

Grade 3: Unit 5, Week 2 Making a Difference

Read Aloud: In Search of a Better World: The George Washington Carver Story

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Wonderful Words: *slavery, convince, university, insult, profitable*

In Search of a Better World: The George Washington Carver Story

“If I were asked what living man had the worst start and the best finish,” wrote a London magazine editor in the 1920s, “I would say Dr. Carver. It is a great loss to us that we have no one like him in England.”

Dr. Carver, an American scientist, was known throughout the world. He had made a great contribution to our knowledge of plants and plant products. Yet a start much less promising than his would be hard to imagine.

George Washington Carver was born into slavery on a farm in Missouri in about 1864. The Civil War was raging, and the slaves had not yet been freed. When Carver was a baby, news came to his mother that her husband had been killed. Soon after that, she herself was kidnapped and carried off to Arkansas. The owners of the farm, Moses and Susan Carver, were left with the small, sickly child that the kidnappers had left behind. They named him George after his father and gave him their own last name.

George was nursed back to health, but he was weak and small for his age. As a child, he spent much of his time observing nature. He couldn't go to school. There were no schools nearby that would admit black children. Instead, he learned all he could from the fields and woods. He developed a special talent for working with plants.

When George was about 10 or 11, he convinced the Carvers that he was ready to make his own way in the world. He headed for a town where there was a school he could go to. He worked at odd jobs while attending school. Then he moved on to Kansas because he had heard the schools were better there.

In the years that followed, George Carver wandered from place to place. He worked at whatever jobs he could find. He got an education whenever and wherever he could. George was an excellent student, and he became an accomplished artist and musician. In 1886, when he was in his twenties, he finally finished high school. He sent an application to Highland University in Kansas and was admitted.

Carver had high hopes as he set out for college. Unfortunately, he faced a great disappointment. On opening day, he was told that a mistake had been made. University officials had not realized that Carver was black when they admitted him. They had never had a black student at Highland University, and they were not prepared to let him stay.

Once more, Carver wandered. He did farm work and odd jobs. When the United States government opened up land in Western Kansas for homesteading, Carver staked a claim. For a while, he farmed his own homestead in Western Kansas. But he soon became restless. He decided to give up his homestead and take his chances. What he still wanted most of all was a college education.

Carver's dream of going to college finally came true in 1890. He was accepted as a student at Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa. He showed so much talent in painting that his art teacher suggested he study in Paris to further his career. The New England Conservatory of Music in Boston offered him a scholarship to study singing. But Carver

did not choose to follow either of these paths. His first love had always been the study of plants. He decided to go to Iowa State College to study agricultural science.

Carver finished his degree at Iowa State in 1894 and was asked to stay on as a teacher. He earned an advanced degree in 1896. He was already becoming well known for his vast knowledge and understanding of plants. His position at Iowa State was secure.

Then Carver made a surprising decision. He accepted a job in Tuskegee, Alabama. The new job would mean poor working conditions and low pay. What it had to offer was a chance to work hard for something he believed in.

Booker T. Washington had founded a school for blacks at Tuskegee fifteen years earlier. The school was still struggling and needed Carver's help. Carver was ready to take on the challenge. All his life, he had suffered insults and hardships because of his race. He hoped that by working at Tuskegee, he might help make the path easier for others.

At Tuskegee Institute, Carver began working to improve the lives of poor farmers in the South. He went about his work in an unusual way. First, he discovered which plants were best suited to the growing conditions of the South. Then he invented uses for those plants so that they would be profitable to grow.

Carver is probably best known for his promotion of peanuts. The peanut plant was not even recognized as a crop in 1896. Carver knew that peanuts would grow well in the South and would actually improve the soil. He developed more than 300 products from peanuts, including foods, dyes, and plastics. Soon there was a demand for peanuts. The peanut became one of America's six leading crops.

Carver also developed 118 uses for sweet potatoes. He invented new ways to use cotton, pecans, and Alabama clay, and he found hundreds of new uses for waste materials such as corn stalks. He taught people new farming methods that helped them raise better crops.

George Washington Carver's work made him famous. He could have become rich, too. The inventor Thomas Edison invited Carver to join his research staff in New Jersey. He offered to pay him more than \$100,000 a year. Automobile manufacturer Henry Ford made a similar offer. Carver turned them both down. Tuskegee needed him more. Besides, at Tuskegee he had found what he was looking for: a true home at last. His wandering days were over.

slavery

Define: **Slavery** is the practice of one person forcing another to work without payment and without freedom.

Example: After being sold into **slavery**, the man was forced to work in the fields every day.

Ask: Why do people fight against **slavery**?

convince

Define: To **convince** is to make a person believe something.

Example: I was able to **convince** my mother to adopt a dog because I took care of my neighbor's dog when she was away.

Ask: How would you **convince** someone that you are a good student?

university

Define: A **university** is a school where there are one or more colleges.

Example: My sister wants to go to the College of Medicine at the **University** of Florida.

Ask: Why might someone attend a **university**?

insult

Define: An **insult** is a word or action that hurts someone's feelings or pride.

Example: The indignant players ignored the **insults** of the crowd.

Ask: Who might use **insults**—a happy person or an angry one? Why?

profitable

Define: When something is **profitable**, it makes money.

Example: Juan's first restaurant was so **profitable** that he was able to buy another one.

Ask: Which might be **profitable**—a library or a book store? Why?