John Amos Comenius (Jan Amos Komensky)
This Moravian theologian and educational reformer is often called the father of modern education. He was born on March 28, 1592, in Moravia. After deciding to become a priest of the Bohemian Unity of Brethren (a German Baptist sect), he received his higher education in Germany. In 1614 he returned to Bohemia, where he taught in the schools of the Brethren. He was ordained a priest 2 years later and appointed pastor of a parish in Fulneck in 1618. The sacking of Fulneck by the Catholic forces after the outbreak of the Thirty Years War forced Comenius into hiding in Bohemia. Shortly afterward he wrote the allegory The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart.
Because of persecution, Comenius went to Leszno in 1628, where his position as corrector of the Brethren's school led him to become interested in educational reform. Many of the educational ideas expressed in his book 'The Great Didactic' were developed during this period. Among the reforms that he advocated were gentler discipline; use of the vernacular instead of Latin in the primary schools; and free, universal, compulsory education for both sexes and all social classes. His book 'The Gate of Languages Unlocked revolutionised the teaching of Latin and helped establish his reputation throughout Europe as an educational reformer.
Elected a bishop of his church in 1632, Comenius expressed his great interest in Christian unity and was conspicuous in the 17th century for his ecumenical beliefs. His development of a universal system of human knowledge among all men and nations, called pansophy, led to him being invited to England. From there he went to Sweden in 1642 and was employed in reforming the nation's school system. In 1650 he established a pansophic school in Hungary as a model for others, but conflicts caused his return to Leszno in 1655. After the sacking of the city in 1656, he fled to Amsterdam, where he resided until his death on November 4, 1670.

John Huss (Jan Hus)
John Huss, 1369-1415, was Bohemian reformer. He was ordained to the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church in 1401, after receiving his bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Prague. He became a powerful preacher of Roman doctrine, until he began to translate some of the sermons of John Wycliffe into the Bohemian language. These sermons moved him to cry out for reform in the Church, and a return to the authority of the Scriptures as the sole source of faith and doctrine for Christians.
He at once was branded a heretic, excommunicated, and his writings were suppressed. He found refuge outside of Prague, where he continued to preach, write, and study. The chief product of his pen concerning the Church developed Wycliffe's teachings concerning the universal priesthood of all believers, stating in no uncertain terms that Christ is the only Head of the church. In 1414 he was promised safe conduct by the Pope and the Emperor Zikmund to the Council of Constance to present his views. Instead of hearing him, the Council had him arrested, gave him a mock trial without the benefit of an advocate, and condemned him to death as a heretic. He was kept in prison for seven months before he was brought forth to be burned.
**Vaclav Havel**

Vaclav Havel was born on October 5th 1936 in Prague. He was playwright and dissident and the first president of the Czech Republic. He worked in a Prague theatre from 1959 and became resident playwright by 1968. His plays, including The Memorandum (1965), are absurdist, satirical examinations of bureaucratic routines that explore the moral compromises made by those living under totalitarianism. They were banned by the communist authorities, and Havel was repeatedly arrested in the 1970s and 1980s; he was imprisoned. During anti-government demonstrations in 1989, he became the leading figure in the Civic Forum, which was a coalition of groups pressing for democratic reforms. The Communist Party capitulated (in the bloodless Velvet Revolution) and formed a coalition government with the Civic Forum, and Havel was elected interim president in 1989 and president in 1990. He was then elected president of the new Czech Republic in 1993 and re-elected in 1998. Barred constitutionally from a third term, he stepped down in 2003. He died on December 18, 2011 in Hradecek.

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**Alphonse Mucha**

Born on July 24th 1860 in Ivanice in Moravia and died on July 14th, 1939 in Prague. He was painter and designer. After studying in Prague, Munich, and Paris, he became the principal designer of posters advertising the stage appearances of Sarah Bernhardt. He designed sets and costumes for her as well. His poster design for the play Gismonda became a sensation in Paris. His many opulent posters and magazine illustrations made him one of the foremost designers in the Art Nouveau style - characterised by art nouveau elements, tender colours and byzantine decorative elements. And all these elements were arranged around images of fairy like young women with long hair and splendid, refined costumes. He also became active in designing jewellery. Between 1904 and 1921 Mucha travelled frequently to the United States. He took commissions in the US and taught art at art academies in New York and Chicago. In 1922, after Czechoslovakia had become independent, he settled in Prague and designed the new republic's stamps and banknotes. In 1939 the German Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia. The popularity of the artist made him a number one target for the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police. He was arrested, interrogated and released. Shortly afterwards, Alphonse Maria Mucha died on July 14th 1939 in Prague. The city of Prague has a dedicated Alphonse Mucha Museum to honour the artist.
Jan Zizka
Jan Zizka (1360-1424), Czech general and Hussite leader, follower of Jan Hus, was born at small village Trocnov in Bohemia. He was nicknamed “One-eyed Zizka”. From his youth, he was attached to the royal court and held the office of Chamberlain to Queen Sophia. He fought in the Battle of Grunwald (July 15th 1410), where he defended Radzyn against the Teutonic Order. Later he played a prominent role in the civil wars in Bohemia during the reign of Wenceslas IV. Zizka’s tactics were unorthodox and innovative. In addition to training and equipping his army according to their abilities, he used armoured wagons armed with small cannons and muskets, as a sort of primitive tank that would come five hundred years later. He was also a master at using geography to its full advantage as well as managing the discipline of his troops. Zizka is considered to be among the greatest military leaders and innovators of all time and is one of six commanders in history who never lost a battle.

Tomas Garrigue Masaryk
Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, born March 7th 1850 in Hodonin, was the first president of Czechoslovakia. After receiving a doctorate from the University of Vienna, he taught philosophy at the Czech University of Prague (1882) and wrote about the Czech Reformation; his most important works were a study of Marxism (1898) and Russia and Europe (1913). In the Austrian Reichsrat he supported democratic policies and criticised Austria-Hungary's alliance with Germany. In 1915 he went to Western Europe, where he organised the Czech national council, which in 1918 gained recognition as the de facto government of the future Czechoslovakia. He negotiated its liberation as one of the 14 Points in the projected post-World War I peace settlement. Elected president of the new country, he was occupied with settling conflicts between the Czech and Slovak parties. He died September 14th 1937 in Lany.
**Frantisek Palacky**

Frantisek Palacky, born on June 14th 1798, was a Czech nationalist and historian. Regarded as the father of the modern Czech nation, Palacky played a leading role in the Czech cultural and national revival in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s. During the revolution of 1848, he presided over the first Pan-Slav Congress in Prague. He advocated Czech autonomy within a strong Austrian Empire as the best protection against German and Russian pressure. His paraphrase of Voltaire - "If the Austrian Empire did not exist it would have to be invented" - remains famous. After the suppression of the liberal and nationalist uprisings of 1848 in the Austrian Empire, Palacky became disillusioned. He withdrew from political activity until 1861, when he became a deputy to the Austrian parliament. With the introduction of Austrian centralising policies, he worked for complete Czech independence. Palacky was an advocate of enlightenment and education, rather than revolution. Strongly influenced by Immanuel Kant and J.J. Rousseau, he visualised the Czech nation as a bearer of the democratic ideal. His influence on the thinking of later national leaders, such as T.G. Masaryk, was enormous. In his History of Bohemia he viewed Czech history as a constant struggle between Germans and Slavs. This monumental work of scholarship strongly influenced the burgeoning Czech national consciousness. Palacky died in Prague on May 26th 1876.

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**Jan Evangelista Purkinje** (17th December 1787 - 28th July 1869)

Jan Evangelista Purkinje was one of the best known scientists of his time. In 1818, he presented his graduate thesis which described a visual phenomenon now known as the Purkinje effect. After graduating in 1819, he developed wide-ranging interests in the areas of experimental pharmacology and psychology, phonetics, histology, embryology, and physical anthropology. In 1823, he took the position of Professor of Physiology and Pathology at the University of Breslau (now the Wroclaw, Poland), he published paper that recognised fingerprints as a way to identify individuals. He noted that fingerprints seemed to follow nine general patterns. In 1832, after obtaining a modern microscope, Purkinje began a new period of research. He found different ways to examine tissues under the microscope - fixing, sectioning, and staining. With his techniques, he saw structures that other observers hadn't noticed. For example, in 1837, he discovered large pear-shaped nerve cells in the outer layer of the brain that had several branches. These are now called Purkinje cells. He was the first to describe these cells as formations in the central nervous system of vertebrates and pointed out that they play an important role in nervous activity.

Two years later he discovered Purkinje fibres - special muscle fibres in the ventricles of the heart. That same year, he described the contents of animal embryos using the term protoplasm in its scientific sense. Purkinje also conducted comparative studies of animal and plant tissue.

After 1850, Purkinje returned to Prague. He devoted the remainder of his life to the cause of Czech nationalism and making science more accessible to his countrymen. He is buried in the Czech National Cemetery in Vysehrad.