

Nowadays, sending somebody a bouquet of flowers might just seem like a kind gesture, but historically plants were used to convey coded messages to the receiver, sometimes with surprisingly complicated meanings.

Flowers have long been used symbolically in art and literature, but the practice of floriography — that is, the language of flowers — increased in popularity during Victorian times. There were strict social rules in this period, so there were plenty of things that couldn't be said aloud. Instead, people began to use floral arrangements to send private messages, like sweet-smelling codes. If they wanted to assure someone of their loyalty, they might send ivy. If they wanted to call somebody childish, they could send buttercups. Suitors often sent declarations of love in flowery form, which might include red roses, tulips or carnations. If the recipient held the bouquet at their heart, it meant the affection was returned, whereas if they pointed it towards the ground, it was a resolute rejection.

Victorians took their floriography seriously, so naturally it wasn't only the types of plants they sent that carried a deeper meaning. The rules were as complicated as a game of chess — if they sent flowers, they had to consider their colour, how many of them they gave and whether they were in full bloom or just budding. Size was also a factor — a small sunflower suggested love, for example, but a tall one labelled the receiver arrogant. In addition, they were careful about which part of the plant they sent, and whether it was broken or intact. Take chrysanthemums, for instance — sending leaves was a sign of devotion, but sending yellow blooms was a symbol of grief and sorrow.

Symbolic meanings weren't limited to flowers; vegetables and other edible plants could be used too. If you'd like to have a go at floriography yourself, why not try it on your friends? Invite them over for lunch and scatter some secret meanings through their food. Suggest they are honourable by putting mint leaves in their salad, or make them a turnip soup to show you feel charitable towards them. Give them cherry juice to signal that you find them intelligent. If they give you almonds in return, you'll know they think you're foolish.

Question 1

According to the text, what did the Victorians use floriography for?

- ☐ To create works of art
- ☒ To communicate with others
- ☐ To reinforce social rules
- ☐ To surprise their friends
- ☐ To make their homes smell pleasant

Question 2

According to the text, which of the following statements must be true?

- ☐ In Victorian times, floriography replaced letter writing entirely.
- ☐ Floriography was only used by couples in Victorian times.
- ☒ Floriography was used before the Victorian period.
- ☐ Floriography is no longer used.
- ☐ Victorian people saw floriography as socially unacceptable.

Question 3

According to the text, which of the following is likely to have been a disadvantage of using floriography to send a message?

- ☐ Messages could only be sent in spring, when flowers bloomed.
- ☐ It could only be used to send positive messages.
- ☐ The meanings of flowers were not widely known.
- ☐ Flowers always had to be given in person.
- ☒ It relied on the sender using the flowers correctly.

Question 4

Which of the following is not mentioned in the text as something that affects the meaning of a bouquet?

- ☐ Whether the flowers are young or fully-grown
- ☒ Whether the flowers are scented or not
- ☐ Whether the flowers are in good condition
- ☐ Whether the flowers are large or small
- ☐ Whether there is a single flower or many flowers

Question 5

According to the text, which of the following plant pairings have similar messages?

- ☐ Cherries and carnations
- ☒ Tulips and small sunflowers
- ☐ Ivy and buttercups
- ☐ Chrysanthemum leaves and mint leaves
- ☐ Turnips and red roses

Question 6

Which of the following does the author suggest you could feed to your friends to compliment them?

- 1 Nuts
- 2 Vegetables
- 3 Herbs
- 4 Edible flowers
- 5 Fruit

- ☐ 1, 2 and 4
- ☒ 2, 3 and 4
- ☐ 1, 3 and 5
- ☐ 1, 3 and 4
- ☒ 2, 3 and 5

Question 7

What does 'convey' mean in this extract from the text: "plants were used to convey coded messages"?

- ☒ Express
- ☐ Provoke
- ☐ Receive
- ☐ Return
- ☐ Conceal

Question 8

What does 'resolute' mean in this extract from the text: "if they pointed it towards the ground, it was a resolute rejection"?

- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Pitying
- ☒ Firm
- ☐ Hesitant
- ☐ Sorrowful

Question 9

"If you'd like to have a go at floriography yourself, why not try it on your friends?" What technique is used in this extract from the text?

- ☒ A rhetorical question
- ☐ A metaphor
- ☐ Onomatopoeia
- ☐ A simile
- ☐ Alliteration

Question 10

What type of word is 'honourable' in this extract from the passage: "Suggest they are honourable by putting mint leaves in their salad"?

- ☒ Adjective
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Adverb