

Maria Montessori and the Nobel Peace Prize

Nominated three times but that might mean less than you think



BY **MARCY KREVER**

For many years, I cherished the fact that Maria Montessori had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, equating it with an endorsement by the Nobel Foundation itself.

No matter that she never won—it was honor enough that this illustrious organization, tasked with selecting “the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses,” had identified her as a contender—and not just once, but three times: in 1949, 1950, and 1951.

When I mentioned this to my son, himself the product of a Montessori education, and now an adult working in the field of news production, he gave me a wry smile. “Let’s face it,” he said, “those nominations are ‘nice’—but it’s not like she was nominated for an Academy Award.”

I asked him to clarify. He handed me a laptop. (Sometimes Montessori alums can be so annoying.)

The first step of my investigations took me to the Oscars website; specifically, to the section on rules and eligibility.

That they are dense and detailed came as no surprise to me—as a movie lover, I follow, with interest, the news about Oscar nominees and winners; including reports, in recent years, about the efforts being made to help ensure diversity and inclusion.

Surely, the rules and regs for the exalted Nobel Peace Prize had to be at least as exhaustive.

A hop over to the Nobel website revealed they are anything but.

For one thing, any living person or active organization can be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize—including you, me, or the associations to which we belong—regardless of who we are or what we’ve accomplished. The

only restriction is that we can’t nominate ourselves.

“What?” you may ask. “How could I nominate myself, or anyone, for that matter, if I’m not on a Nobel

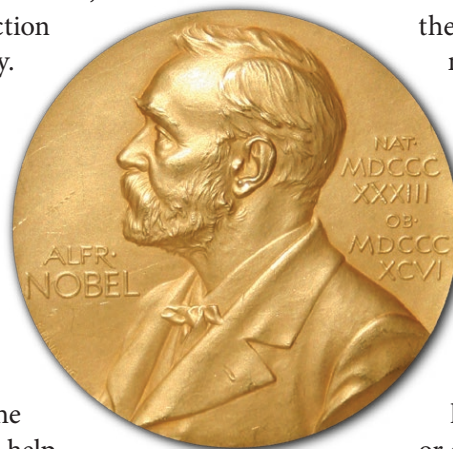
Committee?”

Well, here’s the kicker: for the most part, it’s not “Team Nobel” that makes the Peace Prize nominations, but rather, anyone who cares to throw a name in the hat, provided the person isn’t nominating themselves and belongs to at least one of several categories specified by the Foundation: for example, university professors of history, social sciences, law, philosophy, or theology; or directors of peace institutes. While the Norwegian Nobel Committee has the option

to add names to the list, their primary role is to make the selections, based on the nominations that have been submitted from individuals worldwide, with the intent to ensure that a great variety of candidates are considered.

In 1949, Montessori’s nominators were Helena Stellway and Martinus J. Langeveld (also spelled Langved, depending on the source), both professors at Utrecht University in the Netherlands; Viscount George Lambert, a member of the British Parliament; and Maria Jervolino, a member of the Italian Parliament (and eventual president of the Association Montessori Internationale, according to at least one source, which I am still investigating). The same Maria Jervolino nominated Montessori in 1950, and again in 1951.

As detailed by their statutes, the



Nobel Peace Prize overview

Nominations 1901–1976: 4,425
Most nominations in one year: 375, in 2016
Nominations in 2021: 329

continues >

Nobel Foundation keeps information about nominators under wraps for 50 years, along with the names of the nominees.

Thus, if you nominate someone for a Nobel Peace Prize—or if someone nominates you—you'll need to be patient about seeing the information go public. It may not even occur in your lifetime.

I'll admit that knowing that in any given year, the pool of potential nominees is equal to the number of people living on the planet and all functioning organizations, with no specifications about qualifications; and that the nominator pool may not be particularly discriminating, took the shine off the apple for me, and caused me to reconsider the gravitas of Maria's three-time nomination, despite the eminence of the nominators.⁹

2021 Winners

Maria Ressa and Dmitri A. Muratov, journalists in the Philippines and Russia, respectively, "for their courageous fight for freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace."

I in no way mean to cast aspersions on Dr. Montessori, whose renown as a leader in the peace movement is indisputable. Rather, it is a reminder that information published in the media should not be taken at face value, as even if it's accurate, it doesn't necessarily tell the full story. Therefore, though we might not like what we learn, going to primary sources, when possible, is the best route. Unless, of course, the journalist is my son—in which case you can rest assured that he's scrupulously done all that legwork for you.

Marcy Krever is a freelance writer and editor, and the former senior director of communications for the American Montessori Society.

Much of the information in this article was sourced from the Nobel Peace Prize website: www.nobelprize.org

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