the truth may be very difficult or terrible for the children to hear?
- In what way do you believe the lives of the teenagers in *Never Let Me Go* are “set out” for them?
