

Sukhomlynsky News



From *I will tell you a story...*

Beauty refines us

Beauty is one of the streams that feeds kindness, warmth and love. The wonder we feel when we see a dog-rose bush, blazing with red berries and orange leaves; a little maple tree, or a shapely apple tree, on which only a few yellow leaves linger; a tomato bush, burnt by the breath of the first night frost: all these things awaken in children's hearts a tender, benevolent and caring attitude towards the living and the beautiful. A child feels sympathy for plants that are preparing for the winter. For children, plants are living creatures who will feel the cold of the penetrating winds. Children want to protect plants from the cold. When we cover roses and grape vines for the winter, the children carefully, tenderly bend each little branch to the earth, trying not to break or damage them. In winter the children talk anxiously about young trees, wondering if they feel the cold. And when we collect snow to supply more moisture to the trees, the children see this work as an expression of their heartfelt concern for beauty, and not just as a fulfilment of an obligation.

I see great educational significance in a child witnessing, understanding, feeling, experiencing, and ultimately realising the great mystery that is the awakening of life in nature. The first spring blooms and opening buds, the first tender blades of grass, the first butterfly, the first croak of a frog, the first swallow, the first thunder, the first trill of a sparrow: all these things I show to children as expressions of the beauty of eternal life. And the more deeply they are inspired by this beauty, the more strenuously they strive to create beauty. For the children, a blossoming orchard is a real occasion for celebration. Early in the morning the children come to the orchard and admire the waves of white, pink, violet and orange blossoms, which appear to float over the orchard, and listen to the chorus of the bees. You must not sleep in on these days, I teach the children, you must get up at dawn, or you will sleep through this beauty! And the children get up before sunrise, so as not to miss those magic moments when the first rays of the sun light up the flowers, laden with dew.



Beauty refines us

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

*This month's newsletter contains more stories from **I will tell you a story...***

Philosophy for Children. *The stories in the opening section of the book are about beauty and its effect on the human psyche and the development of values. In Sukhomlynsky's system of education there is a very strong link between the development of values and an appreciation of beauty.*

*Each of the six sections in **I will tell you a story... Philosophy for Children** is introduced by a selection of reflections from Sukhomlynsky's educational writings, and this month the first page of the newsletter presents a sample of these reflections, under the heading 'Beauty refines us.'*

The remainder of the newsletter contains fifteen little stories or vignettes about beauty that have not previously been published.

I hope you enjoy them.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



Stories from *I will tell you a story...*

A sunny winter's day

The sun rises and reveals an amazing scene: the trees are covered with white hoarfrost, as if overnight they had grown leaves made of fluffy bird's down. I approach a willow and touch its branches. I am instantly covered with light silver flakes. 'No,' I think to myself, 'I won't touch you again, willow. May everyone see your enchanting attire.'

A chickadee flies over to me, chirps a greeting, and lands on the willow's branch. How did it manage to settle there without disturbing the tree's fluffy garment?

'Chickadee,' I ask, 'Can you make this beauty last forever? Can you stop the wind from blowing and disturbing this soft down?'

The chickadee replies, 'If this beauty were to last forever, you would never see beauty again. You would miss the beauty of the sky in spring, the beauty of dawn, and the song of a nightingale.'

I return home, sit by the window, take a pencil, and record all this beauty on a large piece of paper: the willow's white gown, the blue sky, the bright sun, and the kind chickadee.

A quail's song

It is a warm summer evening. The sun has set. The crimson glow in the west has faded. Stars sparkle in the dark blue sky. We sit on an ancient burial mound and gaze at the village with its white huts and green gardens. Tall poplars grow on the outskirts of the village, watching the road as it disappears into the distance. They seem to be wondering where the road ends. They watch and watch, but they still do not know.

From a deep ravine, the evening darkness spreads out like a river. Its waves have covered the steppe and the village. In this sea of darkness, everything seems strange. Tall haycocks resemble enchanted fairytale ships. In the dusk, the forest looks like a gigantic wave that has come rolling in and then suddenly frozen.

Far away, in a field, a quail starts singing. A nocturnal bird flaps nearby. A fish splashes in the pond. Its ripples murmur and then fall silent.

Everything in the forest is singing

In spring we went for a walk in the forest.

The sun rose, a light breeze sprang up, and all the trees in the forest began to sing. Each one sang its own song.

The birch tree sang a tender song. Hearing it, we felt like going over to the white-barked beauty and embracing it.

The oak sang a song of courage. When we heard the song of the oak, we wanted to be strong and brave.

The willow, drooping over the pond, sang a thoughtful song. When we listened to its song, we reflected that autumn would come, and all the leaves would fall from the trees.

The rowan tree sang an anxious song. This song brought on thoughts of a dark night and a furious storm, forcing the slender rowan tree to bend over and seek the earth's defence.

Those are the songs we heard in the forest.

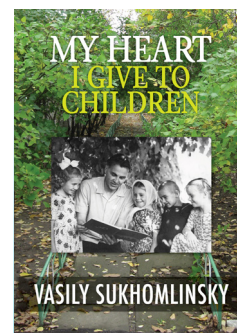
The oak and the willow

An oak and a willow have grown side by side on a riverbank. The willow is the first to wake in the spring. You rise at dawn, walk to the river, and

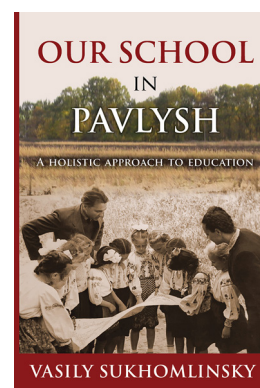
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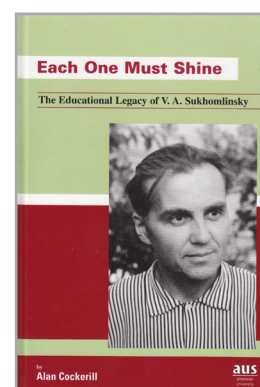
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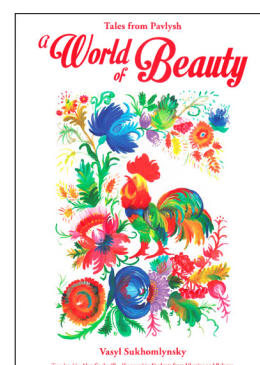
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see the willow's branches wrapped in a clear, green mist. The willow buds are sprouting. As they sprout, they fill the air with their scent. A starling comes to the willow, lands on its branches, feasts on a green bud, and trills its joyful song.

When the willow is already covered with rustling leaves, the oak is still dark and leafless. It sleeps and does not want to wake. People say that an oak will not wake until it hears the rumble of the first thunderstorm. Finally, thunder rumbles, and the oak's buds start sprouting. The first sticky leaves emerge, and each day they grow larger and larger, till by summer they are thick, sinewy, and strong.

In autumn, when the cold winds blow, the willow's leaves turn golden, but the oak is still green. It does not want to prepare for winter, even when the willow's golden gown has been shed into the river. The oak remains as green as a field of wheat. Only frost can make the oak reconsider its stubbornness: the oak's leaves change colour and wither, but they are not shed. Yellow, golden, brown, cherry-coloured, the leaves remain on the tree throughout the winter, a coat of many colours.

Good-bye, sun!

In the evening a little girl was saying good-bye to the sun. It was setting on the horizon.

'Good-bye, sun,' said the little girl.

'Good-bye, little girl,' answered the sun. 'Go to sleep. I will also rest. Early in the morning I will wake up and tenderly greet you. Wait for me by that window.'

The girl went to sleep. She dreamt of a blue sky.

At last, the sun rose. Its gentle rays touched the little girl's face. She woke up and said, 'Good day, Sun! How glad I am to see you!'

Beautiful and ugly

Mariia Ivanivna said, 'Children, I would like you to think about what seems most beautiful to you, and what seems most ugly. Think about it, and then write about it.'

I thought for a long time about what is most beautiful. It seemed to me that the most beautiful thing of all is the little white flowers of a lily of the valley, the colour of marble. They are so soft and tender. The very sight of them makes me happy. They make me feel like doing something good. I want people to say that I am a good, obedient girl and a kind daughter to my mother and father.

The most beautiful thing is when people are kind to each other. For instance, one day an old man was sitting on a bench under a tall tree. He had been travelling on the bus when he began to feel ill. He had got off the bus and sat down to rest on the

bench. My mother invited him into our home, gave him some medicine and fed him. The old man had a rest and then went home.

And I'll tell you what the ugliest thing is. A boy's grandmother died. She was really old: ninety years old. And he did not go to the funeral. And when his grandmother was ill, he did not visit her. How could he feel no pain? The ugliest thing is when people are heartless and mean.

If I were invisible

If I were invisible, I would see so many interesting things! I would visit meadows and riverbanks, creeping up to a nightingale and listening to his song. I would sit beside him, listening to the way he sings and looking into his eyes! What do they look like? What does he see when he is singing his mesmerizing song?

I would also like to see another wonder. A cricket lives in our garden. Every evening he starts chirping his song. It is more like the sound of violin than a song. I think that he takes his tiny violin just before sunset, runs his bow over the strings, and enchanting music rings out. If I were invisible, I would get to see his violin and bow. Otherwise, whenever I come close to the cricket, he sees me and falls silent.

In the evening, a red rose closes its petals, but in the morning, it shows off its beauty, its petals now open and charming. My mother says that a rose wakes at dawn but is very shy and will never open its petals if somebody is watching it. If I were invisible, I could watch and see how the rose washes its petals in the morning dew and opens them. Though I would not dare to spy on it like that. That would be impolite. Modesty is a beautiful quality, and beauty should be preserved.

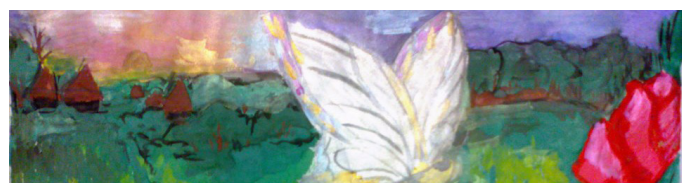
The butterfly and the flower

Someone threw a red flower into the pond. A white butterfly flew over the pond and saw the red flower. It landed on it and sat there, and gently waved with its wings. The flower sailed along, and the butterfly sailed with it.

A swallow swept down over the water and was amazed. How strange! How did that butterfly learn to swim?

The swallow touched the water with its wing, sending a ripple over its surface. The flower rocked, and the butterfly swayed.

It was having fun sailing on the pond!



The sun and the ladybird

In autumn, a ladybird crawled under the bark of a tree to rest. The little bug slept through the winter, unafraid of the severe frosts and the burning winds. She slept and dreamt of a warm, sunny day, a fluffy cloud in a blue sky, and a brightly coloured rainbow.

In the middle of winter there was a warm, sunny day. It was quiet in the forest, with not a breath of wind. The sun warmed up the dark bark, and the ladybird grew hot. She woke up, yawned luxuriously, and peeped out from under the bark. She wanted to spread her wings and fly, but the sun warned her, 'Don't venture out, ladybird! Hide away in your warm bed. It is too early for you to fly out. You will perish. My rays are warm, but the frost is treacherous and will kill you. There are blizzards and freezing winds and hard frosts still to come.'

The ladybird heeded this good advice. She took a deep breath of fresh air and crawled back into her warm bed.

The noisy stream and the silent river

A deep, wide river flows through a green valley. Its water flows slowly. Ships and rafts wend their way along it. The river is quiet, silent.

Meanwhile, a small stream flows between the mountains. Swift and noisy, it is always in a hurry, gushing over the pebbles and always babbling about something, explaining how it was born from melting snow high in the mountains. Then the noisy stream meets the silent river. Enchanted by the majesty of the river, the stream falls silent. It is suddenly ashamed to chatter, when the river is so silent.

The tree stump and the oak

A young, curly, green oak grew in the forest. Underneath the oak was a stout, grey, rotting tree stump.

'Once, I was a young, green oak just like you,' murmured the stump. 'But now, look at me, I am just a stump!'

'Will I really become a stump like you?' protested the young oak tree.

'Yes, just like me.'

'I don't like that idea at all,' said the oak tree. 'I would rather be struck by lightning and burnt to a crisp.'

There was a peal of thunder, and a flash of lightning struck the crown of the young oak. The oak was set ablaze and burnt like a candle. Then rain poured down and quenched the fire. Just one green branch remained. From it the oak regrew, spreading until it finally became as green and

curly as the young oak before the thunderstorm.

As for the stump, when the lightning struck, it was so frightened that it collapsed in a heap.

The luckiest leaf

At night, the leaves of an aspen tree sleep, but when the sun rises, they tremble as if they are alive.

I once witnessed how aspen leaves greet the sun. I woke at the break of dawn, walked to a tall aspen tree, and sat under it, waiting for the sun to rise. The sky to the east was crimson red and at any moment the sun's blazing disc would appear on the horizon. I could not yet see it, but the aspen leaf at the top of the tree could. It turned red and rustled joyfully, greeting the sun, while its brothers lower down were still dozing.

'I am the luckiest one and the happiest,' sang the leaf at the top of the aspen tree. 'I see the sun before everyone else and bathe the longest in its rays. I am the last one to bid it goodnight.'

I want to be as fortunate as that leaf up on high.

The bristly beetle

A bristly beetle climbs to the top of a clover stalk. He has two long moustaches that look like radio antennas. He raises them towards the sky. The antennas start waving. Do you know why he raises them? He is sending a signal, a telegram, to his friend in the garden, saying, 'Come over, my friend! I've found a sweet clover leaf. Let's eat it together and drink of a drop of dew.'

I am interested to see what happens next. I see another bristly beetle fly over to the clover. Of course, he is from the garden! The two sit together and wave their moustaches. Why do they not eat the clover leaf? Perhaps the bristly beetle from the garden has misunderstood the telegram from the bristly beetle on the clover. Or perhaps they will have a chat first and then eat the leaf.

Yasenets – the first thin ice

Yesterday evening, waves still lapped at the edge of the pond, but today there is a frost. The pond is covered with the first thin layer of ice, which in Ukrainian we call *yasenets*. A little crucian carp lives in the pond. He is swimming around and wants to take a look at the shore, but the ice will not let him. The fish is surprised. 'What is that?' he wonders.'

A rainbow in the sky

A rainbow is shining high up in the clouds above the pond. It is a colourful bridge linking the sun to the earth. The sun uses it to drink water from the pond. It built the rainbow, and now it is tired and thirsty.