

Name _____ Date _____

Benjamin Banneker

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b’

In 1731, Benjamin Banneker was born in Maryland. At the time, Maryland was still a slave state, a state where it was legal to own slaves, but Banneker was born to free parents. He grew up on a farm near Baltimore, where he showed an interest in science from an early age.

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Banneker attended a Quaker school occasionally, but was mostly self-educated. He was constantly reading any book he could find. He was also an intensely curious child. When a friend gifted him a pocket watch, Banneker took it apart to learn how it worked.

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In his adult life, Banneker became a respected scientist and surveyor. He is widely considered one of the first well known Black American scientists.

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2. b''

Banneker had a keen passion for astronomy. He read everything he could find on the subject, and began using his knowledge to predict weather patterns. He published these predictions, alongside other astronomical calculations, in a farmer's almanac a yearly guide to help farmers plan their harvests.

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Beyond farmers' almanacs, Banneker published many essays and pamphlets on the subject of civil rights. Pamphlets were small books published on single topics, usually politics and social issues. In this format, Banneker argued passionately for civil rights and the end of slavery. He began exchanging letters with Thomas Jefferson. In his letters, he respectfully challenged the idea that slavery could exist in a country that says all people are created equal.

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3. b'

Benjamin Banneker once wrote, 'The color of the skin is in no way connected with strength of the mind or intellectual powers.' He lived in a time when slavery was still legal in the United States. But he had a hope for a future where Black scientists like himself could contribute to research and innovation. Many of Banneker's unpublished manuscripts were lost in a house fire shortly after he died. Some of his surviving personal belongings and manuscripts have been preserved in US history museums, including the Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum in Maryland. Over a century after his death, Banneker's legacy was honored on a US postage stamp.

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