

# Emily Green Balch

1946

*The desire for liberty has made itself felt.*

Emily Greene Balch was a co-recipient of the 1946 Nobel Peace Prize, which she shared with fellow American, John R. Mott. Throughout her long life, she remained a believer in the ability of human beings to cooperate and find ways to create lives of justice and peace. Her beliefs were shown by her passion for education, social activism, and international political activity.



Emily Balch was born into a wealthy Boston family on January 8, 1867. In her youth, she attended private schools and later was a member of the first graduating class from Bryn Mawr College in 1889. She earned a degree in Greek and Latin. After a year of independent study in sociology, she won a scholarship at the Sorbonne University in Paris so she could study how to eliminate poverty. When she returned to Boston in 1892, she founded Denison House, the city's first settlement house, based on the example of Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago.

- Professor of economics and sociology, political and social activist, peace activist, visionary, author, speaker, leader of women's movement
- One of founders of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Advocate for humane treatment of prisoners of war

In 1896, she joined the faculty of Wellesley College in Massachusetts, becoming a professor of economics and sociology in 1913. Balch was a teacher and writer, and participated in many social justice movements. She spoke out loudly for women's rights, racial equality, improved labor conditions and wages, an end to child labor, and fair treatment for immigrants, as well as efforts to promote world peace.

The outbreak of World War I was a turning point for Emily Balch. She realized that ridding the world of war was going to always be an important part of her life. In 1915, Ms. Balch was a delegate to the International Congress of Women (ICW) at The Hague, Netherlands, which later became the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

She served as secretary for the WILPF from 1919 to 1922 and from 1934 to 1935. She was an outspoken **pacifist** during the years of the First World War and strongly believed in **mediation** as an alternative to fighting. Along with her good friend, Jane Addams, and other women, Balch traveled to many European nations.

She met with U.S. president Woodrow Wilson in an unsuccessful attempt to make mediation, not war, the best choice for solving differences between countries. In 1918,

Balch was fired from her teaching position at Wellesley College due to her many absences while doing work for the ICW. She thought her strong beliefs and opposition to conflict was also a factor in her firing. **Undaunted**, she continued to work for peace, through the WILPF and individually, for the rest of her life. She always found a suitable way to work for peace. In 1919, speaking as a WILPF member, she criticized the harsh nature of the Treaty of Versailles and, in the same year, she became a writer for the magazine, *The Nation*.

Between the two world wars, Ms. Balch **fought** for peace and for social and economic justice through her writing, speaking, and organizing. She was sought out to help work on several projects of the new League of Nations. These included developing ways for international **disarmament**, drug control, and the encouragement of the United States' participation in League activities.

In the 1930's, she became very concerned about **isolationist** tendencies among nations, a trend which directly conflicted with her firm belief in "internationalism" as the hope of the future. She also grew concerned with the plight of refugees from many nations around the globe, and in particular the fate of those individuals persecuted by the Nazis in Germany.

The evils she perceived in the Nazi regime led Emily Balch to push the United States government to accept more refugees into the country and, later, caused her rethink her pacifism. She was horrified by the mass murder of Jews in Europe and the immoral issues which led the holocaust.

In the United States, during the war years, she helped to relocate Japanese-Americans who had been removed from their homes and imprisoned in concentration camps against their will. By the end of the war, Ms. Balch was in her late seventies, but that did not keep her from remaining active in the causes she had served for such a long time.

The Nobel Peace Prize, which Emily Balch received in 1946, was in recognition of her role as a major leader of the peace movement in the United States. In her individual and group efforts she believed humans needed to combine action with a sense of higher purpose. Ms. Balch's ideas were recognized by Gunnar Jahn, Chairman of the Nobel Committee, in his Nobel presentation speech.

In the Nobel Lecture that she delivered in 1948, Emily Balch spoke of her undying optimism and hope for the future: "As the world community develops in peace, it will open up great untapped reservoirs in human nature. Like a spring released from pressure would be the response of a generation of young men and women growing up in an atmosphere of friendliness and security, in a world demanding their service, offering them comradeship, calling to all adventurous and forward reaching natures. We are not asked to subscribe to any **utopia** or to believe in a perfect world just around the corner. We are asked to be patient with necessarily slow and groping advance on the road forward, and to be ready for each step ahead as it becomes practical. We are asked to equip ourselves with courage, hope, readiness for hard work, and to cherish large and generous ideals."

## Suggested Classroom Activities

### Emily Balch

#### Introduction/Warm-Up:

The teacher should introduce newspaper clippings indicating some of the efforts being made today in the United State on behalf of world peace. Emily Balch's work is still going on.

#### Vocabulary Terms:

1. **Co-recipient**
2. **Alleviation**
3. *Pacifist*
4. **Mediation**
5. **Undaunted**
6. **Advocate**
7. **Disarmament**
8. **Inherent**
9. **Utopia**

#### Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways did her life and her work aid the cause of international peace? What obstacles did she face? (Level 1)
2. Why did she win the Nobel Peace Prize? (Level 1)
3. What is an "armchair interest?" Name an armchair interest of yours. (Level 1)
4. What do all of the causes for which she was a vocal advocate have in common? (Level 2)
5. Describe the meaning of "internationalism" and explain why Emily Balch considered it so important? (Level 2)
6. Do you agree with her hope for the future? (Level 3)
7. What kinds of activities might Emily Balch be involved with if she were alive today? Explain your answer. (Level 3)

#### Activity:

1. Students are to work in pairs for this activity. One person is to play the part of Emily Balch, the other is to play the part of a television reporter.
2. The reporter will ask a series of at least 10 questions based on Emily Balch's life for the purpose of learning more about her life. (Students should be alerted that rude or inappropriate questions will not be acceptable. If there is a doubt, students should check with the teacher!)

3. The person playing the part of Emily Balch will respond in a way that reflects the kind of answers that Emily Balch herself would likely have given.
4. The interview(s) should be presented to the entire class. They may be presented live, by videotape, or by audiotape.

**Technology Option:**

Go to website [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/lists/women.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/lists/women.html)

How many women have won the Nobel Peace Prize? How many of those women are Americans? Is there something special that contributes to such a high percentage of American women who have won the award? Are the percentages of American women who have won the award as high in other Nobel Prize categories? How do you explain the difference, if there is one?

**Resources:**

Randall, Mercedes M. *Improper Bostonian: Emily Greene Balch*. New York, 1964. Twain Publishers, Inc.

[www.discoverthenetwork.org/individualProfile.asp?indid=1592](http://www.discoverthenetwork.org/individualProfile.asp?indid=1592)

[www.harvardsquarelibrary.org.unitarians/balch.html](http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org.unitarians/balch.html)

[www.irwinabrams.com/articles/balch.html](http://www.irwinabrams.com/articles/balch.html)

[www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org)

[www.wilpf.org](http://www.wilpf.org)