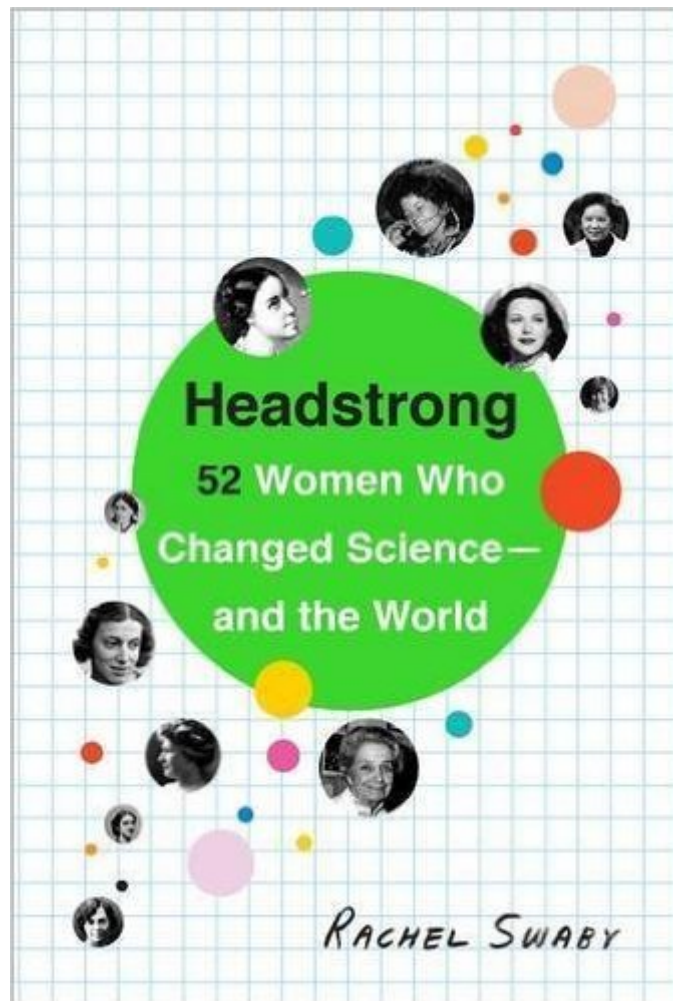


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# Headstrong: 52 Women Who Changed Science—and The World



## Synopsis

Fifty-two inspiring and insightful profiles of history's brightest female scientists. In 2013, the *New York Times* published an obituary for Yvonne Brill. It began: "She made a mean beef stroganoff, followed her husband from job to job, and took eight years off from work to raise three children." It wasn't until the second paragraph that readers discovered why the *Times* had devoted several hundred words to her life: Brill was a brilliant rocket scientist who invented a propulsion system to keep communications satellites in orbit, and had recently been awarded the National Medal of Technology and Innovation. Among the questions the obituary—and consequent outcry—prompted were, Who are the role models for today's female scientists, and where can we find the stories that cast them in their true light? *Headstrong* delivers a powerful, global, and engaging response. Covering Nobel Prize winners and major innovators, as well as lesser-known but hugely significant scientists who influence our every day, Rachel Swaby's vibrant profiles span centuries of courageous thinkers and illustrate how each one's ideas developed, from their first moment of scientific engagement through the research and discovery for which they're best known. This fascinating tour reveals these 52 women at their best—while encouraging and inspiring a new generation of girls to put on their lab coats.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The pivotal line of this book is delivered by Hertha Ayrton, who was a scientist, an author, a close friend of Marie Curie, and the inventor of a fan that dispersed noxious gas away from soldiers. She is quoted as saying: "Personally I do not agree with sex being brought into science at all. The idea

of 'women and science' is entirely irrelevant. Either a woman is a good scientist or she is not; in any case she should be given opportunities, and her work should be studied from the scientific, not the sex, point of view." This is the standard of measure of all the women in the book *Headstrong* by Rachel Swaby. In this work, Swaby covers the lives and contributions of 52 women in varying branches of science including invention, physics, mathematics, biology, chemistry, and more. Why 52? Swaby reasons that there are 52 weeks in a year, and so in reading this book you can learn about a different female scientist each week. Each selection is just a snapshot of their life and their lasting impact to human progress and innovation. Some of these portraits are only two pages long; the longest is only about 5 pages. Although each segment is brief, the value of having so many different contributions by women compiled together effectively drives home the point of the impact women have made to the umbrella of science area which they fall under and upon the larger world. The work is fact-filled, interesting, full of trivia, and delivers strong evidence of the value of female scientists without harping on or getting lost in hot-button issues like male dominance in science and exclusion of women in the field.

I chose this book because I wanted to have something that I could use for my daughter in earning her Women Scientists badge for American Heritage Girls. One of the requirements at her current level is to learn about a few women who invented something, and I just wanted it to be something different than the fairly silly stuff I've seen come through so far. Let's actually learn something about these scientists. This book will definitely accomplish that goal, though I have not used it with my 9 year old daughter yet. I've been reading it myself, to see if the whiney tone of the introduction continued into the biographies. The introduction is worth reading, if just to understand the parameters the author used in choosing these 52 women. She did not choose anyone still living, as she wants her biographies to reflect their entire life's work. She also didn't include Marie Curie, as she is the token female included in every list of great scientists. The biographies are great. The book is split into sections (medicine, biology and the environment, genetics and development, physics, the earth and the stars, math and technology, and invention) so you can focus in on an area you are interested in, read straight through, or just go for random biographies. Each biography is only a couple of pages long, so you can easily read one in just a few minutes. Obviously, these are not in-depth biographies, but there is quite a bit of information packed into those pages. Definitely, there is enough to give you a good overview, and you could then look for more information if you want to dig deeper. The biographies focus on the struggles and successes of each scientist, which is why I have always loved using scientist biographies with my children.

This book was totally inspiring! I almost wished I'd stuck with my original college goals in science after reading *Headstrong*. Swaby chose 52 amazing women to highlight and by specifically only including women whose life work has been completed • she really makes you think about how far women have come in the fields like medicine, physics, and chemistry. For example, the first woman featured, Mary Putnam Jacobi who to enter medical school in Paris had to enter lectures through a separate door and maintain a buffer of empty seats around her. Or chemist Ellen Swallow Richards who was the first woman admitted to MIT in 1870. Richards was admitted tuition free “ so that if anyone complained about her being a student the school could claim that she was not establishing a precedent for the admission of females. These women were amazing! They were brilliant and all around inspiring. Virginia Apgar “ besides coming up with the Apgar test to evaluate newborns “ “ always kept the following things on her person: a penknife, an endotracheal tube, and a laryngoscope, just in case someone needed an emergency tracheotomy. • And its the BOY Scouts who are prepared?! I could have pulled a quote from any chapter that was this cool! At the same time this book made me kind of want to tear my hair out reading the stories of these geniuses that were unpaid, relegated to work in closets or not given credit for their ideas. Barbara McClintock, who won the Nobel Prize for genetics, was asked if she was bitter that it took so long for the Nobel to come to her she said “ When you know you’re right you don’t care. It’s such a pleasure to carry out an experiment when you think of something. “ I’ve had such a good time, I can’t imagine having a better one.

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