

Grade 4 Pre-assessment

George Washington Carver



Born: July 12, 1864, in Diamond Grove, Missouri (though birth date may be uncertain)

Died: January 05, 1943, in Tuskegee, Alabama Occupation: Agricultural scientist

George Washington Carver, a famous agricultural scientist, revolutionized the way we farm. He also discovered that the humble little peanut could be made into 300 products! Born a slave around 1860, he lost his mother to kidnappers. After the Civil War, the 13th Amendment declared all slaves free. George's former owner, Moses Carver, raised him in Missouri where he pursued an education.

Juggling homework with full-time grueling farm work all through high school, he graduated and applied to college. However, he got rejected because he was African-American. Fortunately, he was accepted at Simpson College, where he studied piano and art. Then he transferred to Iowa State College. He earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural science plus a master's degree.

His teaching career continued at the Tuskegee University, a historically Black university. By 1896, he directed the school. His deepest passion was helping newly free African-American farmers to become self-sufficient. Since they overworked the soil when they grew so many crops in limited sized fields, their crops did not thrive and grow as well as they could. Soil, like all of us, needs nutrition and rest. Carver discovered new ways to provide these. He taught farmers to rotate the crops by planting different crops, such as peanuts, in different years. This fed the soil, which produced better food for the farmers to eat and sell.

After growing more peanuts, the farmers wondered what to do with all the peanuts now. If you think peanuts are just for PB & J sandwiches, you'll be surprised to learn that Carver discovered peanuts could make over 300 products, from plastics to paint. Carver's innovations earned him many awards and the respect of even presidents.

In 1940, he donated his savings to Tuskegee's Carver Research Foundation. As his tombstone says, *He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world.*

Simulated News Press Release: ‘Peanut Man’ Carver Restores Soil... and Hope

TUSKEGEE, ALABAMA, Dec 9, 1935

Known as the “farmer’s best friend,” George Washington Carver, a famous African-American scientist, had a love of plants that started as a boy, nursing neighbors’ plants back to health. This love continued as he completed a Master’s degree in science at Iowa State College of Agriculture. Today, he helps local farmers. He has just been appointed to help the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Soil Solution

Many farmers run into problems due to growing cotton season after season. This leaves the soil depleted of nutrients so they cannot any longer grow their most important cash crop: cotton. These farmers relied on selling cotton for their income.

This is where Carver enters. Affectionately called, ‘the plant doctor’ by all those he helps, he advised farmers to plant certain crops, like peanuts, to restore nutrients to the ‘worn out’ soil. Carver also said that growing peanuts will provide these farmers food for their cattle, and protein for their families. He has taught them that this doesn’t mean giving up cotton, but to alternate their crops each year. One year they plant cotton, the next peanuts or other soil-restoring plants such as peas, sweet potatoes.

Peanut Possibilities

As a result, local farmers now make a better living, using their healthier, nutrient-rich soil to grow not only cotton, but also peanuts. But Carver didn’t stop there! The farmers have been left with more peanuts than they needed. The “farmer’s best friend,” has come up with over 300 uses for the peanut, including peanut milk, paper and soap. Now the farmers can make products they would otherwise have to buy. And furthermore, if other people knew they could make such items from peanuts, they will want to buy peanuts from the farmers.

Carver Lives Up to His Nickname

Thanks to George Washington Carver, many farms are doing much better now. His work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture will further spread good crop care. “Farmer’s best friend” indeed!

Task: Describe how George Washington Carver overcame challenges and made a difference toward improving the lives of others. Cite evidence from the text to support your response.