

Women of Valor



I was a best-selling author and created my own philosophy!

Ayn Rand

Meet Ayn Rand

Ayn Rand is a beloved author whose childhood experiences shaped the themes of her novels and ultimately led to the creation of her own **philosophy**.

Rand witnessed the **Bolshevik Revolution** and the Communist take-over of Russia. Ayn's family suffered years of severe poverty after armed soldiers confiscated her father's pharmacy. She escaped to the United States when she was 21.

Ayn pursued a writing career in Hollywood. She worked as a clerk and wrote stories, plays, and screenplays in her spare time. Her first novel, *We the Living*, introduced the idea that **individualism** is the source of freedom and **collectivism** is the root of oppression.

Rand is best known for her books *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, which drew harsh critical reviews but became best-sellers. Rand's philosophy of reason and individualism has influenced many people and inspired political movements, including libertarianism and the Tea Party.



At-a-Glance

- ★ Born Alissa Rosenbaum February 2, 1905 in St. Petersburg, Russia
- ★ Adopted the name Ayn Rand when she emigrated to the United States (Ayn rhymes with "pine")
- ★ Best known as the author of two novels, *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957)
- ★ Developed her own philosophy, Objectivism: Every individual has a right to pursue the values that make him or her happy. It is morally wrong to sacrifice the self or others.
- ★ Influential among conservatives and libertarians from the mid-20th century
- ★ Died March 6, 1982 in New York, New York

Young Ayn (Alissa)

The eldest of three daughters, Alissa (the name Ayn was born with) was born in St. Petersburg, one of the most cultured cities in the world. Her family lived in a large apartment above her father's pharmacy. Her father had grown up poor and worked hard to support his family and put himself through university. He placed a high value on individualism.

Alissa taught herself to read and write before entering school. She enjoyed expressing her strong opinions and decided at age nine that she wanted to be a writer. In early 1917, when the revolution began with political demonstrations against the Russian monarchy, Alissa watched with fascination. She viewed politics as a **moral** issue. She felt that people should be free to set their own goals and not be forced to live by others' goals. In the beginning, Alissa was in

favor of the revolution because it appeared to represent the fight for individual freedom. Russia had undergone a period of instability following World War I, and the government leaders were struggling to cope with political unrest, food shortages, and low morale. Government **corruption** was rampant, and Russians hoped for a better life.

However, life changed for the worse in October 1917 when the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia by occupying government buildings and other strategic locations. The prime minister fled, and soldiers filled the streets. Amid this unrest and fear, the Soviet regime was born. Private property, businesses and banks were confiscated by the new government.

*"To achieve, you need thought. ...
You have to know what you are
doing and that's real power."*

Ayn Rand





Life Under Communism

Alissa remembered vividly when armed soldiers burst into her father's pharmacy and stamped a red seal on the door, indicating that it was now state-owned. In a single moment, Alissa's family lost nearly everything and was forced to live on their meager savings. She later wrote, "It was a horrible spectacle of brutality and injustice."

Alissa and her family moved to Crimea where she attended high school and began writing her own short stories. She discovered author Victor Hugo, whose work had a profound influence on her own development as a writer. She admired that Hugo wrote about important issues through complex plots featuring heroic, larger-than-life characters. Alissa also enjoyed studying math because it was based on pure logic. She concluded that her values were "objective" because they were based on logic and reason.

Alissa studied history at the University of Petrograd. Soon after graduation, Alissa's family received a letter from a relative in the United States who had fled Russia in 1889 and knew about the horrors of the communist government. Alissa begged her mother to request their help in bringing her to America. In 1925, the Soviet government granted permission, and Alissa began her long journey, carrying only a small suitcase and her typewriter.

A PHILOSOPHY TO LIVE BY

Ayn Rand named her philosophy Objectivism. She believed that the only way to obtain knowledge was through rational thought, not faith or feelings, and that the creators of values are the greatest heroes of the human race.

Rand believed that something is good if it promotes human life (such as freedom, education, nutritious food), and evil if it destroys human life (such as political dictatorship, ignorance, poison).

She argued that the good must be based on objective fact, and not on the will of God, societal beliefs, or individual impulses.

Rand concluded that every human being should pursue values that advance his or her own happiness. Individuals succeed by following their values, not by surrendering them.

Life in America



Oscar White / Getty

Ayn (the name Alissa took after she arrived in America) first stayed with her mother's family in Chicago. They greeted Ayn warmly and asked about her life in Russia, but she refused to speak of

it. Ayn wanted to focus on the future and was grateful for the opportunity of a new beginning. She later acknowledged that her mother's family had saved her life.

Ayn learned English by watching films in the small theater owned by her Aunt Sarah. She began writing screenplays in English and enlisted a young cousin to help her with English grammar.

In the summer, Ayn left for Hollywood to pursue a screenwriting career. Through her Aunt Sarah's connections, she was introduced to director Cecil B. DeMille's movie studio. By chance, DeMille noticed Ayn standing near the gate and offered her a ride to the studio where he was filming a new movie, *King of Kings*. He hired her to work as an extra on set. One week later, Ayn met her future husband, actor Frank O'Connor, whom she later married in 1929. They remained married until he died in 1979 and did not have any children.



"What you feel tells you nothing about the facts; it merely tells you something about your estimate of the facts."

Ayn Rand

Life as a Writer



Ayn wanted desperately to earn a living as a writer, but struggled for several years, working as a junior screenwriter for Cecil DeMille and in the wardrobe department of RKO Pictures. In her spare time, Ayn developed her own screenplays and short stories. She also began writing her first novel, *We the Living*, about a young woman struggling to pursue her goals under communist rule in the Soviet Union.

Ayn sold a screenplay, *Red Pawn*, to Universal Studios for \$700, allowing her to quit her job and focus entirely on the novel, which was published in 1936. *We the Living* was rejected by many publishers because the book was considered too intellectual and too political. No publisher wanted to earn a profit on a story that denounced the Soviet Union, but Ayn didn't give up and *We the Living* was finally published. Unfortunately, it was not initially

well-received, but Ayn was determined to keep writing.

Ayn and her husband moved to New York when her courtroom drama, *Night of January 16th*, played for more than six months on Broadway. Around this time, Ayn also wrote a short story entitled *Anthem*, which tells the story of a young mind living in a **totalitarian** state where freedom of expression has been suppressed, and the very idea of individualism was stamped out.

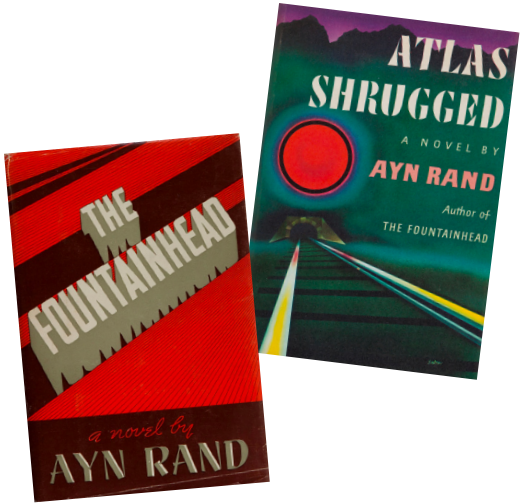
Ayn also began working on her most famous literary works, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. In both books, Ayn explores the theme of individualism versus collectivism. Her heroes are independent thinkers whose lives are guided by their own minds, self-interests, and abilities.

Later Life

Atlas Shrugged was Rand's last work of fiction. It sparked controversy and launched the Objectivist movement, which has slowly entered mainstream American culture. In Ayn's later years, she concentrated on further developing Objectivism. She wrote many essays, gave lectures at universities, and appeared on television. In 1961, she published her first non-fiction book *For the New Intellectual*. A lifelong smoker, Ayn suffered from lung cancer but ultimately died from heart failure in 1982. Her last book, *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, was published in 1982 just after her death.



Famous Books



The Fountainhead (1943)

Synopsis: Howard Roark is an architect who designs a public housing project that was altered against his wishes by government officials. When he is tried in court, he stands for individualism and the jury acquits him.

Rand spent more than seven years working on the book.

Initially rejected by 12 publishers; published in 1943.

Now considered an American classic.

Continues to sell more than 100,000 copies per year.

Atlas Shrugged (1957)

Synopsis: Dagny Taggart manages a railroad company in a future American society that is on the brink of collapse under oppressive laws. As the U.S. falls into communism, Dagny fights back to save her business. Meanwhile, the greatest minds of the country are vanishing! Americans ask a question that no one can answer: "Who is John Galt?" Dagny pursues this mysterious man who wishes to "stop the motor of the world."

Rand defends the system of **capitalism** on moral grounds. She believes that pursuing one's own happiness is essential to living a moral life. Therefore, acting in one's own self-interest is morally correct, in contrast to making decisions based on self-sacrifice for the greater good. According to Rand, the only political system that supports individual freedom is capitalism.

Attacked by critics, but became an instant best-seller.





Fascinating Facts about Ayn

- When Ayn first arrived in the U.S., she lived with family in Chicago, where one of her relatives owned a movie theater. She visited the theater almost daily, watching films to hone her English skills.
- The name “Ayn” was inspired by the name of a Finnish writer. Ayn described her new surname as an abbreviation of Rosenbaum.
- Ayn became a U.S. citizen in 1931.
- When Ayn finally experienced financial stability in the 1930s, she tried to bring her family to the United States.
- Unfortunately, the Soviet authorities did not grant the Rosenbaums permission to leave Russia. When World War II began, Ayn lost contact with her family.
- In the publishing industry, a novel usually shows its highest sales in the first few months following publication. Ayn’s books reversed the pattern; sales were slow initially and gradually increased.
- Ayn stated that she wrote every page of the 1,000-page *Atlas Shrugged* a minimum of five times.

Free to Choose

1. Ayn Rand is best known as a:

- ☐ a. revolutionist
- ☐ b. writer
- ☐ c. actress

2. The Bolshevik Revolution ushered in:

- ☐ a. a period of peace and prosperity
- ☐ b. a democratic movement
- ☐ c. the rise of communism

3. The author who had a profound influence on Ayn was:

- ☐ a. Victor Hugo
- ☐ b. William Shakespeare
- ☐ c. George Sand

4. Ayn Rand named her personal philosophy:

- ☐ a. Individualism
- ☐ b. Collectivism
- ☐ c. Objectivism

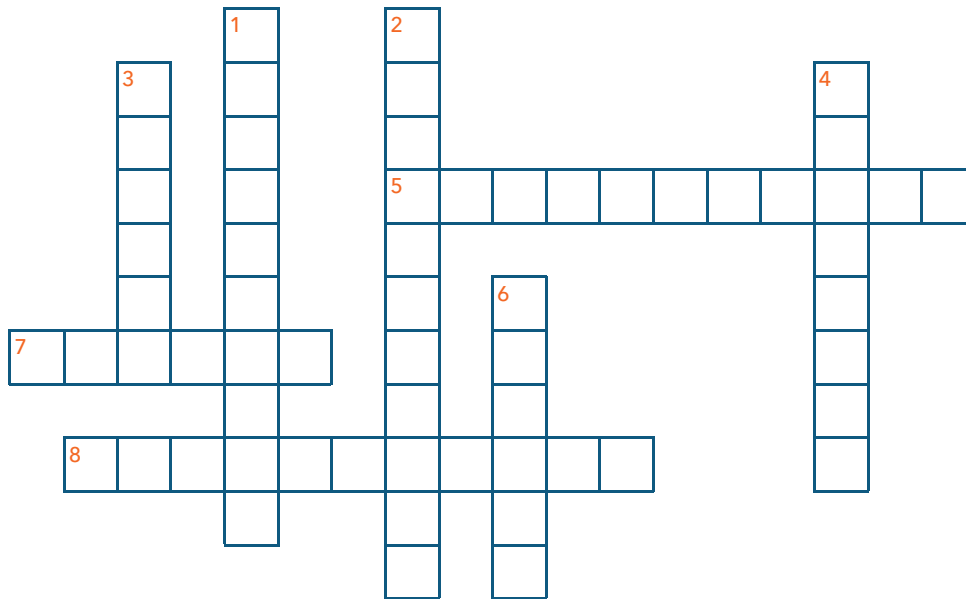
5. Ayn’s two best-selling novels are:

- ☐ a. *We the Living* & *The Fountainhead*
- ☐ b. *The Fountainhead* & *Atlas Shrugged*
- ☐ c. *Night of January 16th* & *Atlas Shrugged*

6. According to Ayn’s philosophy of Objectivism, the individual should:

- ☐ a. sacrifice his own values for the sake of the greater good
- ☐ b. make decisions solely based on feelings
- ☐ c. pursue his own interests and values

Crossword Puzzle



Answer key on page 10

ACROSS

- The name of the main character in *The Fountainhead*
- The country where Ayn was born
- What Ayn Rand called her philosophy

DOWN

- Ayn left for America with a suitcase and this
- The title of Ayn's first novel
- Ayn believed that individuals should live according to these
- The type of business owned by Ayn's father
- Ayn learned English by watching these

Detect the Difference

Use your skills of observation to find the six differences in these nearly identical images of the Ayn Rand commemorative postage stamp, issued in April 1999. The stamp was designed by Phil Jordan of Falls Church, Virginia, and illustrated by Nicholas Gaetano of Fletcher, North Carolina.

Answer key on page 10



Glossary



- **Bolshevik Revolution:** The 1917 overthrow of the Russian government led by the Social Democratic Workers' Party (the Bolsheviks and Vladimir Lenin).
- **Capitalism:** An economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately or corporately owned and growth occurs through the accumulation and reinvestment of profits gained in a free market.
- **Collectivism:** The system of ownership and control of the means of production and distribution by a group, usually under the supervision of a government.
- **Corruption:** Dishonest or illegal behavior, especially by powerful people.
- **Individualism:** Belief in the primary importance of the individual and in the virtues of self-reliance and personal independence.
- **Moral:** Concerned with the judgment of right or wrong human action and character.
- **Philosophy:** The study of the nature, causes, or principles of reality, knowledge, or values, based on logical reasoning.
- **Totalitarian:** A form of government in which the political authority exercises absolute and centralized control over all aspects of life, the individual is secondary to the state, and all opposing expression is suppressed.

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FREE TO CHOOSE KEY: 1-b, 2-c, 3-a, 4-c, 5-b, 6-c.
CROSSWORD KEY: Across: 5. Howard Roark, 7. Russia, 8. Objectivism. Down: 1. typewriter, 2. We the Living, 3. values, 4. pharmacy, 6. movies.