

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Peanut Man

By America's Library

George Washington Carver (1860s-1943) was an African American inventor and scientist who studied plants. Carver was born into slavery as it did not officially end in Missouri until 1865. In this informational text, the author discusses how Carver showed farmers the benefits of planting peanuts. As you read, take notes on how George Washington Carver helped African American farmers.

- [1] George Washington Carver was always interested in plants. When he was a child, he was known as the “plant doctor.” He had a secret garden where he grew all kinds of plants. People would ask him for advice when they had sick plants. Sometimes he’d take their plants to his garden and nurse them back to health.

Later, when he was teaching at Tuskegee Institute, he put his plant skills to good use. Many people in the South had been growing only cotton on their land. Cotton plants use most of the nutrients in the soil. (Nutrients provide nourishment to plants.) So the soil becomes “worn out” after a few years. Eventually, cotton will no longer grow on this land.

This was especially bad for poor African American farmers, who relied on selling cotton to support themselves. Carver was dedicated to helping those farmers, so he came up with a plan.

Carver knew that certain plants put nutrients back into the soil. One of those plants is the peanut! Peanuts are also a source of protein.



"George W. Carver" by Betsy Graves Reyneau, 1888-1964, Artist is in the public domain.

- [5] Carver thought that if those farmers planted peanuts, the plants would help restore¹ their soil, provide food for their animals, and provide protein for their families — quite a plant! In 1896 peanuts were not even recognized as a crop in the United States, but Carver would help change that.

Carver told farmers to rotate their crops: plant cotton one year, then the next year plant peanuts and other soil-restoring plants, like peas and sweet potatoes. It worked! The peanut plants grew and produced lots of peanuts. The plants added enough nutrients to the soil so cotton grew the next year. Now the farmers had lots of peanuts — too many for their families and animals — and no place to sell the extras. Again, Carver had a plan. Do you know what he did?

1. **Restore (verb):** to bring back

Carver invented all kinds of things made out of peanuts. He wrote down more than 300 uses for peanuts, including peanut milk, peanut paper, and peanut soap. Carver thought that if farmers started making things out of peanuts, they'd have to buy fewer things and would be more self-sufficient.² And if other people started making things out of peanuts, they would want to buy the extra peanuts, so the farmers would make more money. Although not many of Carver's peanut products were ever mass-produced,³ he did help spread the word about peanuts.

Peanuts became more and more popular. By 1920 there were enough peanut farmers to form the United Peanut Association of America (UPAA). In 1921 the UPAA asked Carver to speak to the U.S. Congress about the many uses for peanuts. Soon the whole country had heard of George Washington Carver, the Peanut Man! And by 1940 peanuts had become one of the top six crops in the U.S.

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2. able to support yourself without outside help
3. to make large amounts of something

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What does “dedicated” mean as it is used in paragraph 3 of “The Peanut Man”?
 - A. being very committed to a purpose or mission
 - B. thinking something is unlikely or impossible
 - C. showing disappointment in the current situation
 - D. expressing appreciation for hard work done by others

2. PART B: Which TWO details from the article provide evidence that Carver was dedicated to his work?
 - A. “People would ask him for advice when they had sick plants.” (Paragraph 1)
 - B. “This was especially bad for poor African American farmers, who relied on selling cotton to support themselves.” (Paragraph 3)
 - C. “In 1896 peanuts were not even recognized as a crop in the United States, but Carver would help change that.” (Paragraph 5)
 - D. “Now the farmers had lots of peanuts — too many for their families and animals — and no place to sell the extras.” (Paragraph 6)
 - E. “He wrote down more than 300 uses for peanuts, including peanut milk, peanut paper, and peanut soap.” (Paragraph 7)
 - F. “By 1920 there were enough peanut farmers to form the United Peanut Association of America” (Paragraph 8)

3. PART A: What is the main idea of the article?
 - A. George Washington Carver was a bright young man and an excellent teacher.
 - B. George Washington Carver taught farmers how to improve crop production.
 - C. George Washington Carver learned about caring for plants as a young boy.
 - D. George Washington Carver was recognized by Congress for his accomplishments.

4. PART B: Which detail from the article supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. “When he was a child, he was known as the ‘plant doctor.’” (Paragraph 1)
 - B. “Later, when he was teaching at Tuskegee Institute, he put his plant skills to good use.” (Paragraph 2)
 - C. “Carver knew that certain plants put nutrients back into the soil.” (Paragraph 4)
 - D. “In 1921 the UPAA asked Carver to speak to the U.S. Congress about the many uses for peanuts.” (Paragraph 8)

5. PART A: How does the author of the article use key details to support the main idea?
 - A. by telling how farmers became self-sufficient
 - B. by showing Carver’s attention to plants since childhood
 - C. by describing the farming conditions in the South
 - D. by explaining how Carver studied nutrients in the soil

6. PART B: Which detail from the article supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "was always interested in plants." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Cotton plants use most of the nutrients" (Paragraph 2)
 - C. "cotton will no longer grow on this land." (Paragraph 2)
 - D. "plant cotton one year, then the next year plant peanuts" (Paragraph 6)
7. PART A: Which sentence best summarizes "The Peanut Man"?
- A. Because George Washington Carver wanted to help farmers, he taught them how to replace cotton plants with peanut plants.
 - B. Because George Washington Carver was interested in plants, he became a teacher who taught his students how to grow different types of crops.
 - C. Because George Washington Carver invented many uses for peanuts, they became a major crop in the United States.
 - D. Because George Washington Carver used his interest in plants to help farmers become self-sufficient, peanuts became an important crop.
8. PART B: Which TWO sentences from the article are important to include in a summary of "The Peanut Man"?
- A. "He had a secret garden where he grew all kinds of plants." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "People would ask him for advice when they had sick plants." (Paragraph 1)
 - C. "Sometimes he'd take their plants to his garden and nurse them back to health." (Paragraph 1)
 - D. "Carver was dedicated to helping those farmers, so he came up with a plan." (Paragraph 3)
 - E. "Peanuts are also a source of protein." (Paragraph 4)
 - F. "Peanuts became more and more popular." (Paragraph 8)
9. PART A: How does the author use evidence to support the idea that peanuts had become one of the major crops in the United States?
- A. by explaining why growing cotton was harming struggling farmers
 - B. by providing examples of products made from peanuts
 - C. by describing the creation of a national group of peanut farmers
 - D. by explaining why crop rotation is good for the soil
10. PART B: Which evidence from the article supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "Eventually, cotton will no longer grow on this land." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "Carver knew that certain plants put nutrients back into the soil." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "He wrote down more than 300 uses for peanuts, including peanut milk, peanut paper, and peanut soap." (Paragraph 7)
 - D. "By 1920 there were enough peanut farmers to form the United Peanut Association of America (UPAA)." (Paragraph 8)
11. How did Carver become well known across the country?
- A. He worked at the Tuskegee Institute.
 - B. He helped people make their sick plants well.
 - C. He spoke to Congress about the many uses of peanuts.
 - D. He organized the United Peanut Association of America.

12. Which detail from the article supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "and nurse them back to health." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Later, when he was teaching" (Paragraph 2)
 - C. "By 1920 there were enough peanut farmers to form" (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "the whole country had heard" (Paragraph 8)

