

James D. Watson

Molecular biologist, Nobel Laureate (1928 –)

Watson is a molecular biologist, best known as one of the co-discoverers of the structure of DNA. Watson, Francis Crick, and Maurice Wilkins were awarded the 1962 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.

Watson was born in Chicago, and early on showed his brilliance, appearing on *Quiz Kids*, a popular radio show that challenged precocious youngsters to answer questions. Thanks to the liberal policy of University of Chicago president ROBERT HUTCHINS, Watson was able to enroll there at the age of 15, earning a B.S. in Zoology in 1947.

He was attracted to the work of Salvador Luria, who eventually shared a Nobel Prize with Max Delbrück for their work on the nature of genetic mutations. In 1948, Watson began research in Luria's laboratory and he received his Ph.D. in Zoology at Indiana University in 1950 at age 22.

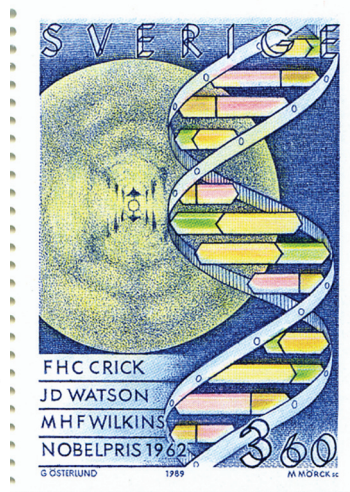
In 1951, the chemist Linus Pauling published his model of the protein alpha helix, findings that grew out of Pauling's relentless efforts in X-ray crystallography and molecular model building. Watson now wanted to learn to perform X-ray diffraction experiments so that he could work to determine the structure of DNA.

Watson and Francis Crick proceeded to deduce the double helix structure of DNA, which they submitted to the journal *Nature* and was subsequently published on April 25, 1953. Watson subsequently presented a paper on the double helical structure of DNA at the Cold Spring Harbor Symposium on Viruses in early June 1953.

Beginning in 1956, Watson taught at Harvard University for 20 years. In 1962, Watson, Crick, and Wilkins were awarded the Nobel Prize for their research. Watson later wrote that he was refused a \$1,000 raise in salary after winning the Nobel Prize.

The year 1968 was a busy one for Watson. He married Elizabeth Lewis, with whom he would have two sons. He also became the Director of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, where he would stay for 40 years. And in that year he published the best seller *The Double Helix*, a sometimes painful story of not only the discovery of the structure of DNA, but the personalities and conflicts surrounding their work. Watson also wrote several textbooks including the classic *The Molecular Biology of the Gene*.

In his lifetime, Watson has won almost every medal available, including the Albert Lasker Award, the Benjamin Franklin Medal, Charles A. Dana Award, the Copley Medal of the Royal Society, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Liberty Medal.



Courtesy of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory