

**Title:** The Precious Plum

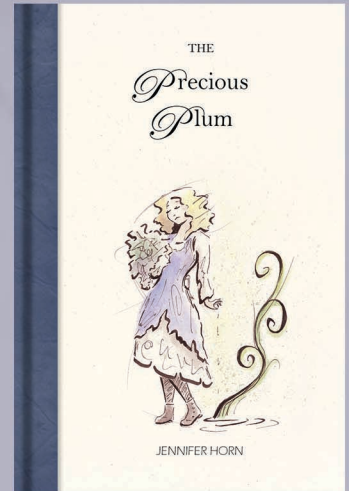
**Author/Illustrator:** Jennifer Horn

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**Recommended for:** 6–12 year-olds and lovers of fairytales of all ages



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## ABOUT THE PRECIOUS PLUM

When a baker of magical goods for her village attempts to help her good friend the Gentleman, she finds an important ingredient goes missing in the process.

A tale for all who have unwittingly left a piece of themselves behind, *The Precious Plum* is a whimsical fairytale about finding that sometimes the things we are looking for are right where we left them.

## THEMES

Kindness, friendship, being true to yourself, magic, fairytale, whimsy, nostalgia.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR: JENNIFER HORN

Jennifer Horn is a Brisbane-based freelance illustrator and budding children's writer. Her debut picture book "The Precious Plum" was released in October 2021 amongst some very musical live book launches. She illustrated the cover of Anthology Angels' children's fundraising anthology, *Once Upon a Whoops!: Fractured Fairytales and Ridiculous Rhymes* (2021). Her short stories have appeared in each of Anthology Angels' annual publications since 2018: *It's Beginning to Look A Lot Like Christmas* (2018), *Spooktacular Stories* (2019) and *Tell 'Em They're Dreaming* (2020). Her first Young Adult short story, *Faulty Connection*, was published in Rhiza Edge's dystopian and sci-fi anthology, *Crossed Spaces* in 2021. She was awarded a Highly Commended for her submission of middle grade illustrations at the 2020 CYA Conference.

With a background in Architecture, Jen draws on her love of stories and adventure to create whimsical illustrations in a Quentin-Blake-inspired squiggle style. She enjoys reading books over local community station Reading Radio, and playing keys, including the piano accordion. She has also been part of Art Department teams on several Brisbane-based films, including *Christmas on The Farm* on Stan and *Romance on the Menu* on Netflix.

## LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

The Precious Plum is a useful resource for teaching in the three strands of the English Curriculum (language, literature and literacy) and can be used as a springboard for developing skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing and creating as children listen to and engage with texts for enjoyment. Extension suggestions provides ways of linking the story with other curriculum areas including science and art.

## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

**Learning Areas:** English, Science, Visual Arts

**General Capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability

## TEACHING NOTES

### BEFORE READING

Discussions and questions asked prior to reading are not meant to elicit 'correct' answers from the children. The purpose is to pique the children's interest and make connections with their prior knowledge to increase enjoyment and understanding.

Discussion and question suggestions are meant to be a guide only. Please tailor them to children's ages and interest.

**The front cover**

Show children the front cover of the book. Read the title.

Invite children to explain what they know about the meaning of the words 'precious' and 'plum'. Ask them to predict why the plum might be precious and what might happen to it.

Invite them to look at the illustration and suggest who the story might be about, what they know about the character and the setting.

**The back cover**

Show children the back cover. Invite the children to look at the illustration and describe what they see. Does this give any more clues about the story?

Read the first paragraph of the blurb. Invite children to share what they have found out about the character and the possible story events. What magical goods might she bake? What are ingredients?

Ask children to suggest suitable ingredients for magical goods. What might go missing?

Depending on your purpose for reading the story, you may wish to list things you already know about the character e.g.

- She is a baker.
- She bakes magical goods.
- She lives in a village.
- The gentleman is her friend.
- She tries to make something magical for her friend.
- Something goes missing.

Read the second paragraph of the blurb, and discuss:

- the meaning of words that may be unfamiliar e.g. unwittingly, whimsical.
- what may be meant by the phrase 'left a piece of themselves behind'. How could they leave a piece of themselves behind?
- what may be meant by the phrase 'sometimes the things we are looking for are right where we left them'.

Does the blurb give any more clues about the character, the setting and the story?



## READING THE STORY

As you read the story, you may invite children to discuss information in the text as well as the illustrations. Tailor the discussion to suit children's interest and attention and be guided by their responses. You may not wish to interrupt the magical spell of the story by stopping for too many discussions on the first reading.

A selection of possible questions and discussion starters is provided below. It is not necessary to discuss them all in one session. Children may raise other questions or make other observations of their own. It is important to invite children to do so.

### ***Title Page***

Read the title page. Give children an opportunity to comment on the illustration if they wish.

### ***First page*** (*Once upon a time ...*)

Read. Discuss the story beginning and what it tells the reader about the type of story and setting. What sort of things can they expect to happen in the story?

### ***Second spread — first page*** (*She had the most extraordinary garden ...*)

You knew the character was a baker. What else does this tell you about the character? What else can you see in the illustration?

### ***Second spread — second page*** (*Not only were there elderberries ...*)

- What plants did the baker grow?
- What do you know about these plants?
- What is meant by the phrase 'fruits of the soul'?
- What fruits of the soul did the baker grow?
- How could you grow those fruits?
- What does that tell you about the baker?
- Do you know any people who grow plants to use in their baking or cooking?



**Third spread** (*The people of the village were familiar ...*)

- Why would the people of the village ask the baker to plant seeds in their gardens?
- What sort of seeds do you think they would like to grow?
- What is an orphanage?
- Why would she plant hope in the orphanage playground?
- What sort of things do you think children in an orphanage would hope for?
- What would hope look like?
- When you think of a factory, what do you think of?
- Why would she plant joy outside the factory?
- What would joy look like?
- What would make people feel joy outside a factory?

**Fourth spread — first page** (*In the gardens of a cemetery*)

- What is a cemetery?
- What does 'regret' mean?
- Why would they be 'weeds of regret'?
- Why does she pull them out?
- What does 'fulfilment' mean?
- What does it mean to 'plant fulfilment in their place'?
- Why would she plant fulfilment where regret was growing? What does that tell you about what she wants for the people in the cemetery?

**Fourth spread — second page** (*No matter what or where she planted ...*)

- What sort of plants did the baker grow?
- What other 'fruits of the soul' might she grow?
- What other 'weeds' might she pull out?
- What are some locations you think some fruits of the soul should be planted? Which ones? Why?

**Fifth spread — first page** (*One day, her good friend came ...*)

- What is meant by 'a problem of the heart'?
- What is a milliner?
- How do you feel something in your 'heart of hearts'?
- What is meant by a 'true gentleman'?
- What do you think his problem might be?

**Fifth spread — second page** (*She offered him her most secret recipe ...*)

- What would a wisdom cake do?
- Why would she have kept the recipe secret?
- Why would she have offered it to him?
- Would she offer it to anyone who asked advice?
- Would wisdom solve a problem of the heart?
- What does it mean, she knew the recipe 'by heart'? What do you know by heart?
- If the gentlemen asked for advice, why wouldn't he accept her offer of a wisdom cake?
- What is a 'privilege'?

**Sixth spread — first page** (*The baker could see he needed her help ...*)

- What does it mean, she 'stole into the garden'?
- Why did she steal into the garden?
- What is the precious plum? What will it give the milliner's son when it grows?
- What happened when she tried to plant the plum seed?

The children may notice that this is the first spread without any colour. It signifies the beginning of the baker's problem. What is the problem?

**Sixth spread — second page** (*"I must have dropped the precious plum," ...*)

- Does it matter that she may have dropped the precious plum?
- There is something else that bothers the baker. What is it?
- What do you think will happen now?

**Seventh spread — first page** (*Now that her good deed was done ...*)

- Why did the baker decide to leave the village?
- What does 'culinary' mean?
- What is a 'dappled mare'?
- What does it mean she 'harnessed her dapple mare'?
- What is 'reserve stock'?
- Why would she leave 'reserve stock'?

**Seventh spread — second page** (*She had packed everything ...*)

- Do you think she has left something behind?
- What do you think she might have left?
- Where do you think she might have left it?
- Have you ever had a feeling that you have forgotten something? Do you check and check again?



***Eighth spread*** (*The baker travelled far and wide ...*)

- What did the baker do on her travels?
- Did the baker like the people she met?
- What did the baker think was missing?
- What does 'lamenting' mean?
- What does 'inconvenience' mean?
- Where do you think the baker has left the missing thing? What do you think the missing thing is?

***Ninth spread*** (*As she was leaving a little town ...*)

- What is a brumby?
- What does it mean 'more recently rejected prince'?
- What does it mean to be 'frank'?
- Why does the baker tell herself that she'll have to be more frank?
- Why does the baker think the prince has come after her?
- What does she mean, 'I have made my intentions clear'?
- What does 'disgruntled' mean? Why would the prince be disgruntled? Why would he try to not look disgruntled?
- Why did the prince come after the baker?
- Who do you think the letter is from?
- What could the important message in the letter be?

***Tenth spread*** (*The letter was from the milliner's son ...*)

- Who was the letter from?
- What did the letter tell her?
- What did the letter ask of her?
- What do you think might be growing in his garden?
- What did she plant in his garden? (the precious plum of wisdom)
- Why did she return to the village?

(Does this remind you of another story? e.g., the beanstalk that grew very quickly in Jack and the Beanstalk.)



**Eleventh spread** (*On arrival, it was very clear ...*)

- What is the problem?
- What do you think caused it?
- What does 'precariously' mean?
- What does the milliner's son mean when he says, 'That house is my inheritance'?
- What does 'hodgepodge' mean?
- What does it mean the house was 'held captive by its garden'?
- Is the plant the precious plum?
- Why does she think she planted it there in secret?
- What will she do to the plant? (What does 'uproot' mean?)

**Twelfth spread** (*So taking a stalk each ...*)

- Was the plant easy to pull out?
  - How long did it take them to pull it out?
- (Does this remind you of another story? e.g. The Enormous Turnip.)

**Thirteenth spread** (*It was like no other seed ...*)

- What was the seed?
- When had it been planted?
- Had the baker intended to plant it?
- What had been missing all the time the baker was travelling?
- How did the baker feel when she realised that her heart had caused the problem with the house?
- How did the gentleman feel?

**Fourteenth spread** (*The poor little house, though ...*)

- What happened to the house?
- How did the milliner's son feel? What did he say to the baker?
- What did the baker suggest they could do?
- How did they solve the problem of what was missing?

**Fifteenth spread** (*The seasons passed ...*)

- What does it mean 'the seasons passed'?
- What happened to the two seeds that were planted?
- What was the most precious fruit that grew on the magnificent tree?





**After Reading**

What do you think of the ending of the story? How else could it have ended?

What would have happened if the baker hadn't planted her heart accidentally?

What fruits of the soul would you plant in your garden?

What problem did the milliner's son come to ask the baker's advice about?

**RETURNING TO THE TEXT****English**

You may not wish to re-read the text immediately, but you may return to it over successive days to explore different aspects of the text as well as to re-read it.

At all times, when returning to the text, it is important to ensure that children are engaged and that their enjoyment of the story is not spoiled by studying it too closely. Remember, we are reading for enjoyment and entertainment.

**Language Features**

You may wish to draw children's attention to language features used in the text, for example:

**Nouns**

- **Concrete nouns:** List the plants that the baker grew in her garden e.g., elderberries, parsnips, cloves, plum. Add other plants that you grow in your garden.

- **Abstract nouns:** List the fruits of the soul that the baker grew e.g., courage, peace, faith, hope, joy, fulfilment, wisdom, love. Add other fruits of the soul to your list.

The baker removed one 'weed' — regret. List other feelings that the baker would consider weeds.

**Adjectives**

List adjectives used to describe the garden e.g., extraordinary, fantastic

List adjectives used to describe her plants e.g., scrumptious, healthy, fruitful, scrumptiously good things

List adjectives used to describe her baked goods e.g., fabulous baked goods

**Verbs**

The story is told in the past tense.

- **Being verbs** e.g. was, had, were

- **Thinking verbs** and words e.g., felt, hoping, checked, lamented, know, decided, confused

- **Action verbs**

Some verbs have **regular** endings e.g., lived, planted, asked, offered, helped

Some are **irregular** e.g., grew, came, felt, stole, lost

**Vocabulary development, words that children may need to have explained**, for example: elderberries, orphanage, regret, fulfilment (see notes for each page).

### **Express and develop ideas**

Invite children to retell the story in sequence. Encourage them to use words to mark the order; for example, first, second, third, next, then, after, when. This could be an oral and/or written exercise.

Invite children to draw and write about their favourite part of the story or what they think of the story.

Invite children to contemplate alternative endings for the story.

Invite children to discuss how the story makes them feel.

Ask children to suggest and explain how *The Precious Plum* is similar and dissimilar to other fairytales they know.

List features that identify *The Precious Plum* as a fairytale.

### **LINKS TO OTHER CURRICULUM AREAS**

#### ***Science***

##### **Biological sciences**

Grow plants from seeds.

Tend a garden.

Remove weeds from a garden.

Identify features of plants and the parts that are used for food, especially in baking.

##### **Chemical sciences**

Follow a recipe to bake a cake or loaf of bread. As well as opportunities for developing understanding in the chemical sciences, cooking integrates learning in English and mathematics.

#### ***The Arts***

##### **Visual Arts**

Be a milliner and design a hat.

Make a heart to give someone you love.

Experiment with line drawings like those used in the illustrations. Explore ways of adding gentle hues with water colours, chalk or crayon rubbings.

Make a garden 'stone' from clay. Form clay into a shape (oval, heart or other). Scratch a 'fruit of the soul' word into it. Place into a pot or garden.

Create a wall display of a tree. Children write 'fruit of the soul' words on fruit to hang from the tree.

**General Capabilities****Personal and Social Capability**

Make a chart to show the difference between 'fruits of the soul' and 'weeds'. Fruits are the positive feelings we wish to encourage and grow. Weeds are the ones to discourage.

**LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM - CONTENT DESCRIPTORS****Key Curriculum Areas**

**Learning Areas:** English, Science, The Arts, General Capabilities

**English****Language****- Language for interaction**

(ACELA 1429) Understand that language can be used to explore ways of expressing needs, likes and dislikes

**- Text structure and organisation**

(ACELA 1430) Understand that stories and informative texts have different purposes

(ACELA1447) Understand that the purposes texts serve shape their structure in predictable ways

**- Expressing and developing ideas**

(ACELA 1786) Explore the different contribution of words and images to meaning in stories

(ACELA 1453) Compare different kinds of images in narrative and informative texts and discuss how they contribute to meaning

(ACELA 1437) Understand the use of vocabulary in familiar contexts related to everyday experiences, personal interests and topics taught at school

(ACELA1452) Explore differences in words that represent people, places and things (nouns, including pronouns), happenings and states (verbs), qualities (adjectives) and details such as when, where and how (adverbs)

(ACELA1470) Understand the use of vocabulary about familiar and new topics and experiment with and begin to make conscious choices of vocabulary to suit audience and purpose

**Literature****- Literature and context**

(ACELT 1575) Recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences that may be similar or different to students' own experiences

(ACELT1581) Discuss how authors create characters using language and images

**- Responding to literature**

(ACELT 1783) Share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in texts

(ACELT 1582) Discuss characters and events in a range of literary texts and share personal responses to these texts, making connections with students' own experiences

## **- Creating literature**

(ACELT1586) Recreate texts imaginatively using drawing, writing, performance and digital forms of communication

## **Literacy**

### **- Interacting with others**

(ACELY 1646) Listen to and respond orally to texts and to the communication of others in informal and structured classroom situations

(ACELY 1650) Use comprehension strategies to understand and discuss texts listened to, viewed or read independently

(ACELY1656) Engage in conversations and discussions, using active listening behaviours, showing interest, and contributing ideas, information and questions

(ACELY1665) Discuss different texts on a similar topic, identifying similarities and differences between the texts

## **Science**

### **Science Understanding**

#### **- Biological sciences**

(ACSSU002) Living things have basic needs, including food and water

(ACSSU017) Living things have a variety of external features

(ACSSU211) Living things live in different places where their needs are met

#### **- Chemical sciences**

(ACSSU018) Everyday materials can be physically changed in a variety of ways

(ACSSU031) Different materials can be combined for a particular purpose

## **The Arts**

### **Visual Arts**

(ACAVAM106) Explore ideas, experiences, observations and imagination to create visual artworks and design, including considering ideas in artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists

## **General Capabilities**

### **Literacy**

Comprehending texts through listening, reading and viewing

### **Critical and Creative Thinking**

Inquiring — identifying, exploring and organising information and ideas

Generating ideas, possibilities and actions

Analysing, synthesising and evaluating reasoning and procedures

Reflecting on thinking and processes

### **Personal and Social Capability**

Self-awareness

Social awareness





***The Precious Plum*** by Jennifer Horn

Setting

Main character

Events

Conclusion

What I think about the story



***Fruits of the Soul***  
Encourage these

***Weeds***  
Discourage these



**WISDOM CAKE**

Ingredients

Method