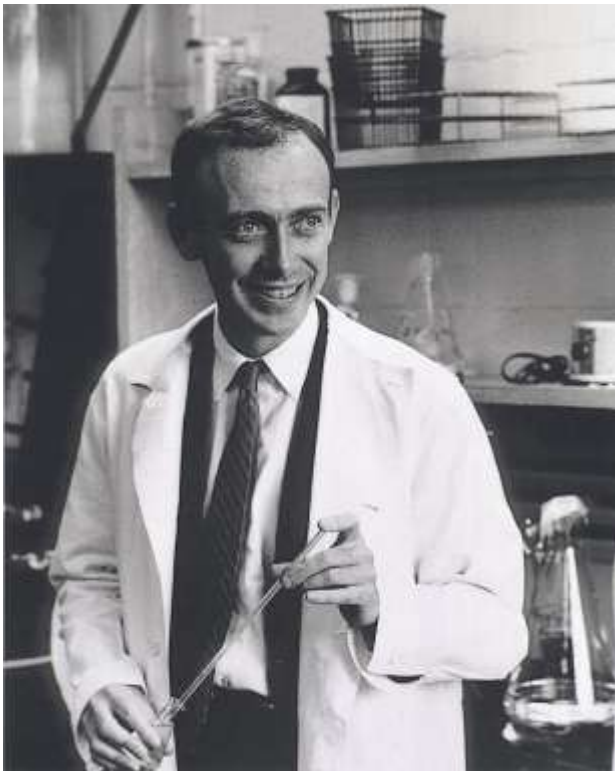


CHRISTIE'S

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RECOGNITION FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH OF THE 20TH CENTURY: DR. JAMES D. WATSON'S 1962 NOBEL MEDAL FOR HIS WORK ON THE STRUCTURE OF DNA

ESTIMATE: \$2.5 – 3.5 MILLION



"Practically all the scientific disciplines in the life sciences have felt the great impact of your discovery," said Professor A. Engström upon presenting the award to James D. Watson (pictured left, *Photo: Science Source*).

New York – On December 4, Christie's New York will conduct the sale of the 1962 Nobel Prize gold medal awarded to Dr. James D. Watson, one of the world's greatest living scientists, for his ground-breaking discovery in 1953, alongside Dr. Francis Crick and Maurice Wilkins, of the structure of DNA: the double helix. Their discovery gave birth to the new science of molecular biology and revolutionized modern medicine. A Nobel Prize medal has never before been offered for sale by a living recipient. A portion of the proceeds will be donated by Dr. Watson to continue his philanthropic legacy of supporting scientific research, academic institutions, and other charitable causes. This medal represents the turning point of 20th century medicine. It is estimated at \$2.5 to \$3.5 million.

No single person has done more to make DNA central to modern life than Dr. Watson, who wrote the first textbook of the new science, the innovative and highly influential *Molecular Biology of the Gene* (1965), followed by his memoir of the discovery, *The Double Helix* (1968)—one of the best-selling popular science books of all time.

Included in this historic auction are Dr. Watson's own handwritten notes for his acceptance speech at the December 10, 1962, banquet ceremony in Stockholm (estimate: \$300,000 - \$400,000), and his manuscript and corrected drafts for his Nobel Lecture, delivered the following day (estimate: \$200,000 - \$300,000). These unique papers offer intimate insights into the creative mind of Dr. Watson, virtually all of whose papers are in the collection of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory archives. On April 10, 2013, Christie's sold Francis Crick's "Secret of Life" letter, in which Watson's co-discoverer explained the structure of DNA to his son a few weeks before their discovery was published, for \$6,059,750, more than three times its pre-sale estimated value. It holds the world record for any letter sold at auction.



The discovery of the double-helix structure of DNA was formally announced in an elegant 800-word article by Watson and Crick in the journal *Nature* in April 1953. The importance of Watson and Crick's discovery was revolutionary, and the scientific community soon rallied around their achievement in subsequent research on DNA and issues of molecular biology.

Watson's 1962 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine represents not merely a pinnacle in scientific achievement, but the beginnings of an intellectual life story that continues to this day. The beauty of the double helix was manifold, implying methods of replication that underpin the inheritance of biological traits and form the basis of the entire field of molecular biology. It was, in short, the most important scientific event of the 20th century, one that would forever link the names Watson and Crick in history.

Dr. Watson comments on the sale: *"I look forward to making further philanthropic gifts to Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, the University of Chicago, and Clare College Cambridge, so I can continue to do my part in keeping the academic world an environment where great ideas and decency prevail. I also intend to direct funds to the Long Island Land Trust and other local charities I have long supported."*

James Dewey Watson (b. 1928)

James Watson was born in Chicago in June 1928, the only son of Jean Mitchell and James D. Watson, a businessman who only completed one year at Oberlin College and a mother who completed two years at the University of Chicago, both due to financial reasons. A couple of modest means, the Watsons nevertheless sought to inspire their son to achieve great things through education and constant self-improvement. After just two years at South Shore High School, he was accepted to begin his undergraduate studies in Zoology at the University of Chicago. At just 15 years old, James Watson already demonstrated tremendous intellectual potential. After graduating with his BA in 1947, a Bachelor of Philosophy in a Great Books centered college curriculum, and graduating Phi Beta Kappa, James Watson began doctoral work on bacterial viruses at Indiana University, studying under Salvador Luria, who himself would receive a Nobel Prize for his research on viruses. Watson obtained his PhD in 1950, and began post-doctoral work in Copenhagen studying the fate of DNA-infecting virus particles.



In 1951, at a symposium in Naples, he met Maurice Wilkins, a 34-year-old physicist who saw the X-ray diffraction pattern of crystalline DNA. It inspired Watson to change the direction of his own research. Salvador Luria arranged for him to

move new research at the University of Cambridge's Cavendish Physics Laboratory, where he worked alongside Francis Crick, a physicist 12 years his senior. "He was the first person I met who I could really talk to about DNA," Watson said later. "I'd met people, but they didn't share my conviction that only DNA was important." Over 18 months, Watson and Crick pored over countless sets of data before discovering the structure of DNA on February 28, 1953. It was a thrilling, laborious, and ever-changing process, one that Watson later rendered vividly in his memoir, *The Double Helix* (1968).

One morning in February 1953, he noticed that the shapes of two pairs of the base molecules in DNA were identical: the adenine-thymine pair and the guanine-cytosine pair. "Upon [Crick's] arrival, Francis did not get more than halfway through the door before I let loose that the answer to everything was in our hands," Watson recalled later. It is no small feat to change the course of science. On a par with Newton, Darwin and Einstein, Watson's unyielding quest for knowledge led to discoveries that forever altered human history.

In 1956, James Watson joined the faculty at Harvard, where he quickly ascended the ranks to become a full professor of Biology. He championed cutting-edge research and restructured the department into what is today the leading biological research center in the world. In 1968, Watson was appointed director of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, the prestigious research institution where he had made his first public presentation of the DNA double helix some 15 years earlier. As he had done at Harvard, Watson turned CSHL into an international leader in molecular biology. He hired distinguished biologists, assembled conferences, and oversaw the restoration of historic, harbor-view properties meant to inspire bold scientific thinking. "Just as he was with the double helix," noted Bruce Stillman, president of CSHL, "[Watson] was a real visionary in running an institution, and how an institution can have an impact on the world." He became chancellor emeritus in 2008, after decades of tireless work in transforming the facility and promoting its research.

His accomplishments as a writer have solidified his place with the general public. His best-selling memoir from 1968, *The Double Helix*, forever changed the public perception of scientists, from staid figures ensconced in laboratories to quick-thinking, ambitious and oftentimes competitive individuals in a race to discover the mysteries of life. Subsequent books included *Genes, Girls and Gamow: After the Double Helix*, and *Avoid Boring People and Other Lessons from a Life in Science*.

In the late 1980s, his connection with the double helix came full circle, when he became the first director of the U.S. National Institute of Health's Human Genome Project. It was the kind of monumental undertaking familiar to Watson: sequencing the entirety of the human genome in an effort to unlock the secrets of disease, human evolution and mankind at the molecular level. In 2007, he was one of the first people to have his entire genome sequenced, a fitting milestone for someone who was so instrumental in uncovering the building blocks of human life. He can still be found at Cold Spring Harbor, where he has lived since the 1970s. In his constant search for answers and to cure incurable cancers, James Watson continues to inspire.

The impact of the discovery of DNA's structure extends far beyond theory, and well beyond science. The concept of DNA has become the very foundation of so much of our contemporary discourse, influencing art, business, culture, the law, even politics. That it is at once something we all share and that which makes us unique profoundly affects our sense of who and what we are in the 21st Century. Dr. Watson's medal is thus not a static object from a moment in the past, frozen in time, but a symbol of human history and evolution: a powerful emblem of human advancement given to one of the men who unlocked our common "secret."

Auction date: December 4, 10 a.m.

On view: Christie's, 20 Rockefeller Center, November 29 – December 3, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., (Nov. 30, 1 – 5 p.m.)

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