

Grades K-5

Mini-Lesson: "What's the most dangerous plant in the world?"

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hey, it's Esther! Have you ever taken a hike in the forest? If you have, you may have seen some of these, pinecones. Pinecones are fun to collect, decorate your house with, or even make crafts out of. But did you know that some pinecones can be dangerous? I'm serious, check this out. You're looking at a bunya pinecone, and they're huge. A bunya pine cone can weigh over twenty pounds. That's heavier than a bowling ball, and that can be dangerous. See, the heavy pine cones have been known to fall off bunya trees and hit people in the head. Some cities put signs warning people about the danger. Some even put ropes around bunya trees to keep people from getting near them at all. Now, these trees only grow in the wild in certain areas around the world. So there probably aren't any around where you live, but they are so cool to learn about. Someone named Emma is curious about dangerous plants like the bunya. Let's give Emma a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Esther.
- Hi, Emma.
- I have a question for you. What is the most dangerous plant in the world?
- Oh, that's a great question.

When some people think of dangerous plants, they think of the monster plants they see in video games or cartoons. Monster plants like that are just pretend, but there are still some pretty dangerous plants out there. And they can be dangerous in different ways. Like a bunya tree can be dangerous to walk under because a giant pine cone might fall and hit your head. And a thorny rose bush like this one can poke you when you try to pick it up, Ouch. But there are other ways plants can be dangerous. Can you think of any? Before we go on, I'm curious. What are some other ways a plant can be dangerous?

VIDEO 2

I'm not sure how you answered, but you may have mentioned that some plants are dangerous to touch, like this one. If you've ever been walking in the woods, you may have seen a poison ivy plant. You may have even touched one, and that would be a bummer. See, every part of a poison ivy plant is covered by a poison called urushiol, and if you brush past it or try to pick it up, the poison will get on your skin and cause a really itchy rash or even blisters. Now, Poison Ivy is only dangerous if you touch it. And once you wash the poison off, the rash will go away in a few days. But that's not the case with this next plant. It's called a Gympie Gympie and it grows in Australia and Indonesia. See those tiny hairs on its leaves? They're actually tiny stingers. And if you touch them, they'll inject you with a really powerful poison, and that's gonna hurt. People who have been stung by this plant say it feels like fire. Oh, and here's the worst part, the sting can hurt for years. That makes the Gympie Gympie plant one of the most dangerous plants in the world to touch. But touching a plant isn't the only way a plant can be dangerous. Eating a poisonous plant can be even worse. Now you might be thinking, why would anyone eat a poisonous plant? Well, this is why. Do you see those shiny blackberries? They look like berries you can eat, don't they? But you definitely cannot. Those are the berries of a deadly nightshade

plant, and they're super poisonous. A tiny little bite can send someone to the hospital or worse. In fact, the deadly nightshade is so poisonous that people have even gotten sick by eating honey from bees that have been around the plants. Woah. The deadly nightshade is one of the most dangerous plants on Earth because of its powerful poison and because people can confuse the poisonous berries for blueberries or blackberries. Okay, so a plant can be dangerous to touch, and it can be really dangerous to eat. But can plants be dangerous to smell? Guess what? They can. This is an angel's trumpet. I've actually had some of these in my garden. See its flowers? They kind of look like a trumpet, don't they? They may look beautiful, but here's the thing, angel's trumpets are really poisonous. They're mainly poisonous to eat, but they can also be poisonous to touch or even to smell, for real. If you get too close or smell the flowers too much, you might breathe in enough of that poison to get a headache or have trouble breathing or get really sick to your stomach, which can make the angel's trumpet a dangerous plant to smell. So in summary, plants can be dangerous in different ways. The Gympie Gympie plant is one of the most dangerous plants to touch. The deadly Nightshade is one of the most dangerous plants because people confuse its fruit for berries you can eat. And the angel's trumpet can be dangerous to smell too much because you might breathe in enough of its poison to make you sick. Now, even though some plants can be dangerous, you don't need to be afraid of them. There are even some gardens you can visit where you can safely see dangerous plants up close. There are so many more of these kinds of amazing plants to learn about. You can also talk to local experts in your area to learn about which plants are dangerous and which plants are safe to touch, smell and even eat. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Emma, for asking it.