

Fact or Fiction?

Name: _____

Below is a biography on George Washington Carver. On the following page is a chart with ten statements. Indicate whether each statement is fact or fiction.

Early Years

George Washington Carver was born sometime around June 12, 1864, near Diamond, Missouri. Born into slavery, he, his sister, and mother were kidnapped by slave raiders when he was an infant. Although he was eventually returned to his owners, George developed a severe whooping cough during the escapade and could not perform the work expected of slaves. As a result, George would spend his days wandering the fields and meadows, learning about different plants.

The Struggle for Education

After the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery, George's former masters decided to raise him as their own son. They encouraged him to pursue academic goals, and his aunt taught him how to read and write. George went to great lengths to find schools that would allow black students and traveled through much of Missouri and Kansas. He finally earned his high school diploma from Minneapolis High in Minneapolis, Kansas. After high school, he opened a laundry business in Olathe, Kansas. Over the next few years, George tried to enroll in numerous colleges but was continually rejected because of his race. In 1887, he was finally accepted by Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa. He would become the second African-American to enroll. While at Simpson, Carver showed great potential and later transferred to Iowa State University where he earned his master's degree in botany and conducted research on plant pathology and mycology (the study of fungi).

Crop Rotation

After he completed his master's degree, George was invited to teach at the Tuskegee Institute, a new college for African-Americans run by Booker T. Washington. While at Tuskegee, Carver developed an interest in helping poor African-American farmers. Farmers in the south worked on poor soil, depleted of nitrogen by the annual cotton crops. Carver and his colleagues taught the farmers how to retain nutrients in the soil by using a crop rotation, a system in which the cotton crop was alternated with other crops such as soybeans, sweet potatoes, and peanuts. Carver's crop rotation improved cotton yields and gave farmers additional crops from which they could earn money.

Experiments on Nuts and Beans

Carver conducted numerous experiments on peanuts, soybeans, cow beans, and pecans, finding hundreds of practical uses for them including dyes, cosmetics, paints, plastics, and even gasoline. Carver quickly became famous and published numerous articles and "bulletins" concerning peanuts and their uses. Carver would later experiment with peanut oil and its possibilities for easing symptoms of polio in infants. Carver's reputation as a botanist and researcher began to grow, and he was named a member in the Royal Society of Arts in England, a famous English society dedicated to improving and challenging scientific practices and theories among other

things. In 1922, Carver was instrumental in convincing Congress to place tariffs on peanuts imported from China that were making it impossible for American peanut farmers to make a living.

Other Innovations

Carver designed a mobile classroom, pulled by horses, known as a Jesup Wagon which could be transported from place to place. The wagon was used not only as a classroom but as a platform for Carver and the Tuskegee Institute to demonstrate new agricultural techniques.

George Washington Carver died in 1943 after falling down a flight of stairs. In his will, he dedicated his entire life savings to the George Washington Carver Foundation at Tuskegee University, which was established two years earlier. After his death, President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated land in southwestern Missouri for the George Washington Carver National Monument. It was the first national monument for an African-American and for a non-president.

| | FACT | FICTION |
|--|------|---------|
| George's uncle taught him how to read and write | | |
| After he graduated from college, George opened a laundry business | | |
| George Washington Carver taught at the Tuskegee Institute | | |
| George Washington Carver was the first African-American to enroll at Simpson College | | |
| George Washington Carver found it difficult to find a college that would accept him | | |
| George Washington Carver taught poor farmers how to rotate their crops | | |
| George conducted experiments on peanuts at Iowa State University | | |
| George Washington Carver was never really famous during his lifetime | | |
| The first national monument for an African-American honored George Washington Carver | | |
| George Washington Carver experimented with peanuts | | |
| George conducted experiments on peanuts at Iowa State University | | |

Answers:

| | FACT | FICTION |
|--|-------------|----------------|
| George's uncle taught him how to read and write | | X |
| After he graduated from college, George opened a laundry business | | X |
| George Washington Carver taught at the Tuskegee Institute | X | |
| George Washington Carver was the first African-American to enroll at Simpson College | | X |
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| George conducted experiments on peanuts at Iowa State University | | X |
| George Washington Carver was never really famous during his lifetime | | X |
| The first national monument for an African-American honored George Washington Carver | X | |
| George Washington Carver experimented with peanuts | X | |