

Sukhomlinsky News

No. 68
April 2021



Appreciating beauty

Dear readers,

Once again I would like to thank Nataliya Bezsalova for translating the stories in this month's newsletter.

The rest of the newsletter is devoted to continuing my translation of the final chapter in Pavlysh Secondary School, which is on aesthetic education.

In this month's extract, Sukhomlinsky pays particular attention to the development of musical and literary appreciation, and to teaching children how to express their feelings in music and words.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Aesthetic education

In this issue we continue our translation of the final chapter of *Pavlysh Secondary School*, which is on aesthetic education.

Aesthetic perception and aesthetic creativity

Music is a very powerful means of aesthetic education. Music is the language of feeling, of emotion, able to express the subtlest variations in mood. Sensitivity to the language of music, the ability to understand it, depend on the extent to which folk music and the works created by composers have been appreciated in childhood and adolescence. At least half the time set aside for singing and music is spent listening to musical compositions. We teach children to understand a musical melody, then progress to listening to simple pieces. Each piece is prefaced by a discussion, which helps children to form some conception of the image or emotion that is conveyed by the specific musical techniques.

Here, as when appreciating a painting, we attach great significance to nature. We teach children to listen to the music of nature. For example, on a quiet summer evening, the children gather in the orchard or by the bank of a pond. The sun sets, and with each minute we observe the changing colours of the trees, hills, and the limitless fields in the distance, with their tall Scythian burial mounds. The children observe the surrounding world and listen to the sounds. It turns out that the quietest of summer evenings is filled with a multitude of sounds. Immediately after listening to the music of nature, the children listen to a recording of an appropriate folk song or composition. The children want to listen to these melodies, that convey the beauty of a summer evening, again and again.

[Continued on the following page]



Aesthetic education (cont.)

When this listening to a musical work is repeated, emotional memory is developed, and children develop deeper sensitivity to the beauty of a melody. Gradually children begin to feel the musical expression of feelings, impressions, moods and experiences in a melody. In this way, even before they become familiar with music terminology, children master a language of images, which is very important not only for musical education, but more generally for the formation and development of feelings. The more comprehensible and accessible this language is for a child at an early age, the greater the role played by listening to music in the middle and senior years.

The ability to listen to and appreciate music is one of the elementary marks of aesthetic culture, and a complete education is inconceivable without it. Music's domain begins where speech ends. That which it is impossible to express to another person in words may be expressed with a musical melody, because music directly conveys moods and feelings. In this connection we should note that music is an indispensable means for influencing a young soul. We try to structure our musical education in such a way that from year to year, students are exposed to a world of great ideas, expressed in music: the idea of brotherhood and friendship between people (Beethoven's ninth symphony), the idea of humanity's struggle against merciless fate (Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony), the battle of the forces of progress and light against the dark forces of fascism (Shostakovich's seventh symphony). We lead children to an understanding of these ideas gradually: at first, as indicated, they listen to simple musical works that express wonder at beauty, goodness, humanity,

and then they progress to more complex works.

At musical evenings conducted for students in the junior, middle, and senior years, the main activity is listening to music. Our musical education program includes listening to vocal, instrumental and symphonic works, and excerpts (overtures, arias) from operas, by leading Russian, Soviet and international composers.

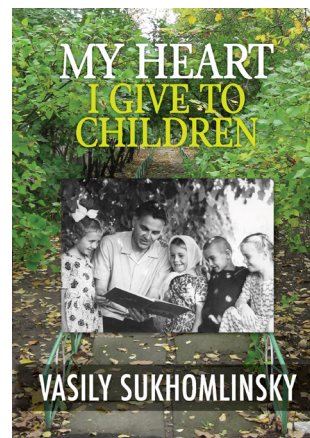
Each musical evening represents the next step in the students' musical education. In order to understand music, it is necessary to explain the musical modes of expressing thought and feeling. We begin with the elementary explanation of musical association and analogy, showing how composers borrow sounds from the surrounding world. Gradually we progress to an analysis of the ideas behind a musical work.

Taking pleasure in beauty provides the first stimulus to awaken creativity. This is particularly noticeable in students' literary experimentation. The more deeply a student has experienced the beauty reflected in poetry, the stronger their urge to express their own thoughts and feelings in words. In this case perception and creativity are not only interdependent; they are often combined in a single process of aesthetic evaluation. The creativity essentially begins during the reading of a poetic work. A characteristic feature of literary, and especially poetic, experimentation, is the fact that thoughts are conveyed with the aid of those concrete, sensory images, with which they were associated while listening to a poem or musical work.

During the past ten years I have read over 100 student poems expressing sadness at the prospect of parting with our school and with friends. The young men and women express their feelings in images such as a

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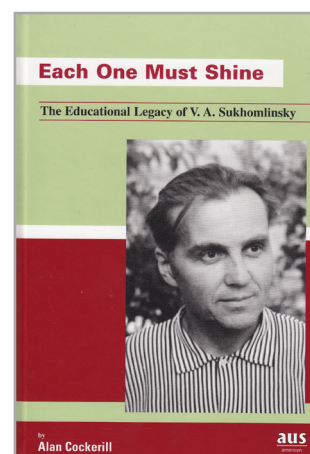
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distant burial mound, shrouded in mist, that becomes ever more distant and barely perceptible; a withering (or, on the contrary, developing) tree on the bank of a pond (or river), illuminated by bright rays of sunlight; a cloud in an endless blue sky; the rising (or setting) of the sun; a sunset or dawn; the distant smoke of a locomotive (or steamship). Such images are associated in the emotional memories of the authors with feelings of sadness, brought on by the thought of parting.

The deeper and more refined their aesthetic appreciation, the more a student is interested in their personal, spiritual world. Many students keep diaries. Notes in a diary are clear evidence of an urge to be creative. This urge should be developed. The ability to use words creatively, to embody one's thoughts, feelings and inner experiences in an artistic image, is necessary not only for a writer, but for any cultured person. The more this ability is developed, the higher a person's aesthetic and general level of culture is, the more refined their feelings, the deeper their experiences, the clearer their aesthetic perception of new artistic values. That is why we attach such great significance to creative writing.

Creative writing is not just developing language, but also the refinement of feelings. This work begins with a child's communion with nature. During our journeys to the world of beauty we reveal to children the wealth of feelings, emotions and thoughts that our people have invested in every word, and that they carefully hand down from generation to generation. When the children take delight in the beauty of the dawn, we are revealing to them the emotional colouring of the word 'dawn'. When they admire the twinkling of the stars, we reveal to them the beauty of the word 'twinkle'. On quiet summer evenings we hold discussions in natural surroundings, devoted to

the words 'sunset', 'dusk', 'stillness', 'whispering grass', 'moonlight'. In the lap of nature, we read immortal works of Russian and world poetry: poems and poetic prose dedicated to nature, that reflects the inner world of a human being.

The urge to be creative in the fields of visual arts and music also depends on aesthetic appreciation. In developing a sense of the beauty of nature, we encourage children to express their feelings in colour and line. Creativity begins when a child expresses their feelings while depicting a forest, mountains, the steppe, or a river. Such creativity enriches a child's spiritual life. On excursions and hikes, our children take albums and pencils. When they are particularly struck by the beauty of nature, they draw. Some drawing lessons in the junior and middle years are devoted to drawings on themes chosen by the students: the children draw whatever has left a deep impression on their souls.

A sign of a person's aesthetic and general culture is their ability to find in music a means of expressing their feelings and emotions. Not everyone can create new musical compositions, but everyone can understand the language of music, and use musical treasures in communicating with others. We try to ensure that a musical instrument is considered essential by everyone, that everyone can play some instrument. Playing the bayan is the most common form of musical activity in our setting. Many of our students have a library of sheet music and spend some of their leisure time playing the bayan. During their free time students can also go to the music room and listen to works recorded on tape.

The higher the level of aesthetic development common to all students, the greater the opportunities for developing the talents of those with particular artistic abilities. [To be continued]

Stories about beauty

A piece of the sea

A boy used to live by the shore of a great sea. For hours, he would sit and watch its mighty waves, as they heaved up and down, rumbling angrily or gently whispering.

The sea was never silent. The boy understood its ferocity and tenderness, its rage and kindness. Going to bed, the boy would always say, 'Good night, sea!' And the sea would respond with the everlasting sound of its waves.

But the boy's parents decided to move far away from the sea, into the steppe. Sad and full of longing, the boy went to the sea to bid it farewell. The sea rumbled quietly, but the boy could tell that its feelings were hurt. The sea cast a spiral shell onto the shore. The boy understood that the sea was giving him a small gift. He took the shell and brought it home.

At his new home, surrounded by the quiet steppe, the boy put the shell to his ear... and heard the gentle sound of waves caressing the sandy shore.

Deeply moved, the boy pressed the shell to his chest. What could be dearer to him than a piece of the sea?

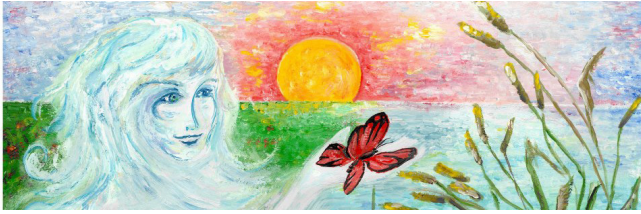
The sun will soon rise

I wake at dawn, venture outside, and am instantly wrapped in the cool early morning breeze. The sky to the east is a pale blue. The grass and leaves are covered with cold morning dew.

High in the sky a lark sings. The lark is golden, as if sailing on a rosy sea. But what is making the lark golden? It is the sun, gently caressing the lark with its rays.

The edge of the sky turns red. A starling wakes in his nesting box. Welcoming the sun, he sings joyfully and flies somewhere. He soon returns, bringing something in his beak for his chicks.

The dawn is afire. Streaks of gold cut the sky. A mist rises from the pond in the valley. Soon the sun will rise.



Stories

The snowflake and the sun

High in the sky, in a white cloud, a little snowflake was born. She was so beautiful and sparkled like exquisite silver lace. Quietly, she descended to a fir tree and looked around. She saw a field carpeted with snow, the green branches of the fir trees, and the sun, round and bright, in the blue sky.

The snowflake started bragging:

'Hey, sun! You think you are beautiful? You are round like a plate, but I am like lace carved from fine silver. Each of my needles sparkles. If I want, I can shine brighter than you!'

The sun smiled but said nothing. The next day, it rose early in the morning. Instantly, it became very hot.

'I can't breathe, it's so humid,' groaned the snowflake and started crying. Tiny teardrops fell from her fine needles onto the snow-covered field.

The snowflake disappeared, but the sun still shone and sparkled. The forest woke from its winter dream, welcoming spring with joyful song. Streams broke up from their icy prison. The snowflake turned into a little drop of water, but the everlasting sun remained the sun. And it will be so forever.

The bumblebee and the lilac flowers

In a garden, a lilac bush was flowering. One cluster of violet flowers stood out amongst all the others. Her flowers were gentle and fragrant. Every morning, the cluster of violet flowers waited for the sunrise. She knew that once the sun rose, a bumblebee would come flying. She liked its buzzing. She liked how the bumblebee gently touched her when he was collecting nectar. Those were the happiest moments in her life. The sun shone in the blue sky, birds chirped in the trees, butterflies fluttered by, an old oak rustled its leaves, and the wind gently whispered of mysteries. And all of this was just for her, the cluster of lilac flowers.

One morning, she woke up and could not believe her eyes. There was no longer any bush or oak tree beside her. Most surprising of all, she was standing in a crystal vase by an open window. The sun rose, and its rays were reflected in the

crystal in thousands of rainbows. The lilac cluster held her breath in wonder. She had never seen anything so beautiful in her life. 'And all of this is for me,' she thought.

At that moment, she heard the buzzing of the bumblebee. She thought that the bumblebee was going to touch her flowers as usual, but anxiously buzzing, the bumblebee circled her flowers and disappeared through the open window.

'What happened to the bumblebee?' wondered the cluster of lilac flowers. 'He's a strange fellow. Can't he see how beautiful this crystal vase is?'

The main entrance

In a small town, a spacious, bright, new school was built.

The school had two doors: a big one facing the road, that was called the main entrance, and another, a bit smaller, that opened onto the yard. As soon as the new school opened, the main door was locked, and only back door was used.

Years passed. Teachers and principals came and went. Everybody who studied and worked at the school completely forgot that there used to be two entrances. It never entered anyone's head that they could enter the school through the front entrance, without using the back door.

Early one spring morning, a couple of little first-graders, who usually came to school earlier than everybody else, approached the back door and froze in astonishment. In front of the porch, a blue violet was blooming. Green shoots had pushed their way up between the paving stones, and a tender flower shone among the green leaves.

Boys and girls circled the flower. They did not want it to be trampled underfoot. And children kept arriving. Finally, all the students and all the teachers were standing there. The whole yard was filled with boys and girls. Right near the flower, the principal was standing and wondering what to do.

'What should we do?' wondered a thousand children.

'There is another door to the school!' Little Dmitrik from Grade 1 broke the silence.

'What door?' asked the principal.

'The main entrance door,' said Dmitrik. 'We play hide and seek there.'

The principal recalled the door, and so did the other teachers. The students also remembered that every day they walked past the locked door. 'Let's open the main entrance door!' joyfully announced the principal.

They opened the main entrance door. Everybody started entering the school through the big front door. The back door was closed while the violet flowered on the threshold.