

# Percy Poll's Peculiar Plants

## Adult Guidance

'Percy Poll's Peculiar Plants' is a story for Key Stage 2 children. It is perfect to use alongside a science topic on plants or as a prompt for children to write their own stories. It can also be used as a whole-class reading text or as part of a guided or reciprocal reading plan. The story is set solely in a large, countryside manor house and centres around the character of Percy Poll, a keen botanist, and his family.

### Story Overview

The story is written in third person, in past tense, from the point of view of Percy, a boy who loves tending to the wild gardens of his family's crumbling estate. One day, he discovers a plant that he has never seen before and decides to bring it back inside the house to study it. Very soon, however, the plant begins to take over the house: its roots are draining all the water from the boiler in the cellar, its leaves are taking in all the light from the large windows in Percy's bedroom, and, much to Percy's horror, its nutrients come in the form of thoughts siphoned from Percy's mother. Realising that the house is the perfect environment for this plant, Percy, with the help of his elder sister Daisy, sets about trying to defeat the growing plant using all his botanical knowledge. The pair are helped by the rest of their family, each assisting in their own unique way.

### Themes

The story focuses on weaving facts about plants and the natural world into an engaging plot with interesting characters. The main themes covered are: plants; botany; natural habitats; family and friendship. There are also more subtle themes of embracing and accepting differences.

### Additional Resources

A range of [additional resources](#) is available to download which support teaching of the text, including a [reading comprehension](#), [guided reading PowerPoint](#), [science materials](#), [writing supports](#) and much more.

### Sensitive Issues

Teachers may wish to be aware in advance of some of the following background information:

- Throughout the story, there are continual references to the plant's threat towards Percy and the rest of his family. On a few occasions, the plant chases and tries to attack various family members. Although no one is actually hurt, be aware of children in your setting for whom this might not be appropriate.
- The plant grows at an extraordinary rate and begins to take over the house as soon as Percy brings it inside. This is a fantasy element of the story and it may need to be made clear to children that plants do not grow this quickly in real life.

- The plant uses Percy and Daisy's mother's thoughts for its nutrients. There is reference to the children finding their mother lying, seemingly asleep, on her bed surrounded by a jungle of leaves and they are unable to get to her. There is also reference to Percy and Daisy being worried about her and Percy initially not being able to wake her up. This might not be appropriate for some children in your setting.
- The family's cellar is dark and creepy. There are references to darkness, dripping water and creaking stairs. Percy and Daisy find the plant's spreading root system in the boiler room of the cellar.
- The plant causes a great deal of destruction in Poll Manor: the walls crack and crumble, the floorboards collapse and items are destroyed. The family helps to rebuild the house at the end of the story. Father also uses the oven to heat the house to a very high temperature and fill the house with smoke in an attempt to kill the plant. Please be aware of how this might be received by children in your setting.
- Although a very small reference, there are a couple of mentions of a monster living in the lake in the grounds. Near the end of the story, this monster appears briefly to drag what remains of the plant under the water.
- Mother is described as a character who likes to put objects in unusual places. She is otherwise perfectly happy and healthy and has her own explanations for why things belong where they do; however, be aware of children who may be reminded of e.g. grandparents living with dementia.
- This story features a wheelchair user whose fantastical wheelchair helps to fight off the plant's attacks.

## Plot Summary

### Chapter One

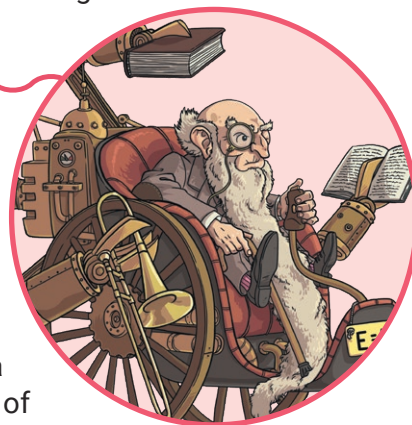
Percy is observing his family at the breakfast table: his father, the family cook, is burning the eggs as his mother has, as usual, tidied away the butter and now cannot find it again. After breakfast, he heads to his favourite room in Poll Manor – the orangery – where he encounters his older sister, Daisy. Daisy suggests that they go for a tour of the gardens. The pair roam the grounds and Percy names the various plants that they come across. When bangs and crashes can be heard from the house, Daisy leaves. Percy lies down on the grass and spots an unusual plant that appears to be moving by itself. Intrigued, Percy picks it up.

### Chapter Two

Although the plant keeps trying to escape, Percy secures it in a jam jar and takes it to his bedroom. There, he notices that, in the glass jar, the plant has started to wilt. Deciding that it must need more oxygen, Percy opens the lid and the plant jumps out, firmly embedding itself into Percy's bedroom wall. After calling Daisy to take a look at the cracked plaster, Percy decides that he needs to observe this strange plant and goes in search of his botany box.

### Chapter Three

On the hunt for his botany box, which once belonged to his grandfather, Percy hears the clock chiming and realises that his afternoon lessons with Professor Devereux, the family's live-in tutor, are about to begin in the library. During a particularly dull lesson about medieval roads, Percy spots his botany box on top of a bookshelf. Percy quietly sneaks past the professor and climbs onto a chair to retrieve the box. Unfortunately, the chair wobbles and Percy lands in a heap on the floor, but not before grabbing a handful of books off the shelf. One of these books, Percy learns, is a botany journal that belonged to his grandfather. Percy realises that this book might have information about the plant he has discovered.



## Chapter Four

Father rings the bells for dinner. As he rings the bell for Percy's room, the cord comes away as if torn in two and he discovers a strange liquid on the frayed end. At the same time, Percy's grandmother, who lives in the attic, is making her way down to the kitchen. As she is grumbling along the second-floor corridor, she notices a new crack in the wall and a purple liquid oozing out. Meanwhile, Percy's mother is going to sprinkle some lemon sherbet on Percy's pillow when she spots the plant embedded in Percy's bedroom wall. Attracted to the plant's glistening berries, she pockets them. Percy himself is finally able to leave the library and is desperate to study his grandfather's book; first, however, he must go to dinner.

## Chapter Five

Percy arrives at the dinner table and is joined by the rest of his family. Midway through the meal, Grandmother realises that her precious pet dachshund, Bratwurst, is missing and demands that the children go and search for him. Percy and Daisy go down into the dark and leaking cellar to search for the dog. Instead, they discover a network of roots belonging to the plant that have taken over the ancient boiler.

## Chapter Six

As Percy and Daisy approach the boiler, the roots almost seem to react to their presence. They retreat back to the kitchen, where Percy collects his grandfather's book and botany box, and they head to Percy's bedroom. There, Percy sees the extent to which the plant's leaves have now spread across his bedroom wall. He falls asleep reading his grandfather's book.

The next morning, Daisy wakes him and they continue to look through the book for anything resembling the plant. Frustrated, Percy slams the book down on the bed and a small piece of paper slips out. As they examine it, Percy finds detailed drawings and information about the plant including its scientific name, 'Asteraceae psychivorum', which means that it feeds off thoughts, and a warning from his grandfather to not, under any circumstances, bring the plant into the house.

## Chapter Seven

Percy decides that Mother will know what to do. The brother and sister race down to the kitchen, where they find their father preparing another disastrous meal. As they leave, Percy spots the plant's berries sitting on top of the fruit bowl. Realising that his mother must have touched the berries, Percy and Daisy run to their parents' bedroom, only to find their mother lying on the bed and being guarded by a fierce jungle of vines.



## Chapter Eight

Now fearing for their mother's life, Percy and Daisy go to see the professor, who taught their grandfather when he was a boy, to see if he can remember anything about the plant. While in the professor's private quarters, Percy observes Professor Devereux's pet bearded dragon and considers how the reptile's environment is perfectly designed to ensure its survival. Although the professor doesn't reveal much, as they turn to leave, he makes a comment which sets an idea in motion in Percy's mind about how to defeat the plant.

## Chapter Nine

Percy realises that too much water or warmth is just as bad for plants as too little. As they leave the professor, he tells Daisy of his plan to flood the roots in the cellar. Daisy tries a simpler approach: cutting a vine that is hanging out of a wall. The plant defends itself and large vines chase Percy and Daisy through the corridor. The children see Bratwurst and follow him up the stairs to Grandmother's attic. Displeased by the intrusion, and the fact that they have knocked paint everywhere, Grandmother begins to wipe down the surfaces with a rag, inadvertently smearing all the surfaces in thick, black paint. This gives Percy another idea.

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## Chapter Ten

The children take all of Grandmother's black oil paint and proceed to paint the windows with it to block out the light. Percy realises that the leaves are in his bedroom and so he instructs Grandmother, along with Bratwurst, to continue painting the windows to stop the leaves from photosynthesising. Leaving Grandmother to finish off painting the bedroom windows, Percy and Daisy head down to the kitchen where they find their father conjuring up another culinary catastrophe. This gives Percy his final idea for how to destroy the plant. He advises his father to make the house as hot as possible. The plant again tries to defend itself but is becoming weaker. Percy turns around and discovers that Daisy has disappeared through the floorboards.

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## Chapter Eleven

Percy goes down into the cellar to look for Daisy and finds her. He manages to wake her and the pair go into the boiler room once more where they see the extent of the plant's growth. Percy leaves Daisy to remove the roots and flood the cellar, while he goes to see their mother.

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## Chapter Twelve

Percy finds his mother still lying on the bed. Most of the vines have left to defend themselves against the rest of the family's attacks; however, there is a single vine that appears to be siphoning off her thoughts. Percy tries to remove it but it won't move and begins to attack Percy. Professor Devereux, now dressed in his Japanese suit of armour, appears and begins to fight off the plant as Percy desperately tries to wake up his mother by listing objects that are in the wrong places.

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## Chapter Thirteen

Percy's plan works and his mother wakes up. He manages to free her of the remaining vine that held her and the two go to find Father and Daisy. They find them both in the orangery cornering what remains of the plant. Unfortunately, Mother opens the door as she declares that the house is too hot and the plant escapes through the gardens. Percy and Daisy chase it through the grounds where it is finally swallowed up by the monster that lives in the lake.



## Chapter Fourteen

Heading back into the house, Percy observes how his family are clearing up the destruction that the plant has caused. A little while later, he goes into the gardens once more and reflects on the events of the past couple of days and how his family all came together to help.

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