



January-February 2020

ZOOM in on america

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AMERICAN NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS IN LITERATURE



Nobel Museum in Stockholm archives and displays the heritage of Alfred Nobel and the Laureates of his Prizes. Photo B. Pilat

In this issue: American Nobel Laureates in Literature

Zoom in on America

American Nobel Prize Winners in Literature

Sinclair Lewis



Above: Sinclair Lewis, the famous American novelist, seated on the steps of a caravan, typing, while his wife, Miss Dorothy Thompson, seated behind him, looks on, somewhere in England in May 1928. They couple spent their honeymoon in a caravan, touring of Great Britain.
Photo AP Images

Right: Eugene O'Neill shakes hands with a canine friend at his chateau in Tours, France, July 21, 1930. Photo AP Images

Harry Sinclair Lewis was born on February 7, 1885 in Sauk Centre, Minnesota. In his childhood Lewis was very shy, but he was an avid reader. Lewis graduated from Yale University in 1908 and then began a career as a journalist and book editor in various cities throughout the United States. During this time, he also wrote his first four novels, none of which were successful. Finally, in 1920 Lewis's novel *Main Street* gained instant recognition from audiences worldwide. *Main Street* was popular for its silly, satirical perspective on an intelligent American woman and her older husband. His second critically acclaimed novel, *Babbitt*, was published in 1922. The main character in the novel, Mr. Babbitt, was also a rather satirical and nonsensical character. With these two highly successful novels, Lewis showcased his unique, playful style of writing. Lewis wrote in a way that ignored typical conventions of plot and structure, and he used a fantastical style of storytelling to depict ordinary aspects of American life. In 1930 Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel Prize in Literature. He was the first American to receive this award. Sinclair Lewis published a great deal of writing in the later years of his life, but none of his later novels had much success. Near the end of his life Lewis spent most of his time traveling throughout Europe. On January 10, 1951 he died of a heart attack in Rome, Italy. Sinclair Lewis's success was somewhat brief, but nonetheless his two novels *Main Street* and *Babbitt* remain superb examples of American literature. His Nobel Prize is further proof of his genius as a writer.

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill



Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888 in a hotel room in New York City. O'Neill was the son of a traveling actor; thus, he was well-acquainted with theatrical productions from a very young age. During most of his childhood he accompanied his father on the road. In 1906 he enrolled at Princeton University, but soon discovered that college was not for him. O'Neill left Princeton after only 10 months. Following his college experience, O'Neill traveled for a few years and went on sea voyages. In 1912, however, he discovered his calling as a playwright. By 1920, O'Neill had won a Pulitzer Prize for his play *Beyond the Horizon* and quickly became one of the most prominent playwrights in America. His 1922 play *Anna Christie* earned O'Neill his second Pulitzer Prize, and in 1936 he became the first American playwright to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. O'Neill's plays convey powerful and poignant emotions to his audiences. He was granted the Nobel Prize in part because of the "original concept of tragedy" shown in his productions. Over the course of his career Eugene Gladstone O'Neill wrote more than 50 plays. He died on November 27, 1953 in Boston, Massachusetts. His final play, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, was performed on Broadway after his death in 1957. For this play he won a posthumous Tony Award and a Pulitzer Prize. Eugene Gladstone O'Neill is remembered as a highly successful playwright that masterfully merged the genres of literature and theater.

Pearl Buck



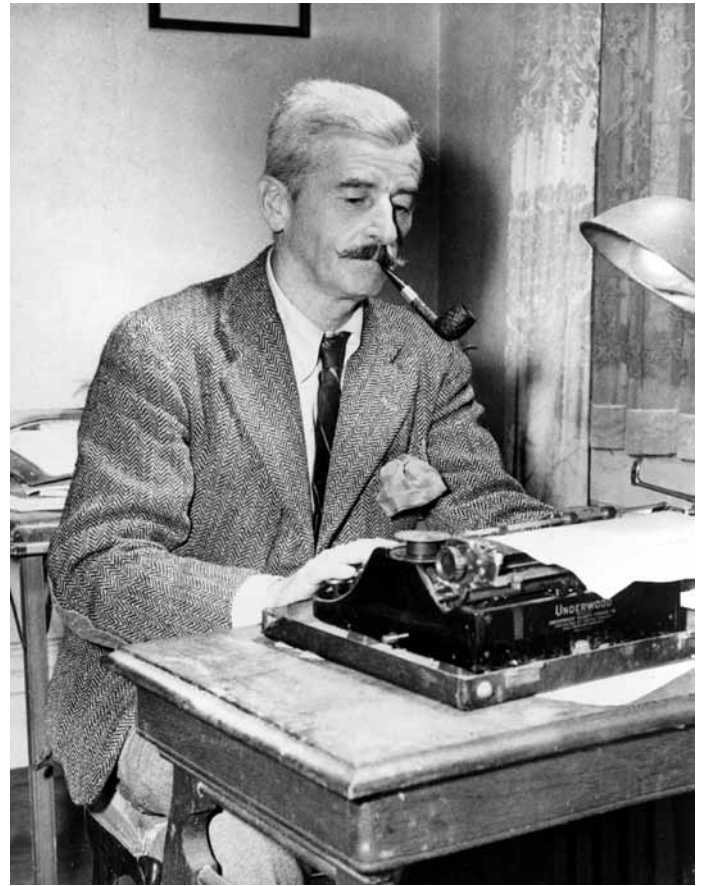
Above: Pearl Buck sprays her plants with water in the solarium of her townhouse in Philadelphia, June 19, 1967. Photo AP Images/Bill Ingraham

Right: William Faulkner works at his Underwood typewriter in his study at his Rowan Oaks home near Oxford, Mississippi, in November 1950. Photo AP Images

The first American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature was born Pearl Comfort Sydenstricke - better known under her first husband's name Buck - on June 26, 1892 in Hillsboro, West Virginia. When she was just three months old her parents moved her family to China to pursue work as Southern Presbyterian missionaries. Buck would go on to grow up and spend half of her life in China and to become a Chinese and English bilingual speaker. She would eventually write many books about her second home country. In 1934 she moved to Pennsylvania. She was a prolific writer and an activist deeply interested in social causes. In 1949 she established an adoption agency, Welcome House Inc., with a mission to help Asian orphans. Communist authorities of China did not allow Buck to return or even travel to the country which was so dear to her. Pearl Buck's first novel, *East Wind, West Wind* was published in 1930. Like many of the ones that followed, it spoke of everyday life in China. Her characters are often split between modernity and tradition. The *Good Earth* (1931), *Sons* (1932), and *A House Divided* (1935), are a trilogy - a saga about the Wang family. Her 1962 novel *Satan Never Sleeps* touches on the subject of the communist rule in China. During the Cultural Revolution, which started in 1966, Buck, was denounced as an "American cultural imperialist" and was not permitted entry into China when Richard Nixon visited the country in 1972. Pearl Buck was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938 "for her rich and truly epic descriptions of peasant life in China and for her biographical masterpieces." On this page of the Nobel Prize Museum: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1938/buck/other-resources/> you can watch an interview on the Merv Griffin show from 1966, in which Pearl Buck talks about her involvement with the charity she created, and about her writing. Her other books include an autobiography, *My Several Worlds: A Personal Record* (1954). She died on March 6, 1973.

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William Faulkner



William Faulkner (1897-1962) was born in Oxford, Lafayette County, Mississippi, where he lived most of his life. This geographical place he transformed into a fictional Yoknapatawpha County - with Jefferson as its capital - and made it the setting for his 14-novel saga, which is believed to be one of the most monumental fictional creations in the history of literature. The novels - in the order of their appearance - are: *Sartoris*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Unvanquished*, *The Hamlet*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *Knight's Gambit*, *Requiem for a Nun*, *The Town*, *The Mansion*, and *The Reivers*. In 1949 William Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature "for his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern American novel." Apart from being a laureate of the Nobel Prize, Faulkner won two Pulitzer Prizes for Fiction for *A Fable* (1954) and his last novel *The Reivers* (1962). Faulkner's early literary fascination was James Joyce, which may have left a trace on his attitude towards literature. In his own writing, Faulkner often employed a "stream of consciousness". His novels and short stories introduce a throng of characters, from former slaves or descendants of slaves, to poor white, agrarian, or working-class Southerners, to Southern aristocrats. His style is often emotional, subtle, and complex, and sometimes even gothic or grotesque.

Here you can read William Faulkner's speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm on December 10, 1950: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/speech/>

Ernest Hemingway



Ernest Hemingway in Venice, Italy in 1948. Photo AP Images

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. From an early age, Hemingway led a life that was characterized by adventure. The lively, adventurous events of his childhood and early adulthood provided Hemingway with plenty of inspiration for his novels. As a child he spent his summers vacationing in northern Michigan. Directly after graduating from high school, Hemingway moved to Kansas City to work as a reporter. After only a short time in Kansas City, however, Hemingway eagerly joined the war effort and volunteered as a Red Cross ambulance driver in WWI. He was soon injured and hospitalized in Italy, where he fell in love with a nurse. Hemingway's nurse did not return his affection, however, and he was left with a broken heart. This heartbreaking occurrence provided Hemingway with the inspiration for one of his most famous novels: *A Farewell to Arms*. After the war, Hemingway lived in Paris, Spain, and Cuba. His life was always an active life; he was an avid hunter, fisher, sailor, and all-around outdoorsman. Ernest Hemingway's novels garnered lots of acclaim by American and British audiences. His style of writing is famous for its mix of masculinity and passion. Hemingway's novels and short stories are written in a concise style that nonetheless conveys intense emotion. Ernest Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954 for his "influence...on contemporary style." His short story published in 1952, *The Old Man and the Sea*, was also a large factor in his winning of the Nobel Prize. Hemingway's style was contradictory but iconic, and it was widely imitated in the 20th century. Hemingway's work continues to influence both readers and authors today. Ernest Hemingway died on July 2, 1961 in Ketchum, Idaho. His life was undeniably a life of adventure, passion, and literary success.

John Steinbeck

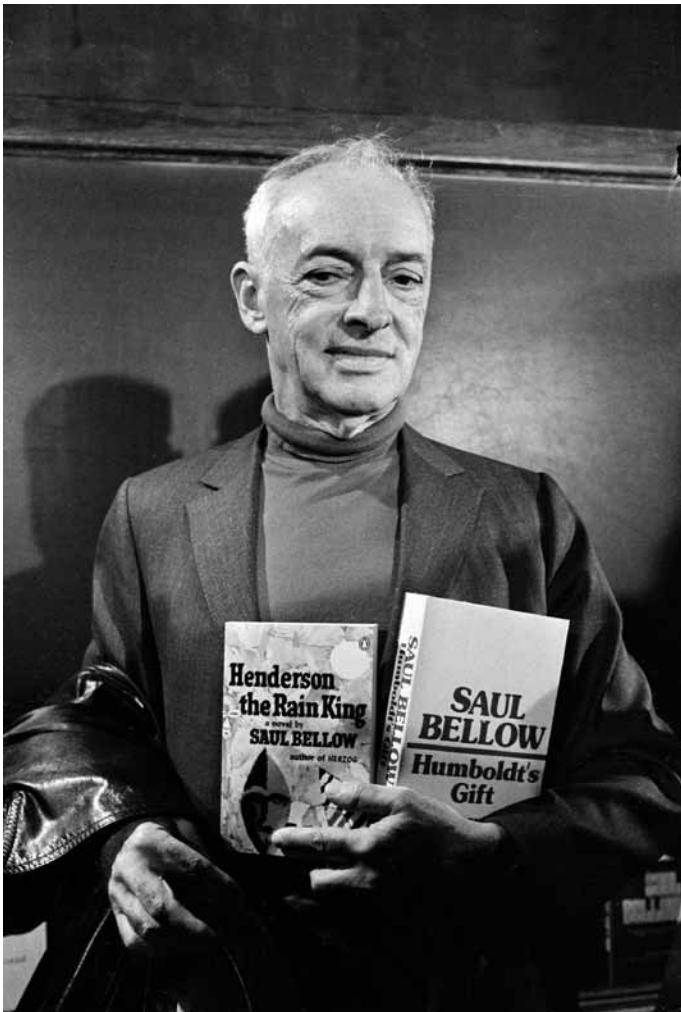


John Steinbeck walks down a trail in the Marine 1st Div. Mine Warfare School in Vietnam on December 12, 1966 in Danang. Steinbeck was asked by President Lyndon Johnson to go to Vietnam to report on the war. Photo AP Images

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California in 1902. The Salinas Valley is famed for its beauty and its agricultural success. Steinbeck always felt a strong connection to his birthplace and hometown; he eventually chose the Salinas Valley as the setting for one of his most successful novels, *East of Eden*. From an early age Steinbeck loved to read and write short stories. In high school he wrote for his school's newspaper, and at Stanford University Steinbeck enrolled in numerous creative writing courses. Though Steinbeck attended classes at Stanford off and on for six years, he left the university in 1925 without earning a degree. In 1926 Steinbeck moved to New York City to work as a journalist, but he stayed only briefly. He was appalled by the dirtiness of the city, and of the difficulty in finding a job. He quickly moved back to his beloved California and settled in Lake Tahoe, where he finished writing his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, in 1929. After writing a handful of moderately successful novels and short stories in the early 1930's, Steinbeck enjoyed critical acclaim for his 1939 masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath*. *The Grapes of Wrath* showcases the plight of poverty-stricken migrant workers during the 1930's.

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Saul Bellow



Saul Bellow (10 June 1915 – 5 April 2005) was a Canadian American writer. His Lithuanian-Jewish parents were newly arrived immigrants from Russia. When Bellow was nine, his family moved to the Humboldt Park neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago, which was often the setting of many of his novels. In 1941 he became a naturalized U.S. citizen. During WWII he joined the servant marines. Bellow was a graduate in sociology and anthropology and had a keen interest in the workings of the human brain. He was also a prolific writer. Bellow was a lecturing professor at many universities throughout most of his adult life. His books include: *Dangling Man* (1944), *The Victim* (1947), *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Seize the Day* (1956), *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), *Herzog* (1964), *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975). Bellow also wrote plays and non-fiction books such as *To Jerusalem and Back: A Personal Account* (1976), which is his personal and literary record of his sojourn in Israel during several months in 1975. In 1976 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature "for the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work." His later works include *The Bellarosa Connection: A Novella* (1989), *A Theft* (1989) and *Something to Remember Me By: Three Tales* (1992). He was a recipient of many prestigious awards.

Isaac Bashevis Singer



Above: This is an October 10, 1978 photo of Isaac Bashevis Singer, in his Miami Beach apartment.
Photo AP Images/Kathy Willens

Left: Saul Bellow clutches two of his books as he appears at a press conference at the University of Chicago October 21, 1976. Bellow came to the University of Chicago in 1963 to join the English Department and the Committee on Social Thought.
Photo AP Images/ Charles Knoblock

Isaac Bashevis Singer was born on July 14, 1904 in Le-oncin, Russian Empire (now Poland). His childhood in Warsaw before and during WWI had a big impact on his life and writing. He wrote novels, short stories and poems, mostly in Yiddish. Among his books are big family chronicles like *The Family Moskat* (1950), *The Manor* (1967), and *The Estate* (1969), short stories, novellas and poems. Some of his most well-read titles include: *The Slave, Satan in Goray, Enemies: A Love Story, Shosha, Reaches of Heaven, The Golem, The Magician of Lublin, The Spinoza of Market Street* (1961) and *A Friend of Kafka* (1970). Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1978 "for his impassioned narrative art which, with roots in a Polish-Jewish cultural tradition, brings universal human conditions to life." In his speech upon receiving the Prize, he characterized what good writing should be: "The storyteller and poet of our time, as in any other time, must be an entertainer of the spirit in the full sense of the word, not just a preacher of social or political ideals. There is no paradise for bored readers and no excuse for tedious literature that does not intrigue...." In this way he gave an insight into what he himself tried to achieve in his own writing, which is rich in humanity, and conveys universal truth about human nature, even when he depicts a typically Jewish environment. His novels show a world of old Jewish traditions and rites, which nevertheless apply broadly to all humans. Singer died on July 24, 1991 in Surfside, Florida, USA. Read more about Isaac Bashevis Singer's life and work on the Nobel Prize Museum site: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1978/singer/biographical/>

Joseph Brodsky



Joseph Brodsky is shown in this December 10, 1987 photo as he receives the prize from Swedish King Carl XVI Gustaf at the Nobel ceremony in Stockholm.
Photo AP Images/Borje Thuresson)

Joseph Brodsky was born on May 24, 1940 into a Russian Jewish family in Leningrad, Russia. In 1955, he began writing poetry and he learned Polish and English to translate the poetry of Czeslaw Milosz and John Donne. In 1972 he was forced to leave Russia for political reasons and went first to Austria and then emigrated to the United States. He taught literature at Mount Holyoke College, and at such universities as Yale, Columbia, Cambridge, and Michigan. Brodsky was chiefly a poet and essayist. He wrote poems predominantly in Russian, but actively participated in translating them and sometimes indeed wrote in English. He drew inspiration from the classical Russian tradition of Pushkin, Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova. Another of Brodsky's sources of inspiration was English poetry from the metaphysical poets John Donne to W.H. Auden. Metaphysical and ethical questions were extremely important to Brodsky. Brodsky considered literature to be about time and the effects it has on life. Therefore, many of his poems speak of parting, becoming deformed, growing old, and dying. Another important role of a poet is to speak for those who are oppressed and therefore silent, or to be a voice in open societies where information flows freely. In 1987, Brodsky was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature "for an all-embracing authorship, imbued with clarity of thought and poetic intensity." He was also appointed United States Poet Laureate in 1991. His essays were published in 1980 in a collection *Less Than One* (1980). His poetry collections include: *Elegy for John Donne and Other Poems* (1967), *A Part of Speech* (1977), *To Urania: Selected Poems, 1965–1985*, and *Discovery* (1999). Brodsky died on January 28, 1996 in New York.

Toni Morrison



Toni Morrison in 2010. Photo AP Images/Thibault Camus

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. From an early age Morrison was taught to embrace and celebrate African American culture, especially folklore and storytelling. In her childhood she showed an early interest in literature. Morrison studied humanities at Howard University for her bachelor's degree and later attended Cornell University for her master's degree. Morrison had a long career as a professor at various universities in the United States, including Howard and Princeton. She also worked as a fiction editor for Random House. In 1970, Morrison published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, about a young black girl struggling to conform to white standards of beauty. A constant theme throughout Morrison's novels is the depiction of life as a black person in America. Morrison's novels utilize rich storytelling and elements of mythology to highlight the unique cultural identity of African Americans. Her novels especially display the experience of black, female Americans. Morrison's most celebrated work, *Beloved*, was published in 1987. *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Prize and was adapted into a film and an opera. Toni Morrison's many novels are an invaluable contribution to modern American literature. Her novels showcase both the rich culture of black Americans and the adversity and injustice that they often face. Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. In 2012 she was also awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom. Morrison died on August 5, 2019 in New York City, but her influence is still widely felt in the literary world.

Bob Dylan



Bob Dylan at a festival in Jackson, Mississippi on May 17, 2003. Photo AP Images/Rogelio Solis

The 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Bob Dylan “for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition.” Bob Dylan was born Robert Allen Zimmerman in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1941. As a child he wrote poetry, and in the 1950s he began listening to country music. During his college years he was inspired by folk singer Woody Guthrie. One of the most famous songs marking the beginning of his career was *Blowing in the Wind*. Dylan has always been an artist in transition and an individualist. No one has ever succeeded in placing him into a defined mold. For his fans, Bob Dylan has not only been a singer and a poet-songwriter but a symbol of non-conformism, a lone wolf unafraid of following his own path in a quest for a better world and an understanding of what life is about. Read more in this issue of Zoom: <https://bit.ly/2ODqDLi>

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Steinbeck was an advocate for better treatment of migrant workers, and his novel helped to reveal their dilemma to American readers. His portrayal of labor issues in California led to some controversy over the novel. Nevertheless, in 1940 *The Grapes of Wrath* won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. During WWII Steinbeck was a very active patriot. He wrote propaganda and even worked as a reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune* in England and North Africa. After the war, Steinbeck traveled widely and continued to pen novels. In 1962 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his book *The Winter of Our Discontent*. John Steinbeck was a lifelong writer, American patriot, and advocate for workers' rights. He died in New York City on December 20, 1968.

Nobel Prize and Museum

In his last will, Swedish inventor, chemist, engineer, businessman, and philanthropist Alfred Nobel allocated his assets to establish the Nobel Prize. He gave instructions for the prizes to be awarded annually - without distinction of nationality - for eminence in physical science, chemistry, medical science or physiology. The prizes are awarded for outstanding contributions to humanity. The Nobel Prize in Literature was meant for “the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction.” The Nobel laureates in literature have written in 25 different languages. Nationality of the laureates is listed according to the place of their residence at the time when the Nobel Prize was awarded. In this way it may differ from nationality at birth. Three American laureates in Literature were born outside the United States: Saul Bellow in Canada, Isaac Bashevis Singer in Poland, and Joseph Brodsky in Russia. Moreover, while they are American Laureates, some wrote in languages other than English. For example, Singer wrote most of his books and poems in Yiddish, and Brodsky wrote his poetry in Russian. Sometimes a Nobel laureate was born in the United States, but is listed as another nationality, as they may have become a citizen of another country at the time they were awarded the prize. One example of this is the American-born T.S. Eliot, who became a British citizen and is entered as such on the laureate list. There are many complexities about nationality, but when it comes to reading books it is quite simple. Although books may need to be translated to be read by speakers of different languages, there is one uniform and universal language that transcends all borders. This is the language of literature. Find out more about Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Prize on the Museum's website:

January-February 2020

TRIVIA QUESTION

What are the names of two American women who won the Nobel Prize in Literature?

Send the answer
(with your home address) to:
KrakowAIRC@state.gov

The 2nd, the 9th and 17th
sender of the correct answer
will be awarded with a book
prize.

Deadline March 15, 2020

November-December
Answer:

The Atlantic Ocean

The winners are:

Tomasz from Szczecin, Maks
from Bezzrzecze, and
Sebastian from Warsaw

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

The prizes will be sent to you
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ACTIVITY: SPEAKING:

In the photographs below you see: (1) an overhead moving display showing Awardees of the Nobel Prize presenting their biographies and achievements at the Nobel Prize Museum, (2) a gift from a Laureate; such gifts have become a tradition at the Nobel Prize Museum, and (3), the burial place of Alfred Nobel in Norra begravningsplatsen in Stockholm.

Work in groups of 3 students. Each student chooses a picture and delivers a presentation about (1) the importance of museums and novel ways of displaying exhibits, (2) the importance of personal items that are displayed in museums, and (3) the idea of establishing a worldwide prize as the last will of prominent people.



An overhead moving display in the Nobel Museum in Stockholm.



Joseph Brodsky's gift for the Nobel Museum - his typewriter.
Photo Alexander Mahmoud. Courtesy of @Nobel Media.

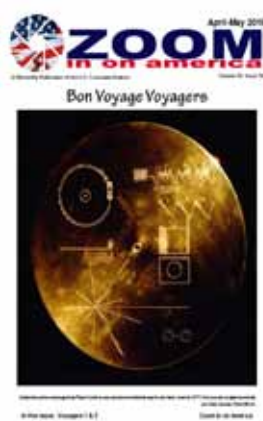


Alfred Nobel's grave in Norra begravningsplatsen in Stockholm. Photo by Bozena Pilat.

The result of our contest for the Best Cover 2019 was a draw. Here are the 3 Winning covers and 3 Winners:



January



April-May



November-December

Congratulations to the winners:

Maria, Alicja, and Pawel

The prizes will be sent to you by mail