

## Young Portrait Explorers: George Washington Carver



**Learning Objective:** Discover this portrait of George Washington Carver, and use your five senses to learn about his job as a scientist, inventor, and teacher.

### **Portrait Discussion:**

Take 30 seconds to look at this portrait of Carver. Let your eyes wonder from top to bottom and all through the center of the painting.

**Pose:** What is Carver doing in this portrait? Notice the tilt of his head and the position of his hands. What is he holding? How do you think these **amaryllis flowers** (the red and white flowers in front of him) would feel in your hands? Soft? Smooth? Look closely at the way he is holding the amaryllis in his hands. Do you think Carver is holding these flowers tightly or loosely? Flowers are delicate, meaning that their petals can break off easily. Can you try holding a pretend flower the way Carver holds his delicate amaryllis?

**Clothing:** Look at what Carver is wearing. Can you name the different pieces of clothing? In this portrait, the white apron Carver wears over his sweater and tie shows us that he was a **scientist** (a person who studies the world around us). Can you tell what he is studying in this painting? In addition to amaryllis flowers (the red and white flowers in front of him), Carver studied peanuts and sweet potatoes.

**Facial Expression:** Look closely at Carver's face. Can you copy his expression? His eyes look down at the amaryllis. Although his mouth is closed, can you see a slight smile? What do you think made him smile? Do you think he enjoys studying the flowers?

**Setting:** Take a look at the background of this portrait. What do you see? Is Carver inside or outside? Imagine that you could jump into this portrait. What might you hear? Leaves rustling in the wind? How would the grass feel? Soft or itchy? What colors would you see? The blue of the sky? Or the green of the bushes?

### **Historical Context:**

*George Washington Carver was a gifted scientist, inventor, and teacher. Born into slavery, Carver faced many challenges even after becoming a free man. He was not allowed to attend school as a child. But he still found ways to study and grew up to become a great scientist and loving teacher. He taught people about the importance of growing different **crops** (or plants grown in large amounts for food) to keep the earth healthy. And he loved sweet potatoes and peanuts! He wrote an entire cookbook with only peanut recipes. What is your favorite food?*

### **Related Children's Book:**

*A Weed Is a Flower: The Life of George Washington Carver* by Aiki  
*In the Garden with Dr. Carver* by Susan Grigsby

### **Activity: Your Five Senses**

**Materials:** Yourself and an adult

**Instructions:** Carver used his **five senses** (touch, taste, hearing, sight, and smell) to study different plants. Now it's your turn! Head outside, open your window, or pick a room in your home. Use your five senses to discover something new:

- Stand still. What sounds do you hear?
- How many different textures can you find?
- Try to spot something you've never seen!
- Take a deep breath through your nose. What do you smell?
- Breathe through your mouth. Can you taste the air? Is it sweet? Salty?



*George Washington Carver* by Betsy Graves Reyneau, oil on canvas, 1942. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; transfer from the Smithsonian American Art Museum; gift of the George Washington Carver Memorial Committee to the Smithsonian Institution, 1944

Find the portrait on our website, here: [https://npg.si.edu/object/npg\\_NPG.65.77](https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.65.77)