

Sukhomlinsky News



School traditions

Dear readers,

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

The remainder of the newsletter is taken from the first chapter in Pavlysh Secondary School. In this month's extract, Sukhomlinsky writes about some of the many traditions that grew up at his school during the twenty-two years when he was principal.

The 'Pioneers' Sukhomlinsky refers to were a bit like Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, but were integrated into schooling, with each class being like a scout troop.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

School traditions in Pavlysh

In this issue we present passages from the first chapter of *Pavlysh Secondary School*.

Our traditions

For the rest of their lives, our students will undoubtedly have the warmest memories of their childhood, adolescence, and youth. Some school customs are already being passed on from one generation to the next and becoming traditions.

I will describe our most important traditions:

1. The meeting between the Pioneers and those five-year-old children who will enrol in grade one in two years' time. This is conducted in the middle of August. The children meet with those Pioneers who, in two years' time, will be organising the Little Octobrist groups and supervising games, excursions, and other interesting children's activities. The Pioneers lead their little friends into the garden. On the green grass by the grape vines the little ones watch a performance by the children's puppet theatre and listen to songs and poetry recitations. Then the Pioneers bring their guests several baskets of grapes as a treat.

2. Greeting the seven-year-olds who are soon to enter grade one. This is conducted at the beginning of June. The children are met by their old friends, the Pioneers, who are now studying in grades six and seven. Each child is presented with a book for home reading: a collection of poems by Pushkin or a little edition of Taras Shevchenko's *Kobzar*. The young children are treated with fruit from the school orchard. From this time on, they come to our school every day and are considered to be our students.

[Continued on the following page]



School traditions in Pavlysh (cont.)

3. The celebration of the first bell for grade one students is conducted during the first day of the school year. Students graduating from the school congratulate the children on becoming part of the school family and present each child with a book inscribed with the greeting and signature of the presenter. They lead them into the school grounds and entrust them with the care of a tree that they planted themselves on their first day at school, ten years earlier. Then they perform a traditional ritual: the planting of a tree of eternal school friendship, with the graduating class and the new students planting an apple tree together. We are trying to develop a romantic thought someone had, that as long as green trees of school friendship grow in our school grounds, our friendships will continue to develop and strengthen.

4. The celebration of the final bell for graduates. This is conducted on the final school day that graduates attend. The graduates and the grade one students line up facing each other. Each grade one student presents each graduating student with flowers and a book with an inscription and signature. (As presents on this occasion it has become a tradition to give collections of poems by Pushkin, Taras Shevchenko's *Kobzar*, Goethe's *Faust*, Servantes' *Don Quixote*, Homer's *Illiad* or *Odyssey*, collections of poems by Adam Mickiewicz, Sándor Petőfi, and Hristo Botev, Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Hugo's *Les Miserables*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Jirásek's *Ancient Bohemian Legends*, Rustaveli's *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, *David of Sassoun* (an Armenian epic poem), Japanese and Arabian folk tales.) This celebration is attended by parents who graduated from our school many years before, and even by old people. The

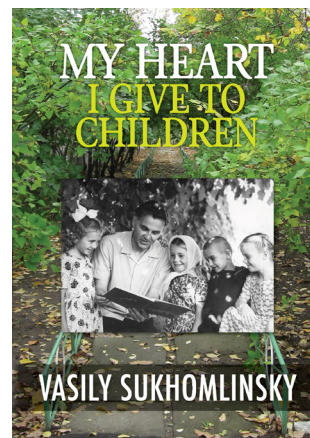
youngsters' presents (books inscribed in large childish letters with touching good wishes) symbolise the eternal, undying nature of the school community. One of the youngsters steps up to a table draped in a white cloth (part of the tradition) and takes a bell tied with a light blue ribbon (also traditional). Responding to the sound of the bell, one of the senior students steps forward and gives a short vote of thanks to the teachers on behalf of their cohort. This address is prepared over a long period of time but is kept secret until the day of the celebration.

5. The graduation ceremony for the senior secondary school students, at which they are presented with their graduation certificates. The most senior teacher addresses the graduates with a farewell address. This address is prepared in good time by all the teaching staff. It expresses our educational ideals and collective educational convictions. We attach great significance to both the form and content of the farewell speech. The impression made by the farewell address is intensified by the solemnity of the occasion, and the emotions that the young men and women are experiencing on that day. The farewell address from the staff remains in the memories of those to whom it is addressed for the rest of their lives, as shown by the recollections of people who graduated from our school long ago. The educational power of language is enormous.

6. It has become a tradition for graduates from past years to meet annually at the school on 30 January. This gathering is attended by students from the graduating class, tertiary students, industrial and agricultural workers. These gatherings foster respect for the

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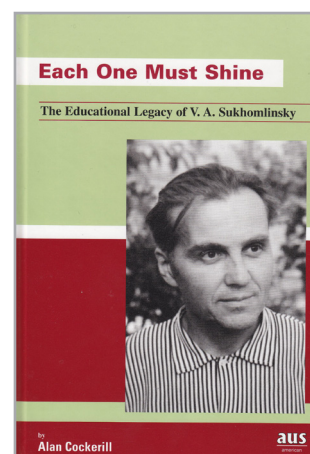
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school. The results of work over the past year are reviewed, and the fruits of the graduates' work are shown to the teaching staff.

7. Mothers' day. Every student spends a long time preparing for this day. On the eve of the celebration, on the evening of 7 March, mothers are presented with gifts: albums with drawings and poems, or simple hand-crafted gifts, always made by the children. On this day many children give their mothers a flower or the flowering branch of an apricot tree, grown in the school greenhouse. The value of the present is measured by the love that a child has invested in their work. On the day of the celebration, 8 March, each child brings their mother some joyful news about their work or their studies at school. For example, they could show a composition that has been awarded the highest possible mark by their teacher or tell their mother about a success they have had in their extracurricular work. This tradition helps children to develop a correct view of the sources of joy that one human being brings to another: joy comes primarily from good deeds, from upholding a family's honour.

8. Girls' day. This is held on the first Sunday of the winter holidays. On this day, the boys give presents to the girls: flowers or drawings.

9. The ceremonial handover of red scarves from the grade eight students (fifteen-year-old adolescents) to the children that are joining the Pioneers. This event takes place on 22 April, the anniversary of Lenin's birth. On this day the grade eight students who are graduating from the Pioneers conduct their final meet. One of the Pioneers addresses the grade three students on behalf of the grade eight students. Telling them about the life of their troop, they urge the new troop

to uphold the honour of the red scarf. When the grade three students have spoken the final words of their solemn pledge as young Leninists, the grade eight students approach them, and each one ties a scarf on a young comrade. The gathering ends with the singing of the Pioneer song. On this day many adults come to the school. The ceremonial handover of the red scarves is gradually becoming an important event in the lives of families. The parents experience it as a significant step that their son or daughter takes in life. Thanks to this tradition, we have been able to overcome an attitude of indifference to Pioneer work on the part of adolescents moving on to their next stage in life.

10. Spring festivals: the song festival, the flower festival and the bird festival. At the song festival the school choir, small groups of singers, and individual students, sing new songs. This is their gift to the community. The flower festival is conducted at the end of May. Each student brings several flowers that they have grown in special beds in their parents' gardens, or that they have gathered in the fields or the forest, and demonstrates their ability to make a small, but beautiful bouquet. After lessons, the children visit their friends' homes to see their flower beds and indoor flowers. On this day the young flower growers club organises an inspection of their rose bushes and flower beds. Parents come to the school, and each may take some flower seedlings from the greenhouse or seedling beds. We also have a flower festival in autumn, at the end of September. This is a sort of competition in the art of growing autumn flowers. The bird festival is held when the swallows arrive. This is a festival for the junior primary children. They release birds that have been rescued half-frozen during the winter and cared for in our bird

hospital. On this day children also give each other pigeons. This festival educates kindly feelings of a moral and aesthetic nature, deepens friendships, and educates love and care for nature.

11. The day of remembrance for Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, whose name is born by our Pioneer group. On the anniversary of her heroic death there is a gathering of the Pioneer group. In the centre of our hall there is a large portrait of the heroine, framed by a garland of autumn flowers. Pioneers read poems about her heroic feat. By tradition, the ceremony ends with a speech by a member of the Young Communist League who was born in November, the month when Zoya died.

12. A report to our friends. Our school community has a long-standing friendship with school students from the Kormyansky District of Gomel Oblast in the Belarus republic. Once a year, usually in September, when lessons begin, we compile a collective letter to our friends, in which each Pioneer troop reports on all the good things they have done and experienced. This tradition is a good way of educating feelings of international friendship.

13. The day of the unknown hero. In a square in the centre of the village, next to the memorial cemetery for heroes who fell during the Great Patriotic War, is the grave of the unknown hero. On the anniversary of the liberation of our village from Nazi occupation, one of the Pioneer troops (usually the oldest Pioneers) comes to this grave. Flowers are laid on the grave. Observing a minute of silence, the young Leninists honour the memory of those who gave their lives for the freedom and independence of our Soviet homeland.

[to be continued]



Stories

The purple flower

In the middle of the night, a rose bud opened and straightened its gentle purple petals. A new flower was born. She was not beautiful yet: her petals had still not fully straightened, and one petal was a bit wrinkled.

The rose looked at the stars twinkling in the sky, quietly shivered, and whispered, 'The dawn is breaking. I need to introduce myself to the sun in all my beauty. The whole world will be looking at me and my purple petals.'

The petals roused themselves. The wrinkled petal straightened up. A drop of dew fell onto its purple surface, trembled, and also turned purple.

The flower stood tall, its petals quivered, the drop of dew shuddered, and shone with many shades of purple.

'Look,' the flower told its petals, 'Even the sky in the east has turned purple. It is because of our beauty. The whole world will be purple!'

Having made this pronouncement, the flower froze in anticipation.

But the purple sky turned pale, then scarlet, and then a rosy blue.

Surprised, the rose looked around. Suddenly, she saw a green tree with a white candle on it.

'Who are you?' asked the flower.

'I am a chestnut. A chestnut flower.'

'Why are you not purple? Why are you white? Why is the sky blue? And why are the trees green?'

'If everything looked alike, there would not be any beauty in the world,' answered the chestnut flower.

You lucky children!

Today, a class of little children came to school for the first time in their lives. Tomorrow, they would be sitting at their desks, but today, their parents brought them to be introduced to their teacher. The mothers went home, but the children stayed with their teacher in a glade under a tall lime-tree. Today, the old teacher, Ivan Pylypovych, was meeting his tenth generation of students. He would be their classroom teacher until grade four. By that time, he would have been working at the school for forty years. His gentle, welcoming eyes looked into the black, blue, grey, and light blue eyes of his little students. The children smiled back.

'Children, have you ever seen how the sky changes colour long before the sun rises?' asked Ivan Pylypovych, and his gentle smile was mirrored by dozens of children's warm smiles.

'No, we've never seen that,' answered the students. 'Have you ever seen how a nightingale drinks the dew?'

'No...'

'Have you ever seen how a bumblebee cleans his wings before he takes off the from flower where he was sleeping at night?'

'No...'

'Have you seen how a sleepy ladybug looks out from the bark of the tree where it was hiding during the winter, to check whether the spring has arrived?'

'No...'

'You lucky children...' said Ivan Pylypovych. 'You're lucky, because you have so much to see. Lucky, because you will see many beautiful and wonderful things. I'll take you to the pond, and you will see how the sky changes colour before the sun rises. We shall hide behind a bush, as quiet as mice, and we shall see how the nightingale drinks a drop of morning dew. At sunrise, we shall come to a big pumpkin flower and find a bumblebee who slept there during night, and watch him wake up and clean his wings. Early in spring, we shall find a tree trunk, warmed up by the sun, and shall see how a ladybug peeps out from the bark, and is surprised to see all the snow. She will wonder how it is possible that it is too hot for her to continue sleeping under the bark, when there so much snow on the ground. You are so lucky, children, because you will see all these things...'

A drawing of a rose

Pavlo drew a rose. It looked so real! It had pink petals, golden anthers, and tiny drops of dew on its petals.

Pavlo put the drawing of the rose on the windowsill. A wasp was flying by. She saw the rose and settled on its petals, thinking, 'I'll take my fill of honey and bring some to my babies.' But the rose was as hard as stone. 'Why is there no honey in it?' wondered the wasp, and she flew away.

The chamomile and the broom

A man came to a pond to gather osier twigs to make a broom. He cut a lot of twigs, but together with the twigs, he accidentally cut a chamomile flower on a tall stem. The man made a good broom. He swept the yard and made it clean. But the meadow felt sad without the chamomile flower.

