



Teaching About the Nobel Peace Prize in ELT

by [Kip Cates](#)

For content-based teachers, it can be a challenge to find good real-world themes that practice English language skills and inspire students with stories of people who have worked for a better future. One such topic is the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Nobel Peace Prize offers a number of benefits for language classrooms. It's a high-interest topic that occurs annually and enjoys international media coverage. It engages the curiosity of learners of all ages. It can involve a variety of language learning tasks. In addition, it stimulates student interest in world affairs, promotes global awareness, and fosters social responsibility.

Classroom Activities

There's a wealth of activities available for teaching this topic, from quizzes and games to readings and research tasks. Following are some that I have used in my classes. Feel free to try these out or adapt them as necessary.

Nobel Peace Prize Quiz

When starting a new theme, it's good to engage students with a challenging task to find out what they know. To begin this teaching unit, put students in pairs and give them the following quiz (Appendix A [.pdf], answer key included). Test your knowledge by trying it yourself!

Nobel Peace Prize Quiz - True or False?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 The Nobel Peace Prize is given every two years.	<input type="checkbox"/> 7 The Nobel Peace Prize ceremony is held each year in December.
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 The Nobel Peace Prize is named after a scientist.	<input type="checkbox"/> 8 The Nobel Peace Prize winner is chosen by a committee from Sweden.
<input type="checkbox"/> 3 Alfred Nobel was from Germany.	<input type="checkbox"/> 9 The prize can only be given to one person each time.
<input type="checkbox"/> 4 Nobel became very rich from his invention – a new gasoline engine.	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 The Nobel Peace Prize consists of a medal, a diploma and some money.
<input type="checkbox"/> 5 There are six different Nobel Prizes.	 
<input type="checkbox"/> 6 The first Peace Prize was awarded in 1946.	

Studying About Alfred Nobel

After the quiz, it's time to learn about Alfred Nobel and the international prizes he established. To teach this, I designed the following reading passage with comprehension questions (Appendix B, .pdf).

The Nobel Peace Prize

A Prize for Peace
The Nobel Peace Prize is a special prize given each year to a person or group that has made a major contribution to world peace. The prize is named after Alfred Nobel, a scientist who lived in the 19th century.



The Man Behind the Prize
Alfred Nobel was born on October 21, 1833 in Sweden. Like his father, he was an inventor. He became rich and famous by inventing dynamite, an explosive used in building roads, railways and canals. He was saddened, however, to realize his invention could be used to make weapons for war. He therefore decided to use the money he had earned from dynamite to give five international awards each year. Four awards were for people who had contributed to the fields of *chemistry, physics, medicine* and *literature*. The fifth, the Nobel Peace Prize, was for the person who had most advanced the cause of world *peace*. Later, in 1969, a Nobel Prize for *economics* was established.

Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize
Alfred Nobel died in 1896. After his death, the Nobel Foundation was set up to give out his awards. The first Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in 1901. Each year, the names of all the Nobel Prize winners are announced in October. The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded on December 10th - the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death. The winner is decided by a special committee of five people from Norway. People from around the world are invited to nominate candidates who they think should be awarded the prize. The Nobel Peace Prize can be given to either a person or an organization. It can also be shared by several people. The same person can even win twice. The prize itself consists of a gold medal, a diploma and a cash award of \$1,000,000 (one million dollars).

Alfred Nobel's Legacy
Today, Alfred Nobel is famous for the six annual prizes that are given in his name. Although he invented a terrible explosive which is used in war, he hoped that his peace prize would help to promote a more peaceful world. Now, each year, people around the globe look forward to see who will be chosen to receive this famous peace prize.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS	
1. What's the Nobel Peace Prize?	11. When did Alfred Nobel die?
2. Who is it named after?	12. When was the first Peace Prize awarded?
3. When did Alfred Nobel live?	13. When are the Nobel Prizes announced?
4. When and where was he born?	14. Why is the Nobel Peace Prize awarded on December 10 th ?
5. What kind of work did his father do?	15. Who chooses the peace prize winners?
6. How did Nobel become rich and famous?	16. Who can be given the Peace Prize?
7. Why was he saddened?	17. What does the prize consist of?
8. What did Nobel do with his money?	18. What is Alfred Nobel famous for today?
9. How many Nobel Prizes are there?	19. What did he hope?
10. What are they?	20. What do people look forward to?

Nobel Peace Prize Winners

Once students have a basic idea about Alfred Nobel, it's time to focus on the recipients of his annual peace prize. To do this, put students in groups and have them brainstorm any peace prize winners they know. Next, pass out a master list of all peace prize winners from 1901 to 2019, such as the one I created here: Appendix C (.pdf).

Students are always excited to look through this list and to see the names of all the peace prize winners. The list can be used for a variety of activities:

Basic Language Practice (Wh- questions)

- Who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 ?
- When did UNICEF win the Nobel Peace Prize?
- How many people won the Nobel Peace Prize in the year 2011 ?

Scavenger Hunt Homework (Find someone who...)

- Find out how many women have won the Nobel Peace Prize (17)
- Find a university professor in Bangladesh who established a grassroots people's bank to combat poverty. (Mohammad Yunus, 2006)
- Find an American peanut farmer who became U.S. president and worked for peace and human rights after retirement. (Jimmy Carter, 2002)
- Find a famous peacemaker who never won the Nobel Peace Prize. (Examples: Gandhi; Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the Olympic Games)
- Find two women—one Catholic, one Protestant—who worked to stop religious violence in Northern Ireland. (Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, 1976)
- Find two leaders of enemy countries at war who stopped fighting, then worked together to make peace. (e.g., Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin, 1978)
- Find three winners who were arrested by their governments, put in prison, and prevented from accepting their prizes. (Carl von Ossietzky, Nazi Germany, 1935; Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma, 1991; Liu Xiaobo, China, 2010)

“Guess Who”: A Peace Prize Card Game

Another way to engage students with the list is to play a “Guess who?” game. For this, I created a set of eight profile cards (Appendix D, .pdf). Here’s what to do:

- Put students in groups, then place a set of cards face down on each table.
- Students take turns to pick up a card and read the profile to their group.
- The other students listen, try to guess the person, then check the list.

<p>Who am I?</p>  <p>I was an American who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. I won the prize for my non-violent struggle to achieve civil rights for black people in the United States. I was influenced by Gandhi. I was arrested 20 times. I made a famous speech in 1963 entitled <i>I Have a Dream</i>. I was shot and killed in 1968. Who am I?</p> <p>▪ Martin Luther King Jr. (USA)</p>	<p>Who am I?</p>  <p>I'm a young woman from Pakistan. When the Taliban took control of my region, they banned girls from attending school. I spoke out publicly and called for girls' rights to education. As a result, they tried to kill me. I was shot, but I survived and moved to England. I was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 at the age of 17. Who am I?</p> <p>▪ Malala Yousafzai (Pakistan)</p>
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Research Task: Profile Three Peace Prize Winners

Finally, to develop research skills, I have students choose three winners from the list, research them, then write a report or give a presentation about each:

- Background:** Who were they? Where and when were they born?
- Peace Prize:** Why did they win? What did they do?
- Problems:** What problems did they face?
- Impact:** What impact did their work have?
- Comments:** Why did you choose them? What did you learn?

Quotes by Nobel Peace Prize Winners

Another way to learn about peace prize winners is to study quotes that they've made. Following is a sample (Appendix E, .pdf). Have students read the quotes, choose the two they like best, then discuss—in groups—the quotes they chose and why.

Quotes by Nobel Peace Prize Winners
<i>A peaceful world cannot long exist one-third rich and two-thirds hungry. (Jimmy Carter)</i>
<i>The best defence of peace is not power, but the removal of the causes of war. (Lester B. Pearson)</i>
<i>We must live together as brothers or we shall perish together as fools. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)</i>
<i>Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free. (the Dalai Lama)</i>
<i>All works of love are works of peace. It is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the action that we do. (Mother Teresa)</i>
<i>Peace is much more precious than a piece of land. (Anwar Sadat)</i>
<i>If nations could overcome their mutual fear and distrust and could meet with confidence and good will to settle their differences, they would easily establish a lasting peace. (Fridtjof Nansen)</i>
<i>Victory can be gained with tanks and missiles, but I think that one wins better with truth, honesty and logic. (Lech Walesa)</i>
<i>If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with him. Then he becomes your partner. (Nelson Mandela)</i>

From *Seeds of Peace* by J. Larson, 1987, New Society.

Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speeches

All peace prize recipients give acceptance speeches at the Nobel award ceremony in Stockholm. These can be a great source of material for advanced classes dealing with reading, listening, or public speaking. Video recordings and written texts of selected acceptance speeches can be found on [The Nobel Prize website](#).

Extending the Unit

Nobel Peace Prize Predictions

If you'd like to get students more involved, why not have them predict the Nobel Peace Prize winner(s) for the coming year? Break them into groups (e.g., one for each continent), have each group research and present possible candidates, then choose the best one(s). The official recipients are announced each October, so students can compare their choice with the actual winner(s).

Classroom Peace Prize

Another idea is to run your own "classroom peace prize." Have students research (and, if possible, interview) peacemakers from your community, city, country, or region. Have students give presentations on these people or groups, then vote as a class for the one(s) to award your class prize to.

Other Global Peace Prizes

The Nobel Peace Prize is the world's most famous award for peace. However, it's not the only one! Extend the unit by having students research, write, or present about other peace prizes around the world. Examples could include:

- Gandhi Peace Prize (India)
- Niwano Peace Prize (Japan)
- Seoul Peace Prize (South Korea)
- Australian Peace Prize
- Stuttgart Peace Prize (Germany)
- Student Peace Prize (Norway)
- U.S. Peace Prize
- European Medal of Tolerance

For other prizes and more detailed information, see Wikipedia's "[List of Peace Prizes.](#)"

Conclusion

In my 25 years of teaching the Nobel Peace Prize, I'm always touched by how positively students respond. They're especially impressed by the diversity of the laureates. And no wonder! Nobel Peace Prize winners comprise dynamic individuals and organizations that have worked to stop wars, fight prejudice, end poverty, defend human rights, promote tolerance, and protect the environment. They include

- men and women of all ages, from teenagers (Malala, age 17) to seniors (Joseph Rotblatt, age 87)
- key world figures: statesmen, politicians, civic and religious leaders

- ordinary people: electricians (Lech Walesa), doctors (Albert Schweitzer), scientists (Andrei Sakharov), lawyers (Shirin Ebadi)
- individuals of all races from nearly every region of the world—Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, Latin America and the Middle East

I hope the activities here show the potential the Nobel Peace Prize offers as a theme for content-based English classes. Many more activities are possible: role-plays, film clips, matching tasks (*Match the winners to their actions*) and debates (*Did they really deserve to win?*). Further ideas can be found on The Nobel Prize website, which has a section devoted to [Nobel Prize Lessons](#), or through an online search for “teaching the Nobel Peace Prize.” Please feel free to [contact me](#) if you’d like a copy of the Nobel Peace Prize PowerPoint I use in class or to share your experiences with this topic

By teaching this important theme, we can introduce our students to individuals and groups around the globe that have promoted peace and social justice. We can also, perhaps, inspire them to become future peacemakers who will use their language skills to help achieve a world free of war, poverty, prejudice, and pollution.

Further Resources

Books

- Feldman, B. (2012). *The Nobel Prize: A history of genius, controversy, and prestige*. Arcade.
- Keene, A. (1998). *Peacemakers: Winners of the Nobel Peace Prize (Oxford profiles)*. Oxford University Press.

Websites

- Wikipedia: [Nobel Peace Prize](#).
- [Nobel Peace Prize Official Site](#)

Videos

- [“How Does The Nobel Peace Prize Work?”](#) (6 minutes)
- [“All Nobel Peace Prize Laureates | List of Nobel Peace Prize Winners”](#) (4 minutes)

Reference

Larson, J. (1987). *Seeds of peace*. New Society.

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