

# Sukhomlinsky News

No. 69

May 2021



## Beauty in the school environment

Dear readers,

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

The rest of the newsletter is devoted to the final instalment from the last chapter in Pavlysh Secondary School, which is on aesthetic education.

In this month's extract, Sukhomlinsky writes about the aesthetic impact of the school grounds and classrooms, and the role of the students in creating beauty in the school environment.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



## Aesthetic education

In this issue we present our final instalment from the last chapter of *Pavlysh Secondary School*, which is on aesthetic education.

### The role of the surrounding environment and of work in aesthetic education

We try to ensure that children accumulate many impressions of an aesthetic nature, and this leads to a concern for the aesthetic environment. Everything that a child sees when they enter our school, everything that they come in contact with, is beautiful. The overall view of the school, luxuriating in greenery, is beautiful. The green grape vines with their amber grapes are beautiful. The roses growing along the path from one building to the other are beautiful. At all seasons of the year the crowns of the trees in the school grounds are beautiful. The porch of the main entrance to the school, framed by wild grape vines, is beautiful...

The aesthetic value of the things that surround us does not correspond to their cost. We seek to ensure that everything that surrounds the children is, in aesthetic terms, priceless, that a great deal of work, care and feeling has been invested in it.

Aesthetic perception of the surrounding environment is deeply subjective, depending on the active participation involved in the aesthetic assimilation of reality. For a child, a plain plant that they have grown themselves in a clay pot from a cutting is of incomparable value. A china vase, bought in a shop, pales in comparison with a clay vase made with one's own hands. This should not be understood as a denigration of the artistic value of artifacts created by masters: the role of such artifacts in education is enormous. We are merely citing these examples to emphasise the value of work in the aesthetic education of students.

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## Aesthetic education (cont.)

The aesthetic impression created by the environment is achieved by a harmony between that which is created by nature and that which is created by human hands, a harmony that awakens a feeling of joy. We try to ensure that everywhere in the school grounds children can see the beauty of nature, which becomes even more beautiful because they, the children, are caring for it.

The harmony between the objects that surround a child imparts a common aesthetic spirit to the environment only when individual objects do not cry out for attention, when one seems not to notice them. If, for example, in a broad, well-lit window, looking out on an orchard, one places several large flowers, the harmony will be destroyed, the flowers will extinguish the aesthetic qualities of the other objects—of the orchard itself. If, however, in the window there is a single cutting, harmonious in form with the trees in the orchard, with the time of year (harmony may also consist in contrast), then the cutting, the orchard and the expanses of the distant fields will all be perceived quite differently.

Beauty only ennoble a person when they labour to create beauty. We seek to ensure that a person labours not only for their daily bread, but also for joy. We teach the children to create beauty. We are happy for a chrysanthemum to bloom next to an ear of wheat, a rose next to sunflowers, a lilac bush next to potatoes. During the first autumn of their school lives, every class plants a rose bush and cares for it. Every class of little children has their chrysanthemums. When cold weather arrives, the children transplant flowers to the greenhouse, or to their nature corner. In the places of beauty that each class creates in the school grounds are roses, lilacs,

grapes, and pears. A concern for beauty is experienced as a concern for a tender, delicate, defenceless being, who would perish if people did not care for it.

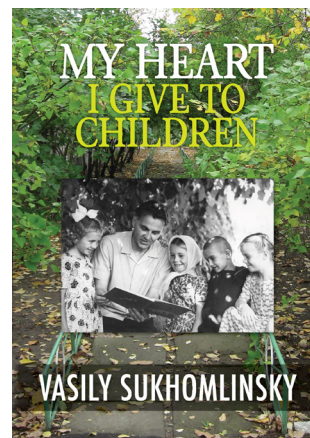
Children's work involves the creation of necessary things, but it is also a form of aesthetic creativity. The unity of these processes is what is behind the ennobling power of work, and behind altruism. This unity also safeguards against a vile relic of the past: possessiveness. The more the element of aesthetic creativity predominates in socially useful work, the deeper the extent to which the aesthetic evaluation of the things that result from that work is combined with a moral assessment of the person who created those things. Many types of children's work are creative in essence, and related to handicrafts (fretwork, pokerwork, moulding, embroidery etc.). The longer these forms of work are part of a person's life, the more vibrantly the aesthetic element will be expressed in all their work activity.

Aesthetic evaluation of work is a source of a worker's moral dignity. Along with the technological demands of work in our experimental plots, in the greenhouse, in workshops and in the fields, we also expect students to give attention to beauty. Any work assigned to students has an aesthetic significance as well as economic significance, connected with the development of a sense of beauty.

The aesthetic environment includes a sense of air, light, space, and perspective. Everything on the walls of our classrooms has the effect of moving the walls outwards, filling the room with the expanses of fields, forests, and meadows. For instance, the students may see a picture depicting an orchard in autumn. It reminds them of the real orchard on the other side of the wall.

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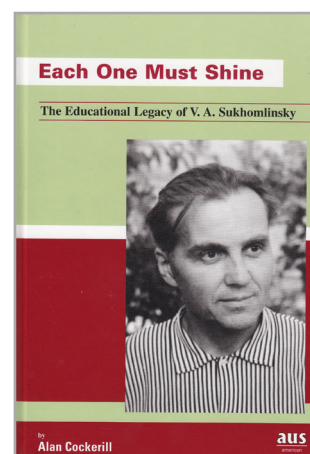
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The school grounds provide a setting for our students' childhood, adolescence and youth. Everything here develops an aesthetic appreciation of nature and of work. The green lawn in the courtyard leads to the beehives, which bring to mind constant, meticulous work. Whatever part of the grounds a student may find themselves in, they can see fruit trees: apples, pears, cherries, plums, apricots. They are beautiful when they bloom, and in summer, and in deep autumn, first with their fruit, and then with their many-coloured foliage, which blazes against the autumn sky. The beauty of their branches in winter is unique, covered in snow and frost. The orchard is a most vibrant combination of natural beauty with beauty created by human hands.

In the centre of the school grounds, next to our sports area, are our grapevines. Their external appearance is attractive due to the natural beauty of the vigorous vines, winding along their trellaces, and of the bunches of fruit (visible for three months of the year), and especially due to the beauty of the work that has gone into them. The children create this beauty and live and breathe it. During their first autumn at the school, they plant cuttings, and then take care of them. Grapevines clad the walls of the rabbit farm, the green laboratory and the toilets. Near the beehives are nectar-bearing plants. From early spring to late autumn, you can hear the sound of the 'bees' music'; as the children like to call their buzzing. The children come here with their teachers on quiet mornings and evenings, to listen to the music of nature. This is where they learn to appreciate musical melodies.

In the school grounds are several green bowers of wild grapevines. The dense foliage creates a living roof, similar to a sunshade. During spring, summer and autumn, nature changes the

colouring of this foliage five times. This play of colours delights the students and provided an object for observation. The students observe the same play of colours on the vines that clad the green laboratory.

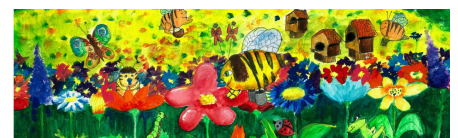
The environments in the experimental plots, greenhouses and nature rooms all have an aesthetic aspect. Every class in the junior and middle years has their own plot for growing grains and other crops. The crops are chosen in such a way that each class plot is green until late autumn. Autumn flowers bloom until the frosts arrive. Sometimes they peep out from under the first carpet of snow. In the greenhouse, flowers bloom all winter: chrysanthemums, snowdrops and lilies. Among our experimental plots there are several nursery beds where we produce fruit trees for planting. Here beauty is born and flows out in streams to beautify the whole village.

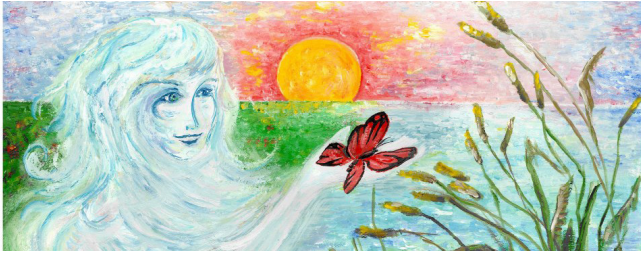
We give considerable attention to the creation of the aesthetic environment in the classrooms, working rooms, and workshops. Each class group strives to ensure that their room is distinguished by something special. The uniqueness of the aesthetic environment is created by a plant placed next to the blackboard. In one class it may be a lemon tree, in another a rose, in a third a little pine tree. This plant sets the tone for the aesthetic ambience of the whole room. On one of the windowsills is a small flower or piece of greenery reminding one of the beauty of the school grounds. The important thing here is not the quantity of greenery (windows are for light), but the striking shape of the stem and leaves silhouetted against the sky.

In every class there are reproductions of paintings. They are changed depending on various circumstances (the season, the content of class discussions etc.). Some classes have a picture gallery:

a series of reproductions that the literature teacher uses to conduct discussions about art. On the teacher's desk is a clay vase into which the pupil on duty each day places a fresh flower or twig from a decorative plant (in spring and autumn, from the experimental plots, in winter, from the greenhouse). This flower not only corresponds to the season, but also expresses the mood of the class and the nature of their interests at that time. In the greenhouse, in the green laboratory, in the nature room, we not only cultivate flowers for the classrooms, but also assemble an aesthetically vibrant combination of flowers. Clearly, we assign flowers a significant role in aesthetic refinement.

A significant role in aesthetic education is played by dress, and by the external appearance of students and teachers in general. Here the most important thing is simplicity and elegance. We are against having a single uniform for all pupils. (The current uniform is no good at all, especially for the girls. It is hideous, and it is no wonder that the young pioneers in their newspaper recently requested the Ministry of Education to give them a new form of dress.) We encourage clothing that emphasises and draws attention to the aesthetic features of each child's individuality. We adhere to those essential requirements of clothing that develop aesthetic appreciation. This is primarily that the colour of the material and the cut of the garment should suit the individual features of the student. .... Similar aesthetic recommendations apply to hair styles. It should not be a requirement that boys' hair is cut with clippers. Our expectations for haircuts are that they should be modest, simple, elegant, and suit the person's individual features.





## Stories

### Soon the sun will 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.

### How the bee found a lily of the valley

A bee flies out of her beehive and makes a circle above the apiary. She catches the sound of bells jingling far away. She flies towards the music of the bells. She reaches the forest and finds lilies of the valley in a meadow. Each flower is a tiny silver bell with an exquisite golden hammer inside. The hammer strikes the silver, and it rings. This sound is heard everywhere, in the steppe and in the apiary. This is how the lily of the valley summons the bee.

The bee settles on the flower and takes its nectar. 'Thank you,' she says to the lily of the valley.

The flower does not respond. It cannot speak. It only humbly bows its head. The bee understands: this is how the lily of the valley acknowledges her gratitude.

The bee carries the nectar to her babies.

### A morning at the apiary

One sunny spring day, a bee flew out of her beehive. She made a circle above the apiary and rose into the air. From above, she noticed something white down below. The bee flew down to have a look. It was an apple tree in flower! The bee found its most fragrant flower, settled on its petals, and drank its sweet nectar. She had enough for herself and for her children. But on her way back, she spotted a bright island

of yellow flowers amid the sea of the green grass: the dandelions were blooming. Their flowers were big and very fragrant. The bee found the most fragrant flower, landed on its petals, and collected a lot of honey.

When the bee returned to her apiary, she met her friend. She told her friend all about the apple tree and the dandelions. Together, the bees brought the honey home, put it into small bowls, and set off again.

The sun shone over the whole world. It gave its warmth to the apple tree, to the meadow, and to the pond. And the bees sang joyfully because the sun was shining.

### The red butterfly

A red butterfly flew above the green grass. He was bright and beautiful. He settled on the green grass for a few minutes and set off again. A sparrow spotted the butterfly and started chasing him. The sparrow drew closer and closer. At any moment he would catch the butterfly.

The butterfly was scared. He did not know where to go. He darted down to a red rose and settled on its petal. The sparrow was confused: where did the butterfly go? The sparrow looked for the butterfly everywhere. He stopped near the red rose and looked around, but the butterfly froze, and he could not see it.

Empty handed, the sparrow returned to his nest, while the butterfly sat safely on the flower.

### By the pond

A hot July day is drawing to a close. The sun is setting. We are sitting on the bank of a pond. The water is as still and motionless as a mirror, and the dome of the blue sky is reflected in it. Looking at the water, we can observe every movement of the sun. We see the moment when it touches the pond, and in an instant the water ignites and becomes a river of fire. The flaming disk of the sun descends lower and lower into the depths of the water. The pond is all ablaze. Finally, the sun sets, hiding below the horizon, and suddenly the river of fire is extinguished. The mirror-like surface turns a soft, pale blue.

In the twilight, the stars start twinkling in the sky. The water in the pond turns a deeper blue, and now the stars are twinkling in its depths.

An old willow leans over the pond. No leaf makes a sound, no branch stirs. The willow looks at its reflection in the water, sad that summer is coming to an end, that soon all her leaves will be gone, and dark clouds will cover the sky.

Don't be sad, dear willow! Soon the pond will freeze over, snow will cover you with its warm blanket, and you will look forward to the spring.