

Sukhomlynsky News



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

Don't boil the chicks

Little Tarasyk saw a broody hen leave her nest. He rushed over to the nest and witnessed a miracle: a chick was hatching from an egg.

The broody hen drank some water and returned to her nest, but Tarasyk stayed there, full of wonder. He could not wait for the mother hen to leave her nest again. He wanted to know what was going to happen next, and whether all the eggs would have chicks in them. And indeed, they did. The next morning, the mother hen was no longer sitting on her nest. She was sitting on the floor, surrounded by twenty tiny chicks.

Fascinated by what he had observed, Tarasyk was about to ask his mother about this wonder of wonders, when he saw his mother holding three eggs in her hand. She had just lowered one egg into some boiling water and was about to do the same with another.

'Mummy, what are you doing?' shouted Tarasyk.

His startled mother turned and asked, 'What do you mean?'

'Please don't boil the eggs!' begged Tarasyk, with tears in his eyes. 'There are chicks inside them.'

His mother smiled.

'These eggs don't have any chicks inside them,' she said.

'So where do they come from?' asked Tarasyk wiping away his tears.



The Everlasting Spring

Dear reader,

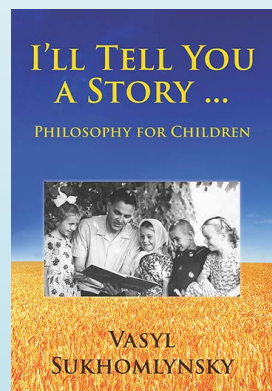
I hope you are well.

This month's newsletter presents the final instalment of Sukhomlynsky's article "The Everlasting Spring" (see page 2), as well as some more stories from *I'll Tell You a Story ... Philosophy for Children*.

One of our newsletter subscribers, Kirsten Barksdale, has started a kindergarten group where she is implementing ideas from Sukhomlynsky's writings. You can read her blog [here](#).

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



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The Everlasting Spring [continued]

A lesson in the life of words—perhaps that is the best name for what I am about to describe. I take my little pupils out into the fields. September is fading, like a glowing ember hidden beneath grey ash. It is a quiet, sunlit morning. High in the blue sky a wedge of migrating birds flies southward. The stillness of the fields is so profound that we can hear their distant cries. In summer, amid the many-voiced bustle of life in the fields, we would never have heard that strange and beautiful music. But now we hear it. And the cranes' mournful calling makes the open fields seem wide and melancholy.

I say to the children, 'Look up at the sky. In summer it was warm, ablaze with sparks of blue fire. And what is the sky like now? Today we shall speak about the autumn sky. Let us think. Let us choose from our language precisely those words for which our thoughts are searching. Search, children, with your thoughts for the right words.'

The children fall silent. They gaze into the sky. They think. A minute later I hear the words their thoughts have discovered.

'The sky is blue, like the tired water in a pond.'

'Why is it tired?' I ask.

'Because all summer the water danced and played in the waves and by autumn it has grown tired, and now it lies there in the pond—blue, very blue, and weary.'

Again the children fall silent, searching with their thoughts for words.

'The sky has washed itself in the rain.'

'The sky is so clear, there isn't a single feather to be seen.'

'The sky is blue, just like in the story of Ivasyk-Telesyk ... At any moment the geese will come flying.'

'The sky is autumnal. In summer the sky is summery; in autumn it is autumnal.'

Again silence.

A little way off stands blue-eyed Valya. She says nothing.

'And why are you so quiet, Valia?'

'I want to say my word.'

'And what word have you found for the sky?'

'The sky is tender,' says Valia softly, and smiles.

Again there is silence. Then every child wants to speak once more.

'The sky is peaceful. When the thunderstorms were rumbling it certainly wasn't peaceful then!'

'The sky is sad. Dark clouds are already drifting down from the far northern lands. Soon they'll cover all the blue.'

'The sky is thoughtful. It remembers the skylark singing and the eagle crying overhead, and wonders where they have all gone.'

'The sky has drawn close to the earth. In summer it seemed much higher because the swallows were flying there. Now there are no swallows, and the sky is listening to see whether perhaps they are hiding somewhere among the bushes.'

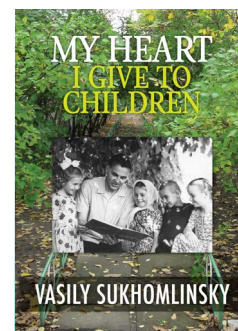
'The sky is warming itself in the sunshine. Soon the clouds will cover the sun—and oh, how cold the sky will be then.'

Such is the life of words. It is that finest and strongest thread which

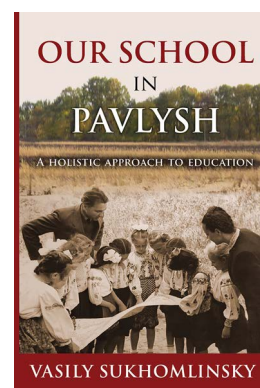
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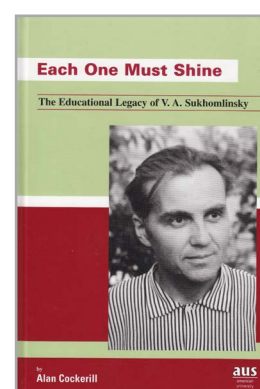
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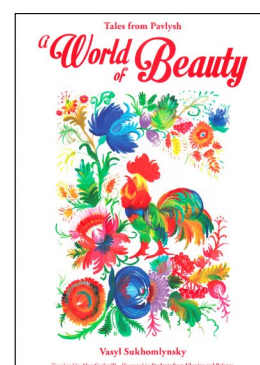
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we, my dear friend, must weave from every human heart to that which is great and eternal—our native language. Give me a group of seven-year-old children who are indifferent to words, to the beauty of the world around them, and to the beauty within themselves, and let me work with them for one year. They will return to you with sparks of thought shining in their eyes—deeply personal, utterly unique—dark blue, light blue, green, hazel, reddish brown—and with an undying love for that which is great and eternal: their native language. The most important thing, my dear friend, is to break through to the life-giving spring, to awaken thought. And that can be done only through words. The ancients said that thought enters the human mind through the gateway of feeling. Yet thought itself remains the first source—the first spark of beauty that kindles the fire of feeling. The life of words is the kingdom of thought. The happiest moments of my work are those inspired moments when thought and creativity unite, when word and thought merge in a child's soul in a surging impulse. At such moments thought longs to become language. The child's mind searches for—and finds—bright, colourful, fragrant words. A poetic image is born, and its creation fills the children with pride. I recall one such moment.

It is late autumn. Evening is drawing near. The sun touches the dark horizon. Evening mist enfolds the hills and valleys. Like a river, darkness flows out of the ravines and gullies, pouring across the fields in silent waves. The steppe is still. My fifth-grade pupils and I have come into the fields to bid farewell to the sun. Entranced by the beauty of our native countryside, we stand upon an ancient burial mound. Villages lie spread before us; on the horizon stands a distant forest. Words begin to form about the beauty that has captured our hearts. Together we compose our thoughts about an autumn evening in the fields.

*The sun—a fiery ball—
Has touched the earth.
Perhaps its fire is cold,
For the field does not breathe the scent of warm earth.
The grasses do not swoon beneath its gentle breath.
The earth does not rejoice in the evening cool.
Another moment—*

*And the fiery ball will vanish beyond the horizon.
Only a little campfire remains,
Kindled by hunters out on the steppe.
The hunters have gone home,
Yet the fire still glows ...
The last spark flashes—
The campfire dies away.
What has happened in the world
That the fields have fallen silent, with the valleys,
and the ancient burial mounds?
Everything is still, listening intently.
The last spark has vanished beyond the horizon.
A great miracle has taken place.
What will happen now?
The night is born—
See what wonder has come into the world.
The waves of evening mist are lapping gently.
From where have they drifted so silently?
And now another wonder:
In the deep ravines and valleys
Cold lakes of darkness have long been waiting,
Waiting until the sun
Should disappear beyond the horizon...*

That, my dear friend, is the life of words.

Nothing can shake my firm conviction that the educational power of language remains a virgin field in the pedagogical landscape. Our ideal is a harmoniously developed, highly educated, cultured and happy human being: a citizen devoted to the socialist Homeland; a creator capable of receiving from previous generations the imperishable treasures of spiritual culture; a faithful son or daughter of the people, who knows how to cherish and preserve its treasures and its sacred inheritance.

The destiny of our people rests in our hands, my dear friend. Our lofty and sacred mission is to teach the younger generation to cherish everything created by those who came before them—each one adding their own single drop to that ocean whose waters stretch beyond each school desk. We stand upon the shore of that ocean, while behind those desks sit its future navigators. Let us never forget, my friend, that this ocean begins with the Everlasting Spring tended by Grandpa Varfalomii. Look after the Everlasting Spring. Only then will the ocean remain forever full.

(first published in *Literaturna Ukraina*,
28 April 1970)

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

When stars go to sleep

Petrus and his father left at dawn. His father was going to work in the fields and had promised to take Petrus with him.

The sky was already growing light, and a band of pink was glowing in the east. Petrus was fascinated by the stars. Some were still twinkling in the morning sky, but it seemed to Petrus as if somebody was putting them out, one by one.

Finally, when there was only one star left in the sky, Petrus asked his father, 'Dad, can you get our horse Bulanko to walk really quietly?'

'Why?' asked his father in surprise.

'I want to see the last star go out.'

'All right, but you'll have to watch very carefully, because it will happen in an instant,' said his father, and he stopped the horse.

Petrus sat motionless with his eyes wide-open. He was afraid to blink or to lower his eyelids.

Now the star was barely visible, twinkling like a firefly on the edge of the forest just before the sunrise.

'I'll keep watching and I won't close my eyes, even for a moment. Then, maybe, the star won't go out,' thought Petrus, and his heartbeat quickened with joy. But, despite all his efforts, he lowered his eyelids just a little.

It was only for a split second! That tiny moment in time was smaller than a poppy seed, smaller than the dewdrop on a bee's paw. But when Petrus opened his eyes, the star was gone.

'Dad, now I know when stars go to sleep,' whispered Petrus quietly.

'When?' asked his father.

'When you close your eyes,' said Petrus.

I have to save the cornflowers

Olesia is five years old. She cannot wait until she turns seven so that she can go to school.

Her father is a machine operator. Today, he was back from work early, before sunset.

'We begin the harvest tomorrow,' he said. 'I'm going to Windy Field to harvest the wheat.'

'That's good,' said Olesia's mother. 'It's close by.'

Olesia overheard that her father was going to harvest the wheat at Windy Field and started worrying. Windy Field was right next to their yard on the outskirts of the village. Every morning Olesia would go to the field to pick cornflowers. She would bring the flowers home, put them in a glass of water and admire them. In the evening, before going to sleep, she would gaze at the bouquet of blue cornflowers and dream about them all night.

'The combine harvester won't just cut the wheat, it will cut the cornflowers as well,' thought the girl. 'How can I save them?'

She wanted to go to the field right away, but it was already getting dark outside. Dusk wrapped the earth.

Olesia did not sleep well. She woke up very early, before dawn. She got up quietly, put on her dress, and went out to the field.

She reached Windy Field and began to pick the cornflowers. The sky grew light, the stars went out one by one, and a lark sang high in the sky, but Olesia kept on picking the blue flowers.

The sun rose. A combine harvester approached Windy Field, and Olesia's father was driving it. He spotted a familiar pink dress among the wheat, stopped the machine, climbed down from the cabin, and walked over to his daughter.

'What are you doing here, Olesia?' he asked in surprise.

'I have to save the cornflowers,' the little girl answered softly.

Why isn't it snowing yet?

Autumn arrived. A little grey hare went to see his grandfather and asked him, 'Please, grandpa, give me a white coat and take this grey one, because it is going to snow soon.'

His grandfather gave the little hare a white coat. But the snow did not come. Against the grey earth everyone could see the white hare, and he was easy prey for dogs and hunters. As soon as they spotted him, they dashed after him. The hare's life became very hard. He sat under a bush and burst into tears. 'Why isn't it snowing yet?' he cried.

