

Informational Texts Pack:
A Christmas Duo
Poinsettias and Mistletoe

By Margaret Whisnant



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The Red Flower from Mexico

By Margaret Whisnant

It's highly unusual for a plant to get its own legally designated day, but that's exactly what happened in July of 2002 when the U.S. House of Representatives officially declared December 12th as Poinsettia Day. If any plant deserves such an honor, the poinsettia (pronounced *poin-set-ee-uh* with four syllables or *poin-set-uh* with three syllables) certainly does. It's the best-selling potted plant in the United States and Canada. During the Christmas season, this little show-stopper pumps \$250 million into the U.S. economy.

Centuries before it became an American and Canadian holiday celebrity, the poinsettia grew wild as a shrub in Southern Mexico and Central America. The ancient Aztecs gathered the red blooms that appeared during the short days of winter, but it wasn't because they wanted to decorate their homes and palaces. Instead, they squeezed out a reddish purple dye from the flowers and used it in their cosmetics. The plant's white, milky sap became medicine for treating fevers. The rest of the world had to wait until 1826 to be introduced to the poinsettia. This time, the dazzling red blossoms got everyone's attention.

Two pages in full text

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Refer to the text to answer the questions.

- _____ 1. Which of the following *best* states the main idea of ***The Red Flower from Mexico***?
 - (A) where poinsettias came from
 - (B) how poinsettias got their name
 - (C) the story of the discovery and development of the poinsettia
 - (D) how poinsettias are used in the U.S. and around the world
- _____ 2. The author's purpose for writing this text is
 - (A) to inform.
 - (B) to entertain.
 - (C) to convince.
 - (D) to persuade.
3. What facts from the first paragraph support the author's opinion that the poinsettia deserves its own legally designated day?

Fifteen questions in complete file.

Kissing under the Hemiparasite

By Margaret Whisnant

The next time you notice a round clump of green poking out among the leafless branches of a deciduous tree, congratulate yourself for spotting a hemiparasite. This vampire-sounding word is a scientific term applied to mistletoe. Yes, the very plant that generates kisses on demand during the Christmas holidays is a parasite. Well, almost . . .

Mistletoe roots are designed to grow through bark and into a tree's inner workings where they siphon water and mineral nutrients.

This trait gets the plant classified as a parasite, but the chlorophyll in its leaves means it can manufacture its own food. This characteristic elevates it to *hemiparasite* status. *Hemi-* is a Greek word part that means "half," so mistletoe is a parasite with a back-up plan. This unusual distinction, however, is not what makes mistletoe famous. It's the kissing thing.

The exact story of how our modern kissing-under-the-mistletoe tradition wove itself together over the centuries remains a mystery, but it seems certain that some of the threads go all the way back to prehistoric times. Like fir trees and holly, mistletoe's capacity to stay green and produce berries through the harshest of winter days led early people to believe it was possessed by or favored by spirits and gods, so it naturally gained a reputation as a magical plant.

Two pages in full text.



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Refer to the text to answer the questions

- _____ 1. The characteristic that makes mistletoe a hemiparasite is its ability to
 - (A) grow roots through tree bark.
 - (B) make its own food.
 - (C) stay green during the winter.
 - (D) produce berries.
2. Write the *effect* for each of the *causes*
 - A. Cause: Mistletoe stays green and produces berries during winter.
Effect: _____

Fifteen questions in complete file file.

Informational Texts: Christmas Duo Answer Keys

The Red Flower from Mexico

1. C (RI. 6.2, 7.2, 8.2)
2. A (RI. 6.6, 7.6, 8.6)
3. It can be argued that the poinsettia deserves its own legally designated day because it is the best-selling potted plant in the United States and Canada—that's year round. Not just at Christmas. During the Christmas season, it generates \$250 million dollars worth of income. (RI. 6.8, 7.8, 8.8)
4. B (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)
5. Joel Roberts Poinsett died in 1851. Poinsettias began their rise to popularity 50 years later in the early 1900's. (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)
6. C (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1) (1825 to 1950-60)
7. B (RI. 6.5, 7.5, 8.5)
8. The Aztecs used poinsettias as a dye in their cosmetics. They used the plant's milky sap as a medicine for treating fevers. Their association with poinsettias was not about decorating for a holiday. Today, we use the plant for ornamentation during the Christmas season, but not as a cosmetic or a medicine. (RI. 6.3, 7.3, 8.3)
9. A (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1) (180-day growing experience)
10. A (RI. 6.5, 7.5, 8.5)
11. D (L. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4)
12. C (RI. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4 L. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4)
13. D (RI. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4 L. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4)
14. B (RI. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4 L. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4)
15. Having a "bad rap" means having an undeserved bad reputation. Over the years, people have been led to believe that poinsettia leaves are poisonous. A recent study at Ohio State University show that they are not. It will take a while for poinsettias to lose their bad reputation as poisonous. (RI. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4 L. 6.4, 7.4, 8.4)

Kissing under the Hemisparasite

1. B (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)
2. A. Early people believed mistletoe was possessed by or favored by spirits and gods, and it gained a reputation as a magical plant.
B. The Druids placed sprigs of mistletoe over the doors of their houses and their stables.
C. Ancient people thought mistletoe could extinguish fire.
D. Mistletoe folklore became a part of American and Canadian Christmas tradition.
(RI. 6.4, 7.4, 8.5)
3. C (RI. 6.2, 7.2, 8.2)
4. D (RI. 6.5, 7.5, 8.5)
5. A (RI. 6.1, 7.1, 8.1)
6. The Druids saw it as a magical plant that could keep them safe from harm and make their livestock herds fertile. They gathered it from sacred oak trees with great ceremony and placed in above the doors to their homes and stables to keep witches, goblins, ghosts, and other evil away. It wasn't reserved for any special occasion. They used it year round. Today, mistletoe is associated with Christmas and it's an excuse to grab a kiss rather than to ward off evil or promote fertility. (RI. 6.3, 7.3, 8.3)

Full answer keys for this text included in product.

e-bibliography

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Kissing under the Hemiparasite

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