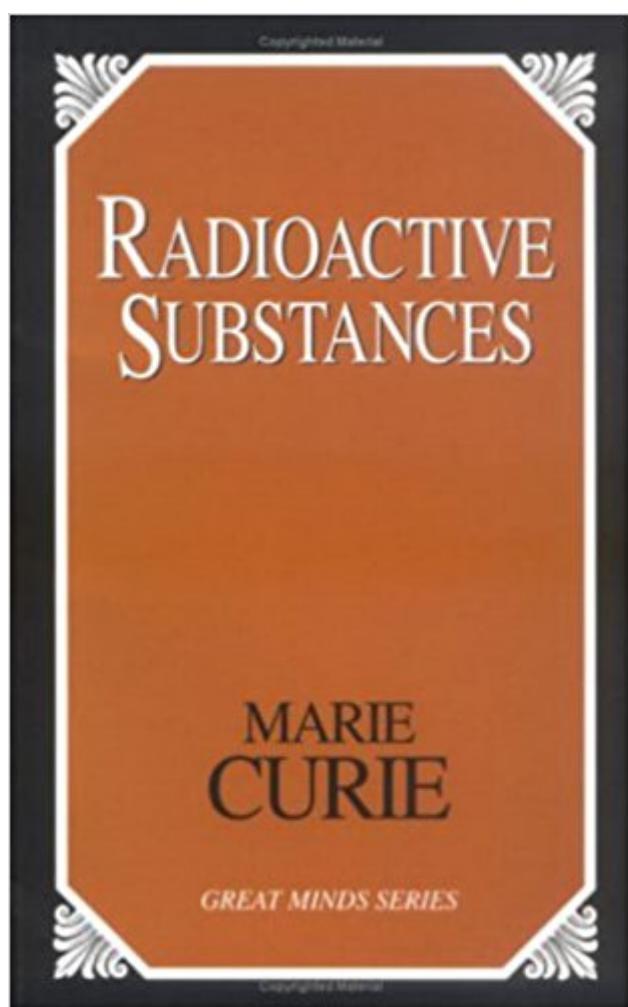


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# Radioactive Substances (Great Minds Paperback Series)



## Synopsis

Pioneering scientist and winner of two Nobel Prizes Marie Curie describes in this interesting firsthand account the painstaking laboratory research that led to her discovery of radium and other radioactive substances. This groundbreaking work in the area of natural radioactivity, done in partnership with her husband, Pierre Curie, proved to be an important milestone in understanding the structure of matter. Born Marie Skłodowska in Warsaw, Poland, she emigrated to Paris at the age of twenty-four and enrolled in the Sorbonne after being refused admission by the University of Warsaw because she was a woman. In France she met her husband, a fellow scientist, and together they conducted the laboratory investigations on radioactive substances that would later make them famous. 1903 was a banner year for both of them. Based on her work with radium she earned a doctorate of science, and their joint research was awarded the Davy Medal from the Royal Society. Then in the same year Marie and Pierre, along with Henri Becquerel, shared the Nobel Prize for Physics for the discovery of radioactivity. When Pierre died tragically in 1906 from an automobile accident, Marie was appointed by the Sorbonne to fill his professorship, and thus she became the first female member of the faculty in the 650-year history of the university. Despite the great loss of her husband and the burden of having to raise two daughters alone, Marie carried on the work that she and Pierre had begun. In 1910, her fundamental treatise on radioactivity was published, and in 1911 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry for the isolation of pure radium. Unfortunately, her many years of close work with radioactive substances eventually had deleterious health consequences and finally in 1934 she died of leukemia. This story of her work, told in her own words, reveals a courageous and dedicated scientist who gave everything for the advance of science.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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MARIE CURIE (née Maria Skłodowska) was born on November 7, 1867, in Warsaw, Poland. Her mother Bronisława Boguska, was an accomplished pianist, singer, and teacher, and her father, Władysław Skłodowski, was a professor of mathematics and physics. A brilliant student, Marie gained a gold medal upon completing her secondary education in 1883. Refused admission to the University of Warsaw because she was a woman, she earned her living as a private tutor and governess. One of her sisters, Bronya, was already studying medicine in Paris, and she encouraged Marie to move there. In November 1891 Marie enrolled at the Sorbonne, where she would earn her doctorate in physics in 1904. In 1894 she met Pierre Curie (1859–1906) at the School of Physics and Chemistry of the University of Paris while working in his laboratory on her research project. They wed in 1895. The Curies began their research into the mysterious radiation from uranium that had been discovered by Antoine Henri Becquerel (1852–1908) and in 1898 announced the discovery of radium. In 1903 the Curies and Becquerel were awarded the Nobel Prize in physics for their work on radioactivity. In 1904 Marie published her thesis, *Radioactive Substances*. After the death of Pierre on April 19, 1906, Curie succeeded her husband as professor of general physics at the Sorbonne, becoming the first woman faculty member in the 650 years of the school's existence. In 1908 she taught the first and at that time the only course on radioactivity ever offered at the Sorbonne. In 1911 she received the Nobel Prize in chemistry for her discovery of polonium and radium and for isolating pure radium. She was the first person ever to receive the award twice. During World War I she organized radiological units for hospitals. She was the director of the research department of the Radium Institute of the University of Paris (1918–1934). Curie died on July 4, 1934, in Vaucluse, France, a victim of exposure to the deadly rays from radium. Her last book, *Radioactivity* (1935), was edited by her daughter Irène, who shared the 1935 Nobel Prize in chemistry with her husband, Jean-Frédéric Joliet, for their discovery of new radioactive isotopes prepared artificially.

Review of *Radioactive Substances* by Marie Curie  
CITATION: Curie, Marie (1903, reprint, 2002) *Radioactive Substances*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc. Reviewer: Dr W. P. Palmer. This book is a reproduction of Marie Curie's doctoral thesis in which she proved that radium is a chemical element. It was presented at the Sorbonne in 1903. This edition is an unabridged republication of the 1904 English translation. Firstly it is important to note that this is a historic document and does not necessarily represent present day knowledge, though it is one of many sources of that knowledge. What is amazing about the work is its attention to detail. It explores each possible explanation of her ideas through carefully planned experiments and is a model of what a good scientific thesis should be. On every page there seems to be yet another experiment that describes in a few lines experiments that may well have taken weeks or months to complete. She also gives full credit to other scientists working in related fields and where she disagrees with their findings respectfully places both views together, so that others may judge the merits of each view. She also manages to keep up with the research of other French researchers and also many overseas researchers. It is an exceptionally brilliant piece of work. It is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in following an experimental scientific method. BILL PALMER

Marie Curie's *Radioactive Substances* provides an intriguing description and first hand account of the lab research which led to her discovery of radium - and her eventual death. Curie's own words, charts, and calculations tell of her work with radium and the advance of a scientific wonder.

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