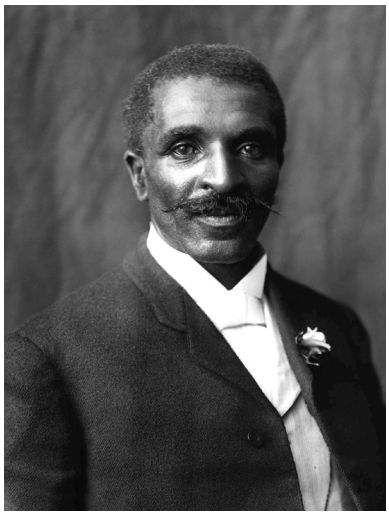
INFORMATIONAL READING COMPREHENSION:

Biography of George Washington Carver

Read the text below, and then answer the questions on the following page.

1 George Washington Carver was an African American scientist, educator, and inventor whose work had a huge impact on agriculture in the American South. Carver was born into slavery sometime in the 1860s on a farm in Missouri. The exact date of his birth is unknown, but it was near the end of the Civil War. After the Civil War, George and his brother remained on the farm owned by their former enslavers Moses and Susan Carver. Because Carver wasn't strong enough to work in the fields as a young child, he learned how to read and perform important household tasks, including cooking and sewing. He also took an interest in learning about the plants on the farm. He experimented with natural pesticides and fungicides, finding ways to improve the health of local farmers' gardens, fields, and orchards. This interest in crop health earned him the nickname "The Plant Doctor."



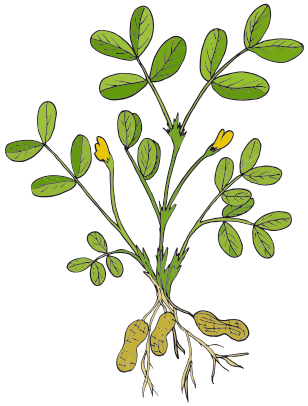
George Washington Carver

2 Although Carver initially went to college to study art and music, he later changed his course of study. When his art professor learned about Carver's interest in plants and flowers—and noticed his impressive drawings of plants—she encouraged him to instead study **botany**. So, Carver revised his plans, and, in 1894, he became the first African American man to earn a Bachelor of Science degree. After college, Carver continued to study plants and became famous as a brilliant botanist. Two years later, he earned his Master of Agriculture degree and received several job offers. One offer was from Booker T. Washington, a prominent figure in education, who invited Carver to lead the agricultural department at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Carver accepted and taught there for 47 years, focusing much of his research on finding ways to improve the lives of farmers in the South.

3 During his time at Tuskegee, Carver researched ways to restore the soil's health in the South. For many years, most of the land in the South was used to grow cotton. Over time, the soil had lost many of its nutrients, and it was difficult to successfully grow crops. Carver taught farmers about systematic crop rotation, a technique that could restore nitrogen to the soil and increase yields of cotton. He encouraged the farmers to rotate their crops, alternating the planting of cotton with nitrogen-fixing plants, such as peanuts. Carver's crop rotation methods helped farmers improve the health of the soil and made Southern farming more sustainable.

4 In addition, Carver worked tirelessly to ensure that people could use the new crops. He discovered more than 300 uses for peanuts, causing him to be **erroneously** credited as the inventor of peanut butter. He also discovered new uses for soybeans, pecans, sweet potatoes, and other crops. Some uses, as you might expect, were tasty recipes. But he also found that different parts of the peanut plant could be used to make nonfood items, including cosmetics, glue, charcoal, paint, plastics, and nitroglycerine. These discoveries further supported farmers and the economy in the southern United States. Farmers could market more of the new crops, and their families could eat whatever they didn't sell.

5 Carver's significant impacts and expertise gained him international recognition. He advised both U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt and Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi on agricultural matters. In addition, he appeared before members of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1921 to describe the versatility of the peanut and seek tariff protection. That earned him the nickname "The Peanut Man."



Peanut plant

6 Carver's legacy as one of the most famous and influential scientists of his time is marked with a national monument—an honor previously only granted to presidents—on the plantation in Diamond, Missouri, where he lived as a child. From "The Plant Doctor" to "The Peanut Man," George Washington Carver is an icon of achievement and ingenuity.

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Answer the questions about the biography.

1. **What is the central idea of the passage?**

   A. George Washington Carver helped farmers use the best pesticides and fungicides.

   B. George Washington Carver gained international fame for developing systematic crop rotation.

   C. George Washington Carver made significant contributions to American agriculture.

   D. George Washington Carver taught farmers about the benefits of growing peanuts.

2. **Part A: According to paragraph 2, what is botany?**

   _____

   _____

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   Part B: Include a sentence from paragraph 2 that supports your answer to Part A.

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3. **Based on the information in the passage, how did Carver's childhood impact his career?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

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4. **How did Carver's work impact the lives of farmers in the South? Describe two ways.**

   1. _____

   _____

   _____

   2. _____

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5. **Read the sentence from paragraph 4.**

   *He discovered more than 300 uses for peanuts, causing him to be **erroneously** credited as the inventor of peanut butter.*

   What does the word erroneously mean in this sentence?

   A. incorrectly

   B. unsatisfactorily

   C. carelessly

   D. definitely

6. **What can you infer about Carver's personality and character from this biography? Use details from the text to explain your answer.**

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7. **In your own words, summarize George Washington Carver's contributions to agriculture.**

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