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Flanders students work up an appetite

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

George Washington Carver's life was food for thought on Martin Luther King Day, but the topic had some at Flanders Elementary thinking about food.

Carver, a celebrated African-American botanist, reshaped how those in the South farmed during the early part of the century, said Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum's Tom Crutcher.

Crutcher gave a presentation on Carver to Flanders fifth graders Monday. Pam Ellis and Karen Calvert classes have been reading books on the agricultural pioneer.

When asked about Carver's most noted achievements, children provided a grocery list of food items: peanuts, mushrooms and sweet potatoes.

Each student was given a peanut, which Crutcher had them break open and examine the parts. He asked what could be made with the shell, red skin and the nut itself.

Children replied with yet more eatables. Crutcher wondered why.



Paint something, please: Fifth-grader Joshua Maurice is asked by Tom Crutcher, historical presenter, to paint something that George Washington Carver might have painted in his day.

"I'm hungry," said one fifth grader.

For years, most people in the South grew cotton. Though an important crop, cotton left the soil drained of moisture and nutrients.

Enter Carver, who was a professor at what is now Iowa State University. He left the sequestered life of academia at the behest of Booker T. Washington, who was starting an agricultural school for black people in Alabama.

Carver taught them how to grow peanuts and sweet potatoes, which had more uses and, thus, a better chance of being sold. Peanuts have more than 300 uses Carver found.

They could make butter and oil

as well as paint, particle board and shaving cream.

Such resourcefulness was inspired at an early age, Crutcher said. Carver graduated from high school and was the first black person to graduate from Iowa State.

He was also an accomplished artist, drawing and painting, Crutcher said. Many of his paintings were lost in a fire but a few exist in the Tuskegee Institute.

"In those days, he didn't have a lot of money which you need in

being a painter," Crutcher said. "So what what did he do? He made his own paint."

Crutcher handed fifth grader Joshua Maurice a brush and paint made from red clay. He asked Maurice to brush something Carver would have likely painted. Maurice painted a mushroom.

Later, Crutcher put Carver's number one product into action by making peanut butter.



By Georget: Photographs and drawings of George Washington Carver were available for viewing by Flanders students.

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Space Availability is Limited. Reservations Required,
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