

Who Was Einstein?

When you hear the name Albert Einstein, what do you think of? Many people picture a brilliant but absent-minded man with wild white hair. But like all of us, Einstein started out as a kid.

Einstein had a birthday, of course.

It was March 14, 1879. He was born in the small city of Ulm, Germany.

What was his family like?

Albert's dad, Hermann, worked with electrical equipment. Albert's mom, Pauline, loved music and was a talented pianist. His little sister and lifelong friend, Maja, was two years younger.

It wasn't obvious that he was a genius.

Actually, he didn't talk until he was nearly 3. At school he did not try hard in subjects that bored him.

What did he do for fun?

Albert liked doing puzzles, reading books about nature, and playing violin. He was fascinated by the invisible magnetic force that makes compasses work. And he was very curious about math.

Albert married and had children.

When he was almost 24, Albert married a fellow physics student named Mileva Maric. They had children together, but eventually they got divorced. Albert later married Elsa Löwenthal.

1905: A miraculous year.

At 26, Albert wrote four papers that changed how people understand light, energy, matter, time, and space. He studied these ideas through "thought experiments" rather than in a laboratory like most scientists. He asked himself questions like, "What would happen if I were riding on a beam of light, and I looked in a mirror?" and then figured out the answers using his imagination (and some math).

Albert used his fame to speak up for what he believed.

Albert won a Nobel Prize in 1921 and became world famous. In 1932 he escaped Nazi Germany by moving to the United States. He campaigned for the formation of Israel and for world peace. He also wrote a famous letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, warning him that Germany might build an atomic bomb and urging nuclear research.

Albert remains famous today.

He died in 1955 at age 76, but people continue to use his ideas.



Now Check This Out!

Albert Einstein: A Life of Genius

by Elizabeth MacLeod.

Kids Can Press, 2003.

Get to know Einstein's story through photographs, cartoons, and quotations.

Odd Boy Out: Young Albert Einstein

by Don Brown.

Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

Learn about Einstein's unique brilliance and misunderstood childhood in picture-book biography format.

Way to Go, Einstein!

www.ology.amnh.org/einstein

Explore Einstein's scientific ideas through interactive features and hands-on activities.

What Does It Mean to You?

What do you and Albert Einstein have in common? How are you different?

If you were famous like Einstein, what would you speak up about?