Dorothy Hodgkin

1910 – 1994

What did she discover?

Dorothy was a British chemist who fell in love with chemistry at the age of ten. She was born to British parents; however, her place of birth was Cairo, Egypt. She was born in 1910, but she spent most of her childhood in England with her sisters. Girls did not have the opportunity to study the sciences when she went to school, so Hodgkin and her friend were the only two girls who joined the boys' class to study chemistry.

After studying chemistry at school, Dorothy loved the subject and went on to study it at university. She attended a course on crystallography and decided to conduct research on X-ray crystallography (the experimental science determining the atomic and molecular structure of a crystal using X-rays). She used the method to solve the structure of penicillin and was the second woman to be elected to the Royal Society in recognition of her work.

She continued her work on X-ray crystallography and she was successful in solving the structure for vitamin B12. Her discoveries were celebrated in 1964 when she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for her determinations by X-ray techniques of the structures of important biochemical substances.

Something to think about...

Why is it important to understand the structures of biochemical substances?

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