

James Watson's Nobel Prize to be auctioned

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Missed the chance to bid on Francis Crick's Nobel Prize when it was auctioned off last year for \$2.27 million? No worries, you'll have another chance to own a piece of science history on Dec. 4, when James D. Watson's 1962 Nobel Prize, shared with Crick and Maurice Wilkins for their work characterizing the double-helix structure of DNA, goes under the hammer at the New York auction house Christie's.

Better make sure your bank account can handle it though: After the \$6 million sale last year of a letter written by Crick to his son that described the team's discovery, Christie's is estimating that Watson's Nobel Prize could command \$2.5 million to \$3.5 million.

No other Nobel Prize has been offered for sale by a living recipient, Christie's said. The auction house said Watson planned to donate a portion of the proceeds "to continue his philanthropic legacy of supporting scientific research, academic institutions and other charitable causes."

The 1953 discovery of DNA's double-helix design is considered one of modern science's watershed moments, giving birth to a new science of [molecular biology](#) and leading to extraordinary advances in medicine. In awarding the Nobel Prize, professor A. Engstrom told Watson that "practically all the scientific disciplines in the life sciences have felt the great impact of your discovery."

The medal given to Watson nine years after the team published its findings in the journal *Nature* was minted at the Swedish National Mint

and is plated with 24 karat gold.

Watson, now 86, is chancellor emeritus of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y. From 1988 to 1992, he served as the first director of the Human Genome Project's National Institutes of Health component, where he oversaw the mapping of the genes in the human chromosomes. In 2007, he had his own genome sequenced, only the second human to do so.

Watson retired his chancellorship of the Cold Spring Harbor lab in 2007 after the Times of London quoted him as suggesting that people of African descent were overall not as intelligent as those of European descent. He subsequently issued a statement apologizing "unreservedly" for his remarks, adding that "there is no scientific basis for such a belief." It was one of several extemporaneous observations that landed Watson, over the course of his career, in controversy.

He is most recently the author of three widely used textbooks: "Molecular Biology of the Gene," "Molecular Biology of the Cell," and "Recombinant DNA."

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