

The 2017 Nobel Peace Prize

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 and is awarded in the following categories: Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature and Peace.



The Nobel Peace Prize

When Alfred Nobel was in his 40s, he hired a secretary. Her name was Bertha von Suttner. Although she left her job after a short period they stayed in contact, mainly by writing letters.

Later in her life, Bertha von Suttner became a leading figure in the peace movement, and in their letters they discussed how best to create peace on earth. Even though the two did not always agree, many people believe it was Bertha von Suttner who inspired Alfred to establish the Peace Prize.

The Peace Prize is awarded to those “...who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.”



The 2017 Peace Prize

This year’s Peace Prize has been awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) “for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons”.

ICAN is an international coalition of non-governmental organisations that was founded in 2007. The goal of its campaign is a worldwide ban on nuclear weapons. By bringing together several hundred organisations in many countries, ICAN has become a strong force in the struggle for a nuclear weapons-free world.

Nuclear weapons are the most powerful weapons ever created. But although nuclear weapons are a major threat to all life on earth, there has not been any international treaty that prohibits nuclear weapons – until now. In July 2017 United Nations member countries approved a treaty that bans the development and stockpiling as well as the use of nuclear weapons. To enter into force, however, 50 countries must have signed and ratified it. Those countries that sign the treaty commit themselves to follow it.

ICAN was a strong driving force in the work that led up to this treaty – working hard for years to build support among decision makers and the general public for a ban on nuclear weapons, and to ensure that the process continued to move forward. Ten years after ICAN was founded, the treaty was adopted by the UN. Now ICAN is focusing its work on persuading more countries to sign and ratify it, so that the treaty can go into effect. The goal is to persuade the nuclear-armed states to sign the treaty in the future too.

Discussion questions



Below are a few questions about the Peace Prize and the Laureate. Think about them by yourself or discuss them in groups, as your teacher suggests.

1. Nuclear weapons

Nuclear weapons are the most powerful weapons ever created.

- Why do you think there has not previously been any prohibition against nuclear weapons? As you may know, there are prohibitions against other weapons that risk harming many civilians, such as land mines and chemical weapons.
- Looking ahead, do you think that more countries will sign the treaty?

2. What did the Laureate do?

Imagine that you are asked to explain the work of the 2017 Laureate to someone aged around 13.

- What did ICAN do?
- What were the results?

3. Many paths to peace

The will of Alfred Nobel says that the Nobel Peace Prize should be awarded to those “...who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.”

- How does ICAN contribute to a more peaceful world?
- What importance will its work have for people around the world in the future?
- Will ICAN’s work affect you in any way? If so, how?
