

Sukhomlinsky News

No. 65

January 2021



Appreciating beauty

Dear readers,

The final chapter of Sukhomlinsky's book 'Pavlysh Secondary School' is on aesthetic education, a subject that was very dear to Sukhomlinsky's heart.

Earlier chapters of the book cover health and physical education, moral education, intellectual education and work education. Each of these areas is not treated as a separate subject, but as a theme that runs through all the educational activities at Sukhomlinsky's school in Pavlysh.

For Sukhomlinsky the ability to appreciate, create, and protect beauty is a fundamental character trait to be encouraged in all students, and beauty is to be found in nature, in art, in work, and in human relationships. Beauty is something that can be created and cultivated in all areas of life, including school life. It can include care for one's physical appearance and dress, for classrooms, the school grounds and the natural environment. Sukhomlinsky was proud of the fact that his students and staff had transformed an area of forty hectares surrounding his school, making it a place of beauty. In his view, the school environment was itself an important educating force.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Aesthetic education

For this issue we have translated an extract from the seventh chapter of *Pavlysh Secondary School*, which is on aesthetic education.

The perception of beauty and the cultivation of feeling

Beauty is a potent source of moral purity, spiritual wealth, and physical perfection. The most important function of aesthetic education is to teach children to find spiritual nobility, goodness, and heart-felt feelings, in the beauty of the surrounding world (nature, art, human relationships), and on this basis to affirm the beauty within themselves.

One of the most important preconditions for deep aesthetic appreciation, feelings and experiences, is a person's deep intellectual development. Consequently, aesthetic education includes acquainting children with the broad achievements of world culture, with the cultural values of humanity.

From their first days at school, we teach children to understand the beauty of the surrounding world, of nature, of social relationships. Perceiving and appreciating beauty is the foundation, the core of aesthetic education, the heart of that aesthetic refinement, without which a person's feelings remain insensitive to all that is beautiful. We strive to ensure that in all areas of a child's spiritual life, in their intellectual and physical work, in their creativity, in their social involvements, in their moral and aesthetic relationships, in friendship and in love, the thought never leaves them that beauty must be valued and preserved.

[Continued on the following page]

Considerations in work education (cont.)

We teach the children: 'Humans were singled out from the world of the animals and became gifted beings not only because they made the first tools with their hands, but also because they saw the depth of the dark blue sky, the twinkling of the stars, the overflowing rosiness of sunset and dawn, the crimson sky before a windy day, the boundless expanse of the steppe, a formation of cranes in the azure heavens, the reflection of the sun in transparent drops of morning dew, grey threads of rain on an overcast autumn day, the tender stalk and pale blue bell of a snowdrop. They saw these things and were filled with wonder, and set out to create new beauty. If you, too, stop in wonder at beauty, beauty will flower in your heart.

People became human when they heard the rustling of leaves and the song of a grasshopper, the babbling of a spring brook and the silver, bell-like notes of a lark in the limitless summer sky, the patter of snowflakes and howling of a blizzard outside their window, the gentle lapping of waves and the majestic silence of the night. They heard these things and, for hundreds and thousands of years have been listening with bated breath to the wonderful music of life. You can also listen to this music and take pleasure in its beauty.'

Children's appreciation of beauty is impossible without a teacher's vivid, emotional description of the beauty of the surrounding world. But words about beauty have an aesthetic effect on a child only when they can see that beauty with their own eyes.

Contemplation and listening, the experience of what is seen and heard, is like a first window onto the world of beauty. We consider it a very important objective to teach children to see and to feel beauty, and when

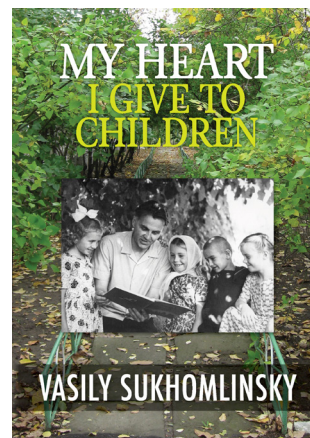
this capacity awakens in them, to teach them to preserve this spiritual delight and goodness for the rest of their lives.

An important role in our system of aesthetic education is played by journeys into the world of beauty: excursions and hikes, observation and analysis of natural phenomena. We go with children into fields and meadows, to the lake and the riverbank, to a shady oak grove or a gully, or to an orchard. Beauty is everywhere, you just need to expose children to it. We go at various times of the year, in autumn, winter, spring and summer. We show them how beauty is born and how it blooms. Children see the play of colours and listen to the music of nature. From the beginning of autumn to the onset of winter we take children several times to the same location in the forest. Each time they notice new shades in the colours of the leaves. Moreover, these shades vary depending on the time of day we go to the forest—morning, midday or evening—and depending on the weather, how the sun is shining, what wind is blowing, and so on. For this reason, every journey to the world of beauty brings amazing discoveries. The children see that the richest spectrum of autumnal leaf shades is to be found on the maples and oaks that grow in the open, not cramped by neighbouring trees. This peculiarity, and how nature creates it, needs to be explained to the children. 'The sun illuminates these trees from all sides, and decorates the leaves,' we tell the children. 'But even when growing among other trees, some oaks do not shed their leaves until winter, and they are richly decorated with all the shades of the rainbow.' The children stand for a long time in wonder, enchanted by this beauty, and when the teacher explains it, it reaches their hearts.

During the quiet, sunny days of an 'Indian summer', we direct

**REALLY GOOD
BOOK SHOP**

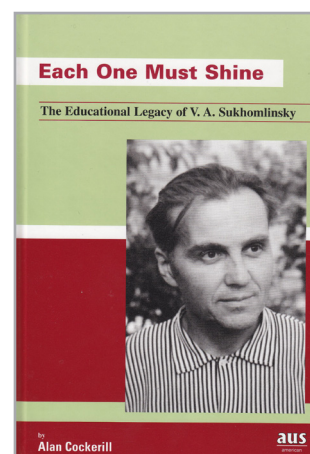
<http://www.thereallygoodbookshop.com.au/>



AUS\$24.95



AUS\$14.95



AUS\$34.95

All the above titles are also available from Amazon, The Book Depository, and other major online retailers.

the children's attention to the wonderful transparency of the air, to the depth of the sky, and the clearness of the water in the river. Silver strands of spider web float in the air; formations of cranes cry out in the evening sky as they fly to warmer lands; on a cold morning the first crystals of hoar frost appear. The children's attention needs to be drawn to all these things. We show them several shades of green in the shoots of winter crops. The green of rye shoots is not the same as the green of wheat shoots. The children take pleasure in admiring the ripening fruit in the orchards and vineyards, the combination of emerald leaves and amber grapes, the play of sunbeams on apples, pears and plums. In the autumn forest we listen to birdcalls and to the quiet rustling of falling leaves, and watch the mirror-like surface of a pond for the sleepy splashes of fish. And children will only pay attention to all these things, watching and listening with care, when a teacher, through their words, reveals to them the beauty of the surrounding world.

Materialistic aesthetics are based on the objective nature of the beautiful. The source of beauty is the world, which is independent of our consciousness. But this world has to be known, through reason and through the senses. The activity entailed in knowing and affirming beauty involves many facets of our spiritual lives: apprehending the images and phenomena of nature both intellectually and emotionally, working, and forming moral relationships. The educating of feelings is also impossible without activity, in which, again, prime place is taken by the active, intellectual and emotional perception of the beauty of the surrounding world.

During the first autumn of their school lives, our children spend a whole day, from morning till nightfall, in the forest, fields and meadows. We choose a warm,

sunny day. Before dawn, we walk to the outskirts of the village. We stand, enchanted by the beauty of the dawn. The children appear not to have known that the sky could be so beautiful, that it could be flooded by so many shades of colour. One after another the stars go out, the day is born, and the sun rises. We listen to the awakening of the birds, the bleating of sheep at the field camp, the rumble of tractors in a distant field. We walk to the forest, where we gather fallen leaves. Each child tries to find leaves with the most striking colours. We stop in a clearing and light a campfire. The boys run to fetch water and gather dry brushwood and the girls cook porridge.

After sunset we observe the evening sky, watching how the stars light up, and how the colours change as we observe the fields, hills, meadows, and distant burial mounds on the horizon. We listen to the quiet of the night. The cries of nocturnal birds and the amazingly resonant trill of the grasshoppers carry to us on the night air. This day remains in the children's memories for the rest of their lives, and the impression it leaves enhances the emotional impact of other new encounters with the beauty of nature.

This first autumn in the children's school lives convinces us that beauty is the mother of kindness and heart-felt emotion. Admiring a dog rose bush with its red berries, or a shapely apple tree, on which only a few yellowing leaves remain, or contemplating a tomato plant burnt by the breath of the first frost, all of these things awaken in children a tender, solicitous attitude to all living things. To them a plant is a living creature, that feels the discomfort and chill of cold winds and hard frosts. Children want to defend plants from the cold.

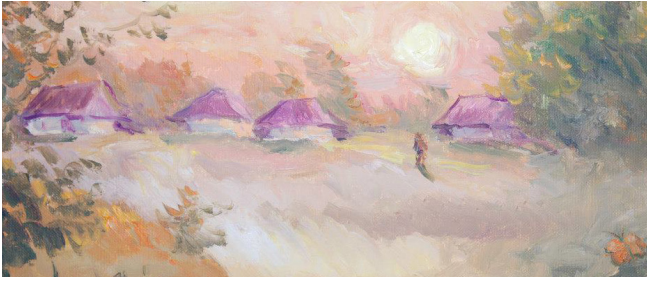
The beauty of winter is also unique. The children admire the oak grove, sprinkled with

snowflakes, the Pushkinesque 'radiance of pink snows, and the gloom of late January evenings', and the February blizzards. They listen to the chirping of winter birds. More than once we walk out at dawn to the edge of the village to greet the winter sun, admiring the play of colours on the snow dunes, listening to the loud drips of melting snow, studying the diamond icicles hanging from the rooves and sparkling in the sunlight.

In spring the children witness the awakening of life. The first spring flowers, the first buds opening on the trees, the first tender blades of grass, the first butterfly, the first croaking of frogs, the first swallow, the first thunder. All of these things enter the spiritual life of children as a manifestation of the beauty of eternal life. For several days in succession, as the sap rises in the trees, we go with the children to a hill with a view of a valley overgrown with willows, and witness how the grey branches are covered, almost as we watch, with a green film whose shade changes with each day. We admire the pale blue haze on the horizon, and the dark blue burial mounds in the steppe.

The flowering of the orchard is a truly festive occasion for the children. We assemble at the school grounds early in the morning and walk to the orchard, admiring the white, pink and orange blossom that adorns the trees, and listening to the humming of the bees. 'You must not sleep in on days like this,' we teach the children. 'You might sleep through this beauty.' And the children rise before the sun, trying not to miss those moments when the first rays of the sun illuminate the flowers, covered in drops of dew. With bated breath, each child is filled with admiration. Children will not pay attention to this beauty if it is not shown to them, if they are not told about it.

[To be continued next month.]



Stories

The apple at the top of the tree

Every week, grade one student Misha visits Grandpa Ivan. His grandfather lives on the edge of the village and does not work anymore.

Today is Sunday, and the grandson is visiting his grandfather.

'Let's go into the garden,' says grandpa. 'The apples are ripe.'

In grandpa's garden there is a big apple tree. On it are red, tasty apples. Misha walks up to the apple tree and sees many juicy, sweet-smelling apples on the ground under the tree.

'When they fall, that means they're ripe,' says grandpa.

As soon as grandpa says these words, a big, red apple falls at Misha's feet.

'Take which ever one is looking at you,' invites his grandfather.

But Misha does not want to take an apple from the ground. He lifts his head, and his grandfather sees excitement in his eyes. The boy dearly wants to climb that tree. He has taken a fancy to an apple that really stands out at the top of the tree.

Misha stands, admiring the apple, but he feels uncomfortable asking his grandfather for permission to climb the tree.

'That apple at the top of the tree,' he says, 'Do you think it will fall down soon?'

His grandfather answers, smiling, 'No, I think it will be quite a while... You climb up, Misha, and pick it for yourself...'

Joyfully, the boy climbs the tree.

Repentance

Eight-year-old Kostya and ten-year-old Pavel are brothers. On Sunday, their mother gives them a loaf of bread and says, 'Boys, I want you to visit Grandpa Efim at the beehives. Take him this loaf of bread and this clean shirt.'

The boys take the bread and the clean shirt and head off into the forest. The collective farm beehives are taken into the forest for the summer. Grandpa Efim lives there from spring to autumn.

The old man is very pleased to see the boys. He tells them about his work and shows them how the bees toil away.

Then the old man sits down by a broad tree stump and says to the boys, 'Pour some honey into this bowl, boys, and have something to eat.'

The boys quickly pour a full bowl of honey. They cut up the loaf of bread they have just brought, and begin to eat.

They sit at their table, silently dipping big chunks of bread in the honey and eating. The old man just sits by the tree stump and watches. The apiary falls quiet. Only the buzzing of the bees can be heard.

The boys finish the honey. Only a small crust remains of the loaf of bread. Grandpa Efim asks, 'Would you like to eat some more?'

'No, thank you,' say the boys, and prepare to leave.

The old man still sits silently by the tree stump, sometimes chuckling, as if at his own thoughts.

The boys look at the crust of bread, all that is left of the loaf they brought, and hang their heads. They quietly say good-bye to the old man, and head off for home.

At the edge of the forest, the boys sit down on the path. They are silent for a long time. They look back at the forest, where Grandpa Efim lives from early spring to late autumn.

Sighing deeply, the boys get up and return home.

The green saucepan

A baby owl fell out of its nest and was crawling on the forest floor. It crawled quite a long way and could not find its mother's nest.

Some birds saw the baby owl, and thought it quite ugly, with its big head, big ears, big eyes and yellow beak. The saw it and asked in amazement, 'Who are you, and where have you come from?'

'I'm a baby owl,' answered the chick. 'I've fallen out of my nest. I can't fly yet, and I can't see properly in the daylight. I'm looking for my mother.'

'Who is your mother?' asked a nightingale.

'My mother is an owl,' answered the baby owl, proudly.

'What does she look like?' asked a woodpecker.

'My mother is the most beautiful in the world.'

'Describe what she looks like,' asked a thrush.

'She has a head, ears and eyes just like mine,' answered the baby owl with pride.

'Ha! Ha! Ha!' laughed the nightingale, woodpecker and thrush. 'But you are really ugly. That means your mother is just as ugly.'

'That's not true!' cried the baby owl. 'My mother is the most beautiful in the world.'

The owl heard her baby's cry, flew down quietly, picked it up in her claws, and carried it to her nest.

The baby owl looked carefully at her mother. She was the most beautiful in the world.