Marie Curie

Today we're going to talk about Marie Curie…in just a minute.

Born as Maria Skłodowska in 1867 in Warsaw, Marie Curie was a Polish-French scientist who pioneered research on radioactivity–a word she invented. Radioactivity is when atoms spontaneously shoot out high-energy particles. She was the first to propose that radioactivity is caused by something happening inside the atoms of radioactive elements. Up until then, scientists thought that atoms never changed. For this work, Marie won the 1903 Nobel Prize for Physics with her husband Pierre Curie, and fellow scientist Henri Becquerel. She became the first woman to win a Nobel Prize.

In 1909, Marie discovered two more elements with radioactivity. She named the first "polonium," for her native country of Poland. She called the second "radium," after the Latin word for ray. As a result, Marie won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1911. She was the first person to win two Nobel Prizes.

All of her work with radioactive elements took a toll on her health. Marie died in 1934 of a blood disease that was likely caused by too much exposure to radiation. But the legacy of her pioneering research lives on, in medical x-rays, nuclear power, and even a type of cancer treatment.

If you could meet Marie Curie, what questions would you ask her?