Benjamin Banneker

Benjamin Banneker was a pioneer in both astronomy and the civil rights movement. Born in Maryland in 1731, his Quaker grandmother taught him both reading and math, but his education was curtailed when he got old enough to help on his parents’ farm. Throughout his childhood, Banneker was fascinated with taking things apart and putting them back together. He was 21 when he got his first pocket watch, and after taking it apart to learn how it worked, he built his own working clock out of wood.

This led to Banneker making clocks and watches for a living. One of his customers, Andrew Ellicott, was so impressed with Banneker that he let him borrow books to read about mathematics and astronomy. Though he was already 58 years old, Banneker began studying astronomy. He made calculations to predict the times of solar and lunar eclipses, and kept track of them in his own almanac. He also calculated where the each of the planets would be on each day of the year. His almanac was called: Benjamin Banneker’s Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Almanack and Ephemeris, for the Year of Our Lord, 1792; Being Bisextile, or Leap-Year, and the Sixteenth Year of American Independence.

A year later, Ellicott’s brother hired Banneker to help him survey the land that would eventually become Washington D.C. Banneker became ill and had to leave the project, but he sent a copy of his almanac to Thomas Jefferson who, at the time, held pro-slavery views which Banneker openly criticized. The two began a correspondence which was published in later copies of Banneker’s almanac.

DIRECTIONS: Write a definition for each word. If the word has a connotation, explain it.

1. **Pioneer** means: __________________________________________________________________________
2. **Curtained** means: __________________________________________________________________________
3. **ephemeris** means: __________________________________________________________________________
4. **Correspondence** means: __________________________________________________________________________