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## **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.”

## **The Best Volunteer Job for Zeke**

**(Story word: cages)**

Zeke wanted to find a volunteer job for the summer. His teacher told him about Wildlife Rescue. He made a date to visit to see if they had a volunteer job for him to do.

He met the director, Ann. She explained the purpose of the Rescue. More people than ever before live near wildlife. This is because land that was once forest or farmland is now suburbs. Thus, suburban dwellers live near bats, birds, rabbits, snakes, foxes, chipmunks, squirrels and other kinds of wildlife.

Often, a person will see an injured or orphaned wild animal and have no idea what to do. Wildlife Rescue Shelter has a hotline for people to call. They advertise the number so that people will know that there are people willing to rescue wild animals.

The goal of the Wild Life Rescue is to return animals back into the wild once they are healed. Before releasing the animals, they test them in order to see if they have the skills to survive.

Zeke met Frank, who was a retired truck driver. Frank helps by collecting hurt animals in his van and bringing them to the shelter when people cannot drop off the animals themselves.

He met other volunteers who helped to clean cages and pens. One volunteer let him observe her feed an infant fox by hand. Another volunteer told him about how he collected and organized items donated to the shelter.

By the end of his visit, Zeke had met a lot of volunteers and seen a lot of animals being cared for. He felt this was the right spot for him to find a volunteer job.

## **A Visit to Aunt Jen's Farm (Part 1)**

**(Story words: Aunt, guess)**

At dinner, Jon's dad said, "Guess who just texted me?" Dad then explained that Aunt Jen was inviting Jon to visit the farm. Now that Jon had turned thirteen, Aunt Jen asked if he might be old enough to ride the bus by himself for a visit.

Jon's mom said, "Hmm, we would have to check on the rules about when a minor can ride the bus. But first, Jon, how would you feel about going by yourself and staying alone on Aunt Jen's farm? Do you think you would get bored?"

Jon said, "I could ride the bus myself. The trip is just three hours. With my phone and my comics, it would be fine."

Jon's mom continued, "I was thinking also about whether you would get bored during an entire week at the farm. I know Aunt Jen wants to spend time with you but she will

be working, and you will have to be entertaining yourself some of the time.”

Jon considered the things he liked about the farm. The first thing that came to mind were the goats. The goats were Elvis, Sniff, Felix, and Bill. Jon had his best times on the farm with them. Jon wished that his parents would let him have goats at home.

Most of the time, the goats were in their big pen. In the pen, there was a small shack that held the tin pails they ate and drank from. There was even a small pond inside the pen. Jon had seen the goats stand near the pond, but he had never seen them step in.

Aunt Jen let Jon take the goats out of the pen to go with him to other parts of the farm. Because goats are herd animals and like to be together, Jon never took just one out.



## **A Visit to Aunt Jen's Farm (Part 2)**

Last year Aunt Jen and Jon had talked about constructing ramps in the pen for the goats to climb. They had even gone to the hardware store to look at items they would need but did not have time to start the project.

Jon said to his mom, "I know that I cannot bother Aunt Jen all the time I am there, and I will not get bored! Besides, I can work on the ramps!"

"Ok, then, I think this visit is a splendid idea," Mom said.

Jon was feeling more enthused than ever about the trip. He remembered the old stone wheel in the yard. The wheel had been on the farm as long as the farm had been there. Aunt Jen kept the old wheel and used it to sharpen her kitchen knives just like people did a hundred years ago. A small thing like holding the knife to the wheel while it turned was fun.

There was one thing on the farm Jon did not like: the chickens. Aunt Jen asked him to collect the eggs each morning. Maybe Aunt Jen was thinking that Jon would find it a fun thing to do.

No matter how quick Jon was when he grabbed an egg, a mean hen would peck his hands first. Aunt Jen gave him kernels of corn to scatter in the yard for the hens to peck while he collected the eggs. Doing this was supposed to distract the hens, but he could never make it work the way it did for Aunt Jen. Still, Jon would rather pretend that the job was no problem than admit that he was scared of hens.

“I won’t get bored on the bus or on the farm,” Jon said. “I’m just not wild about the chickens.”

Jon’s mom smiled and said, “But the chickens are so cute!”

“Not to me,” Jon said.

## Career Day

**(Story words: ranger, follow, country)**

Linda woke up and got dressed for school. Then she remembered. Something interesting was going to happen today. After lunch, students were going to skip their regular classes for career day.

Linda had not chosen which speakers she wanted to hear. At the last moment, she went with her friend, Steve, to hear about the career of a forest ranger.

The forest ranger was named Mike. Mike explained that rangers did many different things and that most of them involved being outside. Sometimes rangers had to help rescue campers and backpackers who got lost or injured in the back country.

Sometimes, Mike said, his job was to remind the public of the rules they needed to follow, such as getting permits for day hikes or overnight stays when entering forest lands.

Most times people were polite and respectful, but at times interacting with the public was stressful when people did not want to follow the rules.

A lot of a ranger's time is spent maintaining trails. Trails need constant work to remain in shape. Mike said rangers have strong arms and backs because of the time spent loading logs and branches into the backs of trucks. Sometimes he and his co-workers planted new seedlings to replenish parts of the forest.

Mike's most important work involved preventing fires. He often worked on a team of rangers to construct fire lines. A fire line is like a path in which anything that could fuel a fire, such as plants or sticks, is scraped away. Mike explained that a fire line needs to be wide enough so that an ember cannot jump over to find new fuel to continue the fire.

Steve had always liked being outside. In the summers, Steve worked coaching and teaching swimming. He liked

everything Mike said about his life as a ranger. Linda had been to forests on summer trips, but she had never considered a career as a ranger. She was surprised to find that many things Mike said about being a forest ranger appealed to her too.

## **Carmen Has Big News**

**(Story words: news, pool, suit)**

From the moment Carmen sat down next to Melissa on the bus, Melissa knew that Carmen had big news. With a big smile, Carmen said, “You know how my birthday is coming up?”

Melissa knew when her best friend’s birthday was. “Yes, it’s the weekend after next!”

“Well, my mom is taking us to Big Waves Water Park, and I can bring a friend!”

Melissa’s brother Frank had just been to Big Waves and said it was fantastic. “Are you going to invite me?”

“Duh,” said Carmen. “Who would I rather take than you?”

At dinner, Melissa told Frank the news.

Frank said, “Oh my gosh, you will have the best time. There are six water slides. At first, I only went down the blue and green slides, but at the end of the day I went down the black slide too. I hit the water so fast that I almost felt like my suit was going to come off. There is an amazing wave pool that is so fun to relax in. And there are these big tubes that you can grab for free to float on.”

When they got to the water park, they all looked at the map to see where everything was. While they put on sunblock and packed their beach bags, Mrs. Diaz came up with a plan.

Mrs. Diaz would entertain Carmen’s brother Dan in the Splash Zone across from where they entered the park. The girls could visit all the slides so long as they stuck together. At one, they would all meet up at the Riptide Snack Bar for lunch. After lunch, she could take them to explore the big wave pool which was on the other side of the park.

Carmen and Melissa looked at each other with big smiles.  
A day of water fun began.



## Grading Papers

**(Story words: chocolate, poetry, books)**

Jane walked into Fluff's and said a bright and cheerful "Hello" to Len who ran the shop.

Len smiled and said, "Two chocolate and one twist?"

Jane said, "You know it!"

Jane was an English teacher at the local high school. She loved being a teacher, and she loved books. When she got her students interested in writing and reading, she was thrilled. Every April she had a poetry unit ending with a poetry slam. It was her favorite time of year.

But there was one thing she wished that she did not have to do so often: grade papers. To prepare for a long night of grading, she often stopped at Fluff's.

Jane knew that her students became better writers because she had them write lots of papers. But commenting on those papers took so much effort. She told her friend Len: “Sometimes I would rather eat a stack of papers than grade them!” She pulled her stacks out of her bag and waved them in the air for emphasis.

After dinner, Jane would make a big pot of coffee. With donuts by her side, she would grade paper after paper late into the night. Her cat Rufus would curl up under the lamp on her desk or sit at her feet. It was as if Rufus could tell that Jane needed his moral support.

When returning papers to her students, Jane felt as free as a bird. Once, after staying up all night grading, she came into class with a big smile and put her stack of papers on her desk.

One of her students, Sasha, gazed at Jane’s shoes and said, “Ms. Reed? Do you realize that one of your loafers is blue and the other is black?”

Jane laughed and said, “That may be, but at least I have no more papers to grade!”

## **Facts About Chinese New Year (Part 1)**

**(Story words: family, January, February, round, noodles)**

In the United States, people travel to be with family near Thanksgiving Day, which makes the dates around Thanksgiving the most traveled days in the U.S. In China, people want to reunite with family for Chinese New Year, and so the days near the Chinese New Year are the most popular travel days.

Chinese New Year is based on a lunar calendar, a much older calendar than the modern calendar. Chinese New Year occurs at the end of January or the beginning of February. The holiday is more than 3,000 years old. The theme of the holiday is new beginnings and fresh starts. Long ago, people hoped for a good spring planting season and a plentiful harvest.

Today, people think of the family prospering in all of their efforts. People have festive dinners and lunches. They decorate their homes and light firecrackers. They may go to public parks where there are spectacular firework displays.

They also prepare and eat dishes that are related to the holiday, like dumplings and noodles. Some people say that round dumplings represent the hope for family being together. Some say long, uncut noodles represent the hope for long life.

## **Facts About Chinese New Year (Part 2)**

**(Story words: rooster, monkey, money)**

With the New Year, there will be a new ruling animal of the Zodiac. The Chinese Zodiac has twelve animals: the rat, the ox, the tiger, the rabbit, the dragon, the snake, the horse, the goat, the monkey, the rooster, the dog, and the pig. 2021 is the year of the ox, and 2022 will be the year of the tiger. People say that the year, and the children born in that year, share the good attributes of that animal. These animals also play an important role in Chinese art because artists have depicted them so many times.

Adults give children red envelopes with “luck money.” This gift is supposed to bring good luck for the whole year. People may even burn fake money for family in the afterlife, so that they can have good luck there too.

One thing people do not do is sweep and clean. This may seem odd, but the reason is that the house is full of luck

for the family, so you would not want to sweep any of it away by mistake.

## **Beach Day (Part 1)**

**(Story words: books, build, castle)**

On Sunday, Josh's family drove to the lake near their house for a day at the beach. Mom and Dad had been working all morning to pack everything they would need for the day: sunblock, water, snacks, and a big lunch. When they got to the beach, Mom and Dad put up a big umbrella to block the sun. They unfolded their beach chairs and started reading their books.

Josh's sister Gwen had invited her friend, Rachel. Gwen and Rachel took off to look at the tent where people were renting canoes.

Josh had not considered what he would do all day at the beach. He took off his sandals to walk in the sand. He looked for some flat rocks that had a good shape for skipping on top of the water. He skipped rocks for a while. He went back to see what his mom and dad were doing. They were still reading.



His brother Pete asked, “Will you help me build a sand castle?”

Pete was six and was always begging Josh to play with him. But he and Pete were in the same boat: bored.

“Okay,” he said. “I’ll help you for a while.”

## **Beach Day (Part 2)**

**(Story words: castle, wall, towers)**

They started by digging a colossal trench about fifteen feet from the shore of the lake. They dug until the trench starting filling up with water. Pete was thrilled and filled buckets and buckets of water to keep the moat for their castle full.

They created a massive wall for the castle with their hands. They packed damp sand into buckets to build cone-shaped towers. Then, they hunted along the shore for bark, rocks, and shells to decorate their castle. Pete poked small sticks through leaves to make flags.

“Should I put them all along the wall, Josh?” Pete said.

“Yes, and on top of the towers too!” Josh said.

“I need to find more sticks,” Pete said.

Josh saw that Pete was having so much fun with the project, and he was surprised to find that he was having fun too.

## **A Room Makeover**

**(Story words: room, walls, clothes, putty)**

This birthday was not going to be a normal one for Liz's sister, Meg. Meg was in tenth grade, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic, she had not been in school for the whole year. She missed seeing her friends. When Liz asked Meg what she wanted for her birthday, Meg answered, "Maybe some nail polish? Or a pair of shorts?" But Meg did not even smile.

Liz said, "I have another idea. You have always wanted to redecorate your room, but it never happens. Why don't we paint your room this weekend and clear out the stuff you are not using? We can do a whole room makeover!"

Meg's room was the same pink color that it had been when Meg was in first grade. The walls were scuffed, and Meg had taped many posters right onto the walls. She had put holes in the walls with thumbtacks too.

Meg's room was full of stuff she was no longer using, and the tops of her dresser and nightstand were always cluttered. Liz and Meg filled up big bags of books, papers, and clothes to be discarded or given away.

Meg wanted a room that looked more adult. She looked at photos of pretty rooms on the internet. Meg chose a pale light gray with white trim that had an elegant, adult look.

Liz had painted rooms before. She and Meg put tape on the moldings to protect them from being spattered by drips of paint and put drop cloths on the floor. They put putty in the holes and sanded the walls with sandpaper before starting to paint. It took two days to finish the job. They blasted all their favorite tunes while they worked.

Meg was so glad that Liz came up with this idea. She would remember this birthday for a long time.

## **Sayings about Sailors and the Sea (Part 1)**

**(Story words: smooth, learning, school)**

Today, sailing and shipping still play a part in people's lives. Products we use have been transported across the sea by ship to be sold here, and some products made here are shipped to be sold faraway. Some people still travel by boat or ship, but most often they do so for fun, not because it is the fastest or cheapest way to travel.

But before there were cars, trains, and planes, sea travel was the only way to go on big trips or transport things from far away. Even just two hundred years ago, sailors and the sea were important and vivid in people's lives. It is not surprising, then, that many sayings still in use today refer to sailors and life at sea.

Sailboats move when the wind pushes their sails, but when the wind stops, ships and sailors can be stuck for days waiting for the wind to pick up again. The phrase, "took the wind out of our sails," refers to a large shift in the

way things are that hampers people from making progress on their goals. Thus, a person might say, “The sudden decline in the market for lumber took the wind out of our sails.” In contrast, people use the phrase “smooth sailing” to describe when things look good for making progress.

Sailors were referred to as hands. The phrase, “All hands on deck,” means that everyone’s help is needed to make progress. A mom or dad might say, “We are going to need all hands on deck to clean the apartment for Gram’s birthday lunch.”

The many sails on a ship are rigged in a complicated way with ropes so that sails can go up, down, or tilt. “Learning the ropes” of the sails was difficult and took time. People still say, “I’m learning the ropes,” when they start a new job to express the idea that jobs are complicated and that a person cannot be a skilled worker at a new job all at once.

Another phrase is, “getting one’s sea legs.” This phrase refers to the fact that it takes time to adjust to the movement of a boat which is rocking back and forth before one can walk or act in a relaxed, normal way. A person adjusting to a new school might say after the first few days, “I’m still getting my sea legs, but things are fine.”



## **Sayings about Sailors and the Sea (Part 2)**

### **(Story words: captain, battle)**

Sometimes ships had to get out of a storm and make an unexpected stop at a port to wait for a storm to pass. As you might expect, sailors would not complain about these ports for minor reasons. The phrase, “any port in a storm,” is used to express the idea that one is grateful to find any good spot or plan to escape from a big problem or crisis.

Speaking of storms and problems, sailors knew that after a big storm the air is often clear and fine. People use the phrase, “clearing the air,” to mean that sometimes having a frank talk or even an argument has the benefit of getting rid of stress later. A person might say, “My brother and I cleared the air about the unfinished yard work.”

The leader of the ship is the captain. A captain who demands that all chores are done and the ship stays “shipshape” is said to run a “tight ship.” Someone might say, “I spent the whole weekend sorting through the junk

in the basement and now everything feels shipshape.” Or, “It’s a good thing we have Beth directing the play because she runs a tight ship.”

The big steering wheel that steers a boat or ship is called the helm. You will sometimes hear people say that someone is “at the helm” when they lead a big project or effort.

Sometimes ships were used for battle. To be prepared for a skirmish at sea, sailors would first “clear the decks” so that nothing would get in the way during the battle. People now use the phrase “clear the decks” to describe the idea of getting chores done in order to be prepared to start a big project: “Jane spent the afternoon clearing the decks by sorting her mail and paying bills.”

## **Saturday Chores**

**(Story words: grow, herbs, flowers)**

Phil was going to the garden store. He had a spot in his yard where a tree stump had been taken out. He had planted grass seed and hoped the grass would fill in, but there was still quite a large bare spot. Phil was considering buying some squares of sod to put where the grass seemed most thin.

He asked his son Luis if he wanted to tag along. Luis had nothing much to do and was glad to ride along and do chores with his dad.

When they got to the store, Phil looked for someone to talk to about grass and sod. Luis went over to the displays of seasonal plants and herbs. His dad and mom liked to grow pots of herbs on their deck. They had mint, basil, and oregano already.

Luis saw a plant labeled “catnip.” It was an attractive plant, with green leaves and small lavender flowers on top. A small leaf had dropped into the dirt. Luis crushed the leaf and held it to his nose. It smelled a lot like mint. Luis thought that their cat Leo would be thrilled to have his own stock of catnip.

The man had advised Phil to wait a bit longer before planting sod and to re-seed the bare spot one more time. The fact that the grass was thicker in the other spots made the man suspect that with time the grass would take over in the bare spot too.

Luis asked his dad if they could take home the catnip plant. Phil examined the tag and saw that the plant was five dollars and liked sun. Their deck got a lot of sun, and they had a few pots with nothing planted in them yet.

When they got home, Luis and his dad re-potted the catnip. Luis was thrilled to show Leo the plant. He put Leo right next to the pot, but Leo ignored the catnip and

stepped over to sniff the oregano. “Leo, you are one ungrateful cat,” said Luis.

## **Facts About Blue Jeans (Part 1)**

**(Story words: California, Strauss, dyed)**

In the 1850s, people moved west to California and Nevada, dreaming of finding gold and getting rich in the California Gold Rush. Prospecting for gold was a job that required working outside in rain or shine. Prospectors spent long hours panning for gold in streams or hiking on crude trails to look for more spots that might contain gold. They needed strong pants that required no care.

The California Gold Rush prompted Levi Strauss to immigrate from the East Coast to California. He met up with Jacob Davis, a tailor who was making pants in Reno, Nevada. They began selling strong pants that included small metal rivets that supported spots where seams got the most stress, such as the top of the pockets. Strauss and Davis patented this method of using rivets in 1873. Even today, most blue jeans have these metal rivets.

While some prospectors got rich finding gold, Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis profited by selling pants. Blue jeans are today the favorite pants of many people. In the United States, more than 450,000,000 pairs of jeans are sold each year.

Blue jeans are made of a woven cotton fabric called denim. Denim is made with a weave called twill. In denim, like other twill fabrics, the yarns intersect on a diagonal. This weave makes for strong, dense fabric.

## **Facts About Blue Jeans (Part 2)**

**(Story words: dyed, loops, stretches)**

When you look up close at denim fabric, you can see some white cotton yarns intersecting with blue yarns. The white yarns have not been dyed, while the blue yarns are dyed an indigo shade of blue. This gives denim fabric a pleasing, complex look that is different than a flat, solid blue.

Fabric can be divided into two main groups—knits and wovens. T-shirts are made of knit fabric. In knit fabric, one very long yarn creates a string of loops that connect together to make the fabric. People like knit fabric because it stretches and is soft, not stiff. Also, knit fabrics do not unravel. This means that if you cut off the bottom or the sleeve of a t-shirt, the fabric ends will remain intact.

In woven fabrics, many yarns are woven together. When you cut the fabric, it will unravel and fray at the ends. In the 1960s and 1970s, people began cutting the legs off of



their old jeans to make “cut off” shorts. People did not mind the long, soft strings of fray at the bottom of these shorts—in fact, frayed ends became the trend.

Today, department stores and online retailers sell many jeans that are fraying at the bottom and have holes in them. Some jeans that teens prefer may be unappealing to older people. In the eyes of the older people, the jeans look ragged and worn out before having been worn even one time. They would rather spend their dollars on pants that look in better shape.