



Phizzi professionals

Dr Naomi Rowe-Gurney (she/her): Planetary Scientist Postdoc

School

I loved all the sciences at school but had a particular interest in physics and geography. I did physics, geography and, reluctantly, maths at A-level. I never thought I was very good at maths because I had teachers tell me I should study something else and that physics and maths weren't for me, but I didn't listen and got top grades in all of my exams! I'm still terrible at numbers though and always need to count on my fingers!



What next?

I went to the University of Leicester and studied a four-year integrated Masters in Physics with Astrophysics. I found it very difficult but managed to get a 2:1! I didn't think I was smart enough to do a PhD, so I took a break and moved to Shanghai, China, and became a physics teacher. Teaching gave me back my love of the subject and gave me the confidence to apply for PhDs. After 5 years in Shanghai, I went back to Leicester to do a PhD in planetary science.



Why physics?

I chose planetary science because it was a perfect marriage between my love for physics and geography. I studied the atmospheres of Uranus and Neptune using the Spitzer Space Telescope. Astronomy helps us learn how we fit into the universe, revolutionises our thinking, and engages people in science.



And now?

I am now a postdoctoral research associate at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. I help scientists use the James Webb Space Telescope to look at our solar system, and I promote the telescope (and planetary science) to the public and to schools/universities. Sharing my unconventional journey and the barriers I faced as a queer Black woman in STEM is my favourite part of my job.



Physics in practice

Physics is figuring out and understanding how our world works. That is always a useful skill in any career but especially during a research project like a PhD where you are trying to understand something new. The main skills that I have used in my career so far is the communication and presenting that I perfected over the years I was teaching. Being good at physics/maths isn't what always makes you a good scientist.



Advice for young scientists

Don't listen when people tell you that you can't do something. If you love it, then you can do it! If I had listened to those teachers in school, then I wouldn't work at NASA now.

