

George Washington Carver Reading Comprehension

Name _____

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.

Legacy and Dedications

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.

1. **Why didn't George perform the work of a typical slave?**
 - A. He was too young
 - B. He was deemed to be very intelligent
 - C. He was taught reading and writing
 - D. He was too sick
2. **Which of the following occurred between George's graduation from high school and his enrollment in college?**
 - A. He started a business
 - B. He learned to read and write
 - C. He moved to Kansas
 - D. He earned his Master's degree in botany
3. **What was the main benefit of crop rotation?**
 - A. Farmers could grow crops during the winter
 - B. Farmers could spend more time selling crops
 - C. Farmers could keep the essential nutrients in the soil
 - D. Farmers could save money
4. **What does "instrumental" mean in the following sentence?**

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.

- A. interested
- B. impartial
- C. important
- D. concerned

5. What can be inferred as an effect of:

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

- A. Chinese peanuts were now less expensive than American peanuts
- B. Chinese peanuts were now of higher quality than American peanuts
- C. Chinese peanuts would now be more expensive than American peanuts
- D. American peanut farmers were put out of business

6. What paragraph would the following sentence best appear in?

When he only a week old, he and his sister were kidnapped by outlaws from Arkansas.

- A. Crop Rotation
- B. Early Years
- C. Experiments on Nuts and Beans
- D. Legacy and Dedications

7. Which of the following is a problem-solution text structure?

- A. George Washington Carver pioneered many innovative uses for peanuts >> He was named a member of the Royal Society of Arts in London
- B. George Washington Carver earned his high school diploma >> George Washington Carver started his own business
- C. Farmers in the South worked on poor soil >> George Washington Carver taught them crop rotation techniques
- D. George Washington Carver conducted many experiments >> One such experiment tested whether peanut oil could make infants with polio feel better