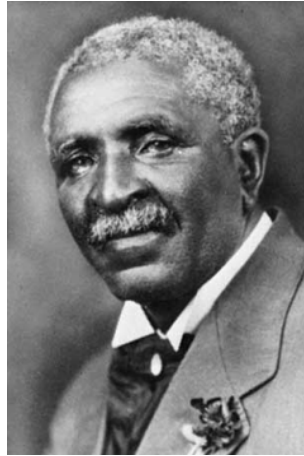



George Washington Carver Teaching Unit




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Fill in the Timeline of George Washington Carver's Life

About 1864	Born to slaves in Diamond, Missouri
1890	Enrolls in Simpson College in Iowa.



Jan. 5, 1943	Dies after falling down a flight of stairs at his home in Detroit.



My Beloved Friend

Letter to Jim Hardwick, April 1924

Your letter touched me deeply. How I wish I was more worthy of the things you say about me. I love you more dearly because you are of another race. God is using you to teach the world the brotherhood of man, the fatherhood of God. How sweet it is to let God purge our souls of ego and bitterness, and to have a little taste of heaven here on earth. I trust you will pray for me, that I get rid of my littleness. I did not have to learn to love you: You were chosen for me. I knew that the first time I saw you. I was the Christ in you, of course.

Drifter

George Washington Carver

Something says find out
why rain falls, what makes corn proud
and squash so humble, the questions
call like a train whistle so at fourteen,
fifteen, eighteen, nineteen still on half-fare,
over the receding landscapes the perceiving self
stares back from the darkening window.

The Perceiving Self

George Washington Carver

The first except birds
who spoke to us, his voice high
and lilting as a meadowlark's,
with an undertone of windsong,
many-petaled as the meadow,
the music shaped and colored
by brown lips, white teeth, pink
tongue.

Walking slowly, he talked to us,
touched our stamens, pleased
us with pollen.

Then he squealed, a field mouse
taken without wingbeat, with no
shadow.

His yellow feet crushed past,
running, his bare legs bruised, he
trampled, his spew burned, his
scalding urine.

The icedrift of science.
Smoke from a torched deadman,
barking laughter from the
cottonwoods at the creek.

The Last Rose of Summer

George Washington Carver

The paper shakes so
the words are hard to read,
but what good is the singing range
from high D to three octaves below, what good the bold step to
a larger canvas
for the yucca on the easel now,
what good piano lessons paid for
with paintings, what good
a rosebud boutonniere if Jim
your brother
smallpox

Four a.m. in the Woods
George Washington Carver

Darkness softens, a thin
tissue of mist between trees.
One by one the day's uncountable voices come out
like twilight fireflies, like stars.
The perceiving self sits
with his back against rough bark,
casting ten thousand questions into the future.
As shadows take shape, the curtains part
for the length of time it takes to gasp,
and behold, the purpose of his
life dawns on him.

The Dimensions of the Milky Way
George Washington Carver

behind the men's dorm
at dusk on a late May evening,
Carver lowers the paper
and watches the light change.
He tries to see earth
across a distance
of twenty-five thousand light-years,
from the center of the Milky Way:
a grain of pollen, a spore
of galactic dust.
He look around:
that shagbark, those swallows,
the fireflies, that blasted mosquito:
this beautiful world.
A hundred billion stars

in a roughly spherical flattened disc
with a radius of one hundred light-
years.
Imagine that.
He catches a falling star.
Well, Lord, this
infinitesimal speck
could fill the universe with praise.

Clay

George Washington Carver
"Beauty is the vocation of the earth." –William Bryant Logan

God's breath on a compound of silica,
alumina, and various oxides—
primarily iron—gave Adam life.
There is a primal, almost mystical
connection between humankind and clay,
from the footed, bellied first receptacles
to frescoed Renaissance cathedral walls,
To Carver's eye, the muddy creek banks say
Here, to be dug up, strained, and painted on,
is loveliness the poorest can afford:
azures, ochres . . . Scraps of discarded board
are landscapes. Cabins undistinguished brown
bloom like slaves freed to struggle toward self-worth.
Beauty is commonplace, as cheap as dirt.

Chemistry 101
George Washington Carver

A canvas apron over his street clothes,
Carver leads his chemistry class into
the college dump. The students follow, a claue
of ducklings hatched by hens. Where he
sees a retort, a Bunsen burner,
a mortar, zinc sulfate, they see
a broken bowl, a broken lantern,
a rusty old flatiron, a fruit jar top.
Their tangle of twine, his lace.
He turns, a six-inch length of copper tubing
in one hand. "Now, what can we do with this?"
Two by two, little lights go on.
One by hesitant one, dark hands are rated.
The waters of imagining, their element.

Odalisque

George Washington Carver

Listen to this: Now he's asking for
laboratory space and a painting
studio!

Says his work "will be of great
honor to our people." The
unmediated gall!

"I beg of you to give me these,
and suitable ones also."

Accent on the suitable.

"I greatly desire to do this that
it may go down in the history
of the race." Can you believe it,
Mr. Washington?

At the feet of every listener who
hears
the promise of dawn in the
wilderness,
the peach-luscious, unashamed
curves
of naked ambition

A Charmed Life

George Washington Carver

Here breathes a solitary pilgrim sustained by dew
and the kindness of strangers. An astonished midas
surrounded by exponentially multiplying miracles: my
Yucca and Cactus in the Chicago World Exposition;
friends of the spirit; teachers. Ah, the bleak horizons of joy.
Light every morning dawns through the trees. Surely
this is worth more than one life.

Called

George Washington Carver
Tuskegee Institute, 1896

Washington yammers on about his buckets.

Under the poorly pruned catalpa trees
the children of slaves slave on in ignorance.

For what but service is a man this gifted?

(The set jaw, the toward-distance-looking eyes:
from the fly in the buttermilk, the butterfly in the cave.)

. . . *your salary, duties, the school of agriculture*

you will establish, your office key . . . A flash

twenty years ahead: this mecca.

this garden. *Good Christ, a whole Africa*

to save, right under my nose.

The Lace-Maker

George Washington Carver

Late Sunday morning gilds the pins and needles,
strokes the wall ochre, blanches the white collar.

He bends, intent on detail, his fingers red

in sunlight, brown in shade. Light calls
through the open to April window directly

into his illumined invisible ear,

like, elsewhere, the trumpet

whisper of an angel.

George Washington Carver came up with 300 different ways to use a peanut. Brainstorm a few yourself!

