

George Washington Carver

(Story words: scientist, soil, American, nitrogen)

Abigail had to do a report on a person from the past who had a big idea. She chose George Washington Carver, one of the most prominent African American scientists and inventors of his time. Carver was born in the 1860s in Alabama. He wrote about three hundred ways you could use peanuts to make things. Abigail knew that Carver must have been interested in peanuts for a good reason.

In fact, it was farmers more than peanuts that Carver was interested in. In his time, like now, farmers wanted to plant the crops that they could sell for the most cash. In his day, those crops were cotton and tobacco. Planting these crops was good in the short term.

But the problem was that cotton and tobacco, like many plants, take nitrogen out of the soil. When farmers planted these crops year after year, they wrecked their soil and went broke.

The peanut plant makes its own nitrogen. Sweet potatoes also make nitrogen. Thus, planting peanuts and sweet potatoes replenishes the soil.

Carver knew that if farmers would rotate their crops, planting peanuts or sweet potatoes in some years while planting cotton and tobacco in other years, they would benefit in the long term, and their lives would be better. Carver's big idea was that farmers can prosper when they understand the long-term benefit of rotating crops.

Carver invented all kinds of ways to make use of peanuts so that farmers would see that peanuts could be sold and were not a waste of their efforts. Carver even made paper and coffee out of peanuts.

Abigail said to herself, "I bet if Carver saw all the peanut butter and peanut treats for sale in the supermarket today, he would be thrilled."