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The Real Mr. Peanut

c. (circa) 1864-January 5, 1943

THE REAL "MR. PEANUT"

- Educator
- Plant Scientist
- **Agriculture** Innovator

George Washington Carver once told a story about a conversation he had with God. He asked God to tell him the mystery of the universe. God replied that George was asking about something much too grand. Then George asked God to tell him all about the peanut. And God decided that the peanut was much more nearly George's Osize. So God showed George what the peanut was all about.

Next time you gobble up a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, think of George Washington Carver. He turned the humble peanut into an agricultural giant.

What got him interested in peanuts? It all started with an insect. In the late 1800s, cotton was the major cash crop for farmers in the Southern states. But the dreaded Mexican boll weevil was threatening to eat the plants and destroy the farmers' income. Besides, all that cotton growing was wearing out the land. The farmers needed a change. Farmers, however, were scared to switch. They knew how to raise cotton, and they knew cotton would sell. Dr. Carver realized that if he were to get farmers to change their habits, he had to prove to them that some other crop would be just as valuable as cotton.

Experimenting, he came up with more than three hundred ways to use peanuts. There were dyes, fruit punches (cherry, lemon, and orange), milk, facial cream, ink, relish, and even a peanut curd that tasted just like meat. Dr. Carver had proven that peanuts had potential.

This great scientist had always been interested in plants and insects even when he was a boy. But learning about the natural world around him was not easy. He was born a slave and battled terrible discrimination against African Americans his entire life. Yet, George Washington Carver was determined to succeed, and succeed he did. He became a gifted and respected botanist. He was invited to be a professor at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. After his death, the U.S. Congress paid tribute to him by dedicating his birthplace site near Diamond Grove, Missouri, as a national monument.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt said of George Washington Carver: "The things which he achieved in the face of early handicaps will for all time afford an inspiring example to youth everywhere."

EXPLORE!

America has often been called "the land of opportunity" because people of any color, religion, or ethnic background can be successful. We are free to follow our dreams, just like the "peanut doctor" did.

Scientists often use their imaginations when they pursue their dreams. They try to come up with new ways to look at concepts, objects, and facts, like Professor Carver did with the peanut. Your task is to take a common natural product (like a potato or a daisy or a dog hair) and become Professor Carver. Design new ways for that product to be used. Consider what you know or can find out about the product, and then let your imagination run wild. If you can, test your new ideas to see if they work. Great things can happen when thinkers like you play with the impossible!

DIVE IN!

George Washington Carver: Nature's Trailblazer by Teresa Rogers (Twenty-First Century Books, Inc., 1995), 88 pages. Illustrated, Earthkeepers

POWER WORDS

"... it has always been the one great ideal of my life to be of the greatest good to the greatest number of 'my people' possible, and to this end I have been preparing myself for these many years; feeling as I do that this line of education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom to our people...."

--George Washington Carver

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): The depth of commitment to his research was made clear when Carver, in the hope of setting an example for others, donated his entire life savings of \$33,000 to Tuskegee Institute to establish a fund to carry on the agricultural and chemical work he began.

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