

Sukhomlynsky News



From *I'll Tell You a Story ... Philosophy for Children*

Why do leaves fall from trees?

In October and November, leaves turn yellow and fall from trees. Why do leaves fall from trees?

One evening, I hid under a bush to find out who paints the leaves yellow, pink, and red. I saw a tiny old man crawl out from under a guelder-rose bush. He chuckled, stroked his grey beard, took his painting kit, and approached some maples. He climbed up a tree and started painting the leaves. He painted one leaf yellow, a second one pink, and a third one red.

'Who are you, old man?' I asked him.

'I am a leaf-colourist,' answered the old man. 'I paint the leaves. Wherever I spend the night, the leaves become bright and colourful!'

'Why don't you paint the leaves of the sour cherry tree?' I asked.

'Because the sour cherry tree cries,' he said. 'It doesn't want its leaves coloured. That is why it stays green until the first frost.'

I took a close look at the cherry tree's trunk. Its trunk was indeed covered with large, sticky, pink teardrops. The cherry tree was crying. It did not want to lose its leaves.

The other trees had already lost all their leaves, but the cherry tree was still green! Then the frost arrived, and in a single night the cherry tree lost all its leaves. The poor cherry tree was left bare and gave a deep sigh.



Nature stories

Dear reader,

I hope you are well. This month's newsletter contains another 15 stories from *I'll Tell you a Story ... Philosophy for Children*.

All of this month's stories are about the beauty of nature, often seen through an imaginative, fairytale lens. Sukhomlynsky thought it was important for children to apprehend nature in this imaginative way. In *My Heart I Give to Children* he writes:

'Without stories, without the play of imagination, a child cannot live.

Without stories the surrounding world is just a beautiful picture painted on a canvas. Stories bring that picture to life. Figuratively speaking, a story is a fresh wind fanning the fire of a child's thought and speech.'

I hope you enjoy this month's selection.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



From I'll tell you a story ...

A butterfly with dew on its wing

In the morning, Oksanka went out into the garden. The sun was rising, and birds were singing.

She spotted a butterfly on the leaf of an apple tree. It was sitting on the leaf and moving its wings very slowly. Oksanka noticed a drop of morning dew glittering on one of the butterfly's wings. 'The butterfly is afraid of flapping its wings and flying because that beautiful dewdrop would slip off its wing,' thought Oksanka.

The girl stood watching the butterfly with bated breath. She wanted time to stand still, so the sun would climb no higher, the morning freshness would linger, and the dew drop would remain on the butterfly's wing.

How the chickadee wakes me in the morning

As soon as a dim light appears outside my window, a small bird with a yellow breast pays me a visit. It is a chickadee. It has an emerald-green cap and white cheeks. Every feather on its green-grey wings looks as if it has been painted with a fine brush.

The chickadee taps at my dew-covered window with its sharp little beak, and its black eyes gaze into my room. It grows light. I get out of bed and take a piece of fried lard to the chickadee. It pecks at the lard and sings, 'Chickadee-dee-dee.' It is saying, 'Thank you very much. I'll see you again first thing tomorrow.'

Who lit the candles on the chestnut tree

Little Marynka went with her mother into the forest. It was May, and everything was a bright green. Marynka looked up at the green branches of the chestnut trees, and her eyes lit up with joy.

'Mum, look!' said the little girl. 'Candles are burning in the chestnut trees. Who lit them?'

'We'll come back in the morning and see,' said her mother with a smile.

Early the next morning, Marynka and her mother walked through the cold dew into the forest. Little Marynka looked up into the green crown of a chestnut tree and saw a squirrel jumping from branch to branch. So, it was the squirrel lighting candles in the chestnut trees. But who gave it fire to light them with? The sun. It rose and reached out to give the squirrel a burning spark. That was what lit the candles in the chestnut trees.

The mallow and the indoor plant

A mallow grew beside a house. It was tall and slender. Its pink flowers gazed into the room to see what was inside. On the windowsill, in a small pot, grew a tiny plant with a green stem and a pink flower, just like the mallow, but much smaller.

The mallow asked the plant, 'Who are you?'

'I am an indoor plant,' said a voice from the pot.

'How can you live indoors?' asked the mallow. 'There's no sunshine and no rain there.'

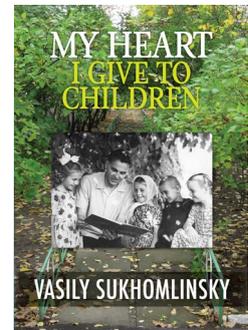
'Everyday, people water me and clean my leaves,' the indoor plant replied. 'I have lived here for many years and remember many winters. In autumn, you will wither and die, but I will live on.'

The mallow listened to everything the indoor plant had to say, and then asked, 'Do you know what the morning breeze feels like?'

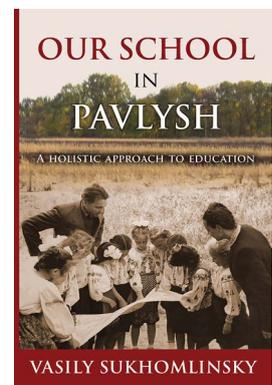
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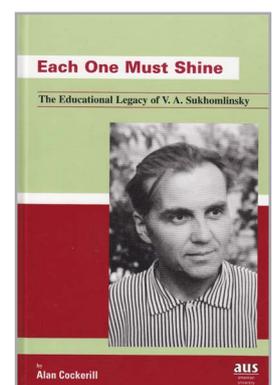
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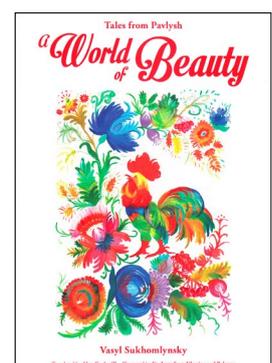
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'No,' said the plant. 'What is that?'

The mallow looked at the indoor plant with compassion and shook its head. 'It is better to live only until autumn,' it said, 'But to know the caress of the morning breeze.'

Sheets of white

It was autumn. The faint light of dawn was beginning to appear on the horizon. The forest stood silently. The birds were still asleep. Just before the sun rose, Grandma Frost crept into the forest. She spread sheets of white all over the green grass. The clearings became white, and the forest appeared to light up. A grey owl looked at the sheets of white, thought that it was already morning, and hid in a tree.

The sky glowed red in the east, and the sun rose. Where did the sheets of white go? They were nowhere to be seen. In their place silver drops of dew were shining on the grass. Where does Grandma Frost get so many sheets from? Will she bring them again tomorrow night? And who weaves them, those sheets of white?

What are the swallows twittering about?

Some swallows built a nest under our window. I have no idea when they built it, but my mother said it was long ago.

Summer passed. The swallows raised their chicks. The little ones left their nest and made their own way. Their parents were left alone. Now, they no longer hide in their nest. They perch near their nest and twitter away, and I listen to them. In the springtime, their twittering used to be anxious but joyful. Now it is anxious and sad.

I wonder what the swallows are twittering about.

The first ice on the pond

Last night, the first frost arrived. It covered the pond with a thin layer of clear ice. The sun rose, and the ice gleamed in the sunshine. A young rooster ran to the bank of the pond. He wanted to drink, so he pecked at the water with his beak, but it was hard.

'What's going on?' the rooster wondered. 'Yesterday, there was water here, but today there is just ground. And why is this ground so hard and shiny?'

The rooster stepped onto the ice, and it was very slippery. The rooster kept moving forward until he was quite some way from the bank. When the mother hen saw him in the middle of the pond, she called out anxiously, 'Come back, or you'll drown! The water in the middle of the pond has not frozen yet!'

The rooster took fright and rushed back home. If he had not turned around, he would have drowned.

The keen-witted glazier

One morning Yurko came to the pond and saw something amazing. The whole pond was covered with a thin sheet of glass, while water was still flowing underneath it. Yurko asked his father, 'Who covered the pond with glass?'

His father laughed and said, 'There is a very skilled and keen-witted glazier. He came and covered the pond with a huge piece of glass. That glazier lives a long way from here, in the north, but he came and visited us.'

'Who is that glazier?' asked Yurko in surprise.

'The frost,' said his father.

Yurko and the sunbeam

Yurko woke up early—as soon as the sun rose. His mother and father were already at work. He listened carefully and could hear something making a rustling sound on the floor.

Yurko thought it was a mouse, but there was no mouse to be seen. All he could see under his bed was a tiny little sunbeam. It was the sunbeam that was making the rustling sound. Yurko asked the sunbeam, 'Could you live with us forever?'

The sunbeam explained that he would need to go and look after his children each night. As the day progressed, the sunbeam shuffled across the floor. In the evening it crawled up the wall and all the way to the ceiling. When the sun set, the sunbeam disappeared into the forest. Yurko felt sad without him ...

The violet and the bee

A bee and a violet became friends. The violet lived in a field, observing everything with her joyful, violet eyes, and the bee lived in his beehive. The bee would visit the violet many times each day to gather pollen and nectar. The violet was always happy to see her friend.

Then, one day, the bee arrived to find that the violet's petals were closed, and her head was drooping.

'Why are you so sad, violet? Why are your petals closed?' asked the bee.

'You must fly home, dear bee, for a storm is approaching. The rain is going to pour down,' said the violet.

The bee rushed home. As soon as he was inside his hive, the rain poured down.



The swallow and the sparrow

A swallow and a sparrow met as they flew in the sky. The swallow said, 'I can fly faster than you.' And she soared into the heavens, right up to the clouds.

When she returned to earth, the sparrow remarked, 'You might be able to fly high, but I can hop across the ground, and you can't.' The swallow tried to hop, but in vain. Then she told the sparrow, 'I can fly over the pond and drink as I fly.' And the swallow swooped over the pond taking a sip of water as she flew. 'You can watch me do it all you like, but won't be able to do that,' she said.

The sparrow just laughed. 'Why don't you try and swing on a twig? I can, but you can't.' And he settled on a slender crack willow twig and started swinging as happily as could be. Even when the sun set, the sparrow was still swinging away, laughing and chirping, 'Cheep-cheep!'

Nowhere for the dewdrops

Red, pink, and white roses bloomed in the garden. Olia went there every morning. She liked to admire the dewdrops on the rose petals, sparkling like silver beads in the sunshine. But every day, there were fewer and fewer roses left in the garden: they were cut by people to put into vases.

Then, one morning, Olia came to the garden and her heart ached: there was not a single flower left on the rose bushes. The sky was dark and gloomy that morning. Heavy clouds passed slowly by, and it began to drizzle.

'There is nowhere for the dewdrops to cling,' Olia thought, recalling a line of verse. Dew loves flowers best of all, but there were no flowers left.

The mole and the sun

A mole dug himself a burrow, deep underground, and that is where he lived. He never came out of his burrow during the daytime. Only at night, when all around were asleep, would he furtively crawl out of his burrow looking for something to eat, and then he would return to his burrow as quickly as he could. One sunny day, a happy mouse came to visit the mole in his burrow.

'What is that scent you are giving off?' the mole asked her. 'I know the scent of an ear of wheat, the scent of the earth, the scent of the grass ... But now I am smelling something different, and I don't know what it is.'

'It is the scent of the sun,' replied the mouse.

'What is the sun?' asked the mole.

The mouse started explaining what the sun is,

how it shines, how hot it is, and how comforting it is. The mole stopped digging and listened to everything the mouse had to say. When the mouse had finished telling him all about the sun, the mole remarked, 'The only thing I don't understand is what on earth they made the sun for?'

The wheaten lark

A mother kneaded some dough and moulded five big, round loaves of bread, the sort that are called palianytsi in Ukrainian. There was a little dough left over, and she used it to make a wheaten lark. She put the loaves into the oven and placed the wheaten lark beside them.

The loaves were dozing inside the hot oven, yawning in their sleep, when a sudden cheeping woke them up, and they saw the wheaten lark sitting beside them.

'Who are you?' the loaves asked.

'I am a wheaten lark. I can hardly wait for Olia's mother to take me out of the oven and put me on the windowsill, so I can take off and fly away.'

The loaves were surprised. They wanted to see the lark fly.

Olia's mother took the bread out of the oven and placed it on the windowsill to cool off, where everyone could see it. She placed the lark next to the bread.

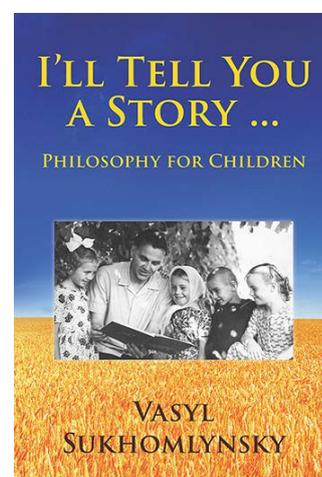
The lark sat on the windowsill, motionless and silent.

'Why aren't you flying away?' the loaves asked it. 'The window is wide-open.'

'I will never be able to fly,' replied the lark sadly. 'I have everything: wings, claws, and sharp little eyes. But I cannot sing. And what sort of a lark am I if I can't sing?'

And it is true: you cannot bake a song in an oven.

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