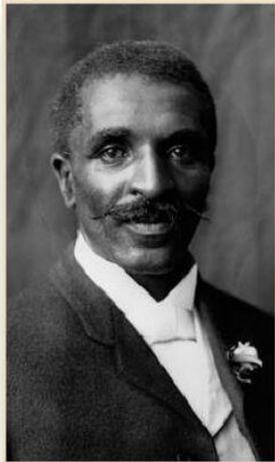


GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Gay U.S. Scientist, Educator and Inventor (1864-1943)



Though he was born into slavery, George Washington Carver struggled and persisted in his quest for an education in the early years of the post-Civil War South. After obtaining his Master's degree, Carver was invited to lead the Agriculture Department at the Tuskegee Institute in 1896 and remained there for 47 years. Because decades of aggressive cotton farming had depleted the soil of vital nutrients, Carver's research focused on finding crop alternatives to cotton – such as peanuts and sweet potatoes – which he wanted poor farmers to grow as a source of food and other products to improve their quality of life. Carver's scientific achievements challenged racial stereotypes, eventually making him the most famous African-American of his time. Business leaders like Henry Ford came to seek his advice, as well as American presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge and Franklin Roosevelt. Though his renown helped to raise the profile of Tuskegee (along with desperately needed funds) administrators worried about potential scandal from the persistent rumors of his homosexuality – especially after 1935 when Carver became life partners with fellow researcher Austin W. Curtis, Jr. – a relationship which endured until Carver's death in 1943. Curtis, who inherited much of Carver's estate, continued his work despite being summarily banished from Tuskegee once Carver was gone. Rumors aside, on July 14, 1943, President Franklin Roosevelt authorized \$30,000 for the George Washington Carver National Monument – the first to be dedicated to an African-American and also the first to a non-President. Though numerous awards and accolades have been bestowed upon Carver, his most enduring tribute comes perhaps from the American Public School system and the several dozen elementary schools and high schools which bear his name.

Lesson Plan

Level 1: Contributions Approach

1. Activate Prior Experience: What do you already know about George Washington Carver? Read the biography above and explore the resource links at <https://legacyprojectchicago.org/person/george-washington-carver> for additional information. Share what you have learned with your class.
2. Read <https://www.notablebiographies.com/Ca-Ch/Carver-George-Washington.html> and engage in a Group Discussion of the challenges Carver faced in his research pursuits, both as an African American scientist from the South *and* as a closeted gay man in a relationship he had difficulty hiding.
3. Extend Knowledge: Read <https://www.sciencehistory.org/historical-profile/george-washington-carver>. How/why did Carver develop "Crop Rotation"?

Level 2: Additive Approach

1. Read <https://truthwinsout.org/opinion/2012/11/31251/> then describe Carver's relationship with Austin W. Curtis.
2. Website Investigation: Conduct an advanced search at <https://legacyprojectchicago.org/explore/advanced> for another LGBTQ scientist. Compare that person's contributions and life to Carver's. How are they similar? How are they different?

Level 3: Transformational Approach

1. Read <https://cypheravenue.com/george-washington-carver-was-he-really-homosexual/> How does one make sense of the role of Carver's castration at the hands of his adopted white parents?
2. Review [this essay from the GLBTQ Archive](#). In his teaching career, Carver formed deep relationships with male students. How did this come to the attention of the Tuskegee universities?
3. Read <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/george-washington-carver>. In what way has the frame of Carver's legacy been preserved for others?

Level 4: Social Action Approach

- Carver made ground-breaking contributions that changed society. He is rightly lionized by African Americans and many others because of his achievements. But his sexual orientation has been routinely overlooked. Why is this?
1. The era in which Carver lived made any speculation about his sexual orientation extremely dangerous. Read <https://www.nndb.com/people/582/000030492/> and the essay "[Dead Ends and Discoveries](#)". Do you accept the authors' conclusions? Why or why not?
 2. What steps could be taken to ensure future historians at least *consider* a person's likely sexual orientation even if there is no recorded declaration of it?