

Sukhomlinsky News



*School in Kramatorsk following Russian bombardment on July 21, 2022
(Wikimedia Commons: from the website of the State Emergency Service of
Ukraine – dsns.gov.ua)
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_bombing_of_a_school_in_Kramatorsk,_July_21,_2022.jpg*

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology*

Because it would upset Maria Petrovna...

It was the last year of the war. Volodya, a student in grade four, was teased by Nina, who was in the same class. 'Five dresses with patches,' she said in a sing song voice. Nina was referring to the fact that Volodya had five sisters, his mother was often sick, his father had been killed on the frontline, and there was no money to buy new dresses, so his sisters' dresses all had patches...

Volodya could not stand being teased. He did not go to complain to his teacher, Maria Petrovna. He just hit Nina, and she burst into tears.

Maria Petrovna saw and heard everything. She sighed and said, 'Today I will come and visit you at home, Volodya.'

Maria Petrovna had only been teaching at the school for two weeks. Before that our class had been taught by a very strict teacher named Maria Nikolaevna. If she visited your home, it meant you would be getting the strap.

We all felt depressed. Everyone looked at Volodya with sympathy because he would be coping it today...

The next day Volodya came to school full of joy. He kept repeating, 'Maria Petrovna visited us yesterday...' Then he told us all about it. Maria Petrovna did not say a single word about him hitting Nina. She brought the sisters toys and gave the oldest one a dress. Only as she was leaving, she very quietly said to Volodya, 'But you mustn't fight...'

'I will never hit anyone again,' said Volodya, 'Because it would upset Maria Petrovna...'



Seeing the world through children's eyes

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

*This month I am continuing to present translations from the section in Sukhomlinsky's **Ethics Anthology** entitled 'Journeys to the wellsprings of thought', offering reflections on school life and child psychology. In these stories Sukhomlinsky demonstrates an ability to see the world through children's eyes.*

Two of this month's stories are set during wartime, a reminder that what Ukraine is experiencing now has parallels in the German occupation during World War II. The picture on the front page of this month's newsletter is of a school destroyed during the current war. When Sukhomlinsky returned to his village after it was liberated from German occupation, he was responsible for overseeing the reconstruction and fitting out of schools in the area around Pavlysh.

Sukhomlinsky also lived through the 'Holodomor', a genocide by famine perpetrated under Stalin, which is commemorated in Ukraine on 26 November.

Given this history, the sensitivity and humanity expressed in Sukhomlinsky's stories is all the more remarkable.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Stories from *An Ethics Anthology* (cont.)

A school in the attic

Before the war, Mitya studied in grade five. He kept getting in trouble with his teachers, especially his class teacher Nadezhda Stepanovna. Mitya was not a diligent student. You could even say he was lazy. He often failed to do his homework, and one day he even came to school without his books.

'Where are your books?' Nadezhda Stepanovna asked him.

Mitya was ashamed to admit that he had left his schoolbag and books by the pond. He went to get it in the evening and saw his bag in the water. His books were destroyed.

Before Mitya could progress to grade six, he had to sit an exam in literature during the autumn. He was too lazy to even learn a poem by heart. Literature was taught by Nadezhda Stepanovna. Mitya knew that in the autumn she would ask him about all the poems.

The summer brought hard times. The war with the fascists began. Mitya's father went to fight on the frontline. At night bright flashes like lightning could be seen in the distance. People said that the Germans would soon arrive in their village. Mitya did not believe this. 'Surely,' he thought, 'Our soldiers will beat the fascists.'

But the fascists did come. They arrested the chairman of the village council and shot him. Now evenings in the village were quiet, dark, and full of fear. The Germans did not let anyone leave their homes at night.

The first of September, the first day of the school year, arrived. Mitya sadly thought, 'How joyful this day was when there were no fascists.' But now there could be no thought of school or study. The school was empty. The watchman nailed a board over the entrance.

Mitya wanted to study. He sat at home and learnt his poems by heart. He even learnt by heart poems that Nadezhda Stepanovna had not set. If only it were possible to go to school!

One day Mitya invited three of his classmates to his house—Nikolai, Petr and Taras.

'Let's go to school,' he said. 'We will study.'

'How can we go to school?' the boys asked in surprise. 'The Germans have forbidden us to study.'

Mitya chuckled and led the boys to school. The school yard was overgrown with weeds. The boys found their way up the stairs and into the attic of the school building.

'Our school will be here. OK?'

'OK!' answered his classmates joyfully.

'Listen to me. I will recite a poem, and you give me a mark.'

And Mitya began to recite the poems he had learnt by heart for his autumn exam.

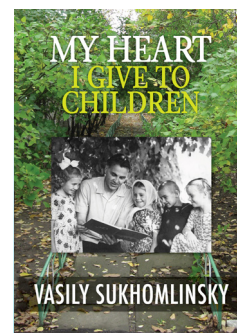
Cause, phenomenon, effect

For homework, our teacher asked us to write a composition about 'Cause, phenomenon and effect'. During the lesson he explained how to write the composition, but I did not listen properly.

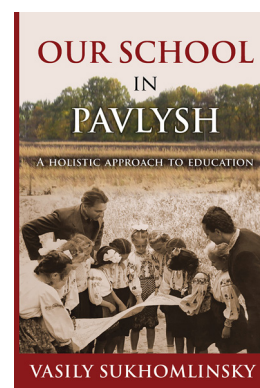
I got home and opened my exercise book, but I did not know what to write. I thought I would go and see Volodya. He listened carefully during the lesson and would know how to start the composition.

I put on some warm clothes and went outside. The pond had already frozen over, though the ice was still thin. I put on my skates and began to skate rapidly over the ice to Volodya's house. It was such fun skating. The wind whistled in my ears and the skates carried me over the ice like a rocket. But why was the ice making that cracking sound? It must be very thin.

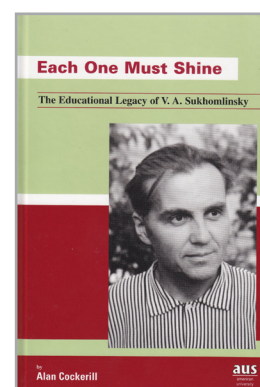
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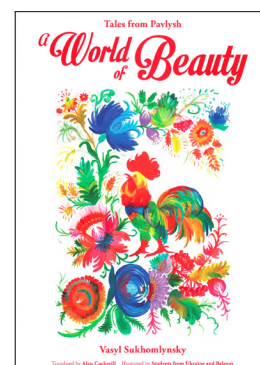
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I had nearly reached the other side, when suddenly the ice gave way and I fell into the water with a splash. I was standing up to my knees in water. I just managed to get to the other side and quickly ran to my friend's house. Volodya helped me take off my boots and we sat and dried them. I asked Volodya how to write my composition about cause, phenomenon and effect.

Volodya laughed: 'Your little adventure is your composition. The ice was thin. That is the cause. The ice gave way under your weight. That is the phenomenon—a rather unpleasant phenomenon. You ended up in the water. That is the effect. The effect is also not very nice.'

Which is better?

There was once a little girl who liked to ask questions: 'Which is better—an apple or a pear? A rose or a gladiolus? Water or cordial? A ball or a doll?'

Her mother patiently answered her questions, but she found them surprising. How could anyone say which was better out of a ball and a doll, or a rose and a gladiolus?

Then one day the little girl asked, 'Mum, which is better—a story or a song?'

'Well, you think about which is better out of the sun and the sky. If you can answer that question, I will tell you which is better out of a story and a song,' replied her mother.

The girl thought about it for a long time but could not decide. She looked at the sky and the bright sun. They were both beautiful and inseparable.

After that, the little girl stopped asking 'Which is better?' She asked her questions in a different way: 'What is good about a story?' or 'What is good about a song?' And her mother was happy to answer.

I want to say own word

Katerina Ivanovna took her little grade one students out into the field. It was a quiet morning in early autumn. High in the sky a flock of migratory birds was passing overhead. The birds' plaintive cries cast a veil of sadness over the steppe.

Katerina Ivanovna told the children, 'Today we are going to make up a composition about autumn, about the sky and the migratory birds. I would like each of you to describe what the sky is like now. Look carefully at the sky, children, and think. Choose beautiful and precise words from our native language.'

The children fell silent. They gazed at the sky and thought. After a while they began to make up their first miniature compositions:

'The sky is deep, deep blue...'

'The sky is light blue...'

'The sky is clear...'

'The sky is azure...'

And that was all. The children kept repeating the same words: dark blue, light blue, clear, azure.

Little Valya stood silently to one side, looking at the sky with her dark blue eyes.

'Why don't you say anything, Valya?'

'I want to say my own word.'

'Well, what is your word about the sky?'

'The sky is tender...' said Valya quietly and gave a sad smile.

The children fell silent. At that moment they saw what they had not seen till then.

'The sky is sad...'

'The sky is anxious...'

'The sky is melancholy...'

'The sky is cold...'

Now the sky was full of life, trembling, breathing, smiling—like a living creature, and the children were looking into its sad, deep blue autumn eyes.

To hear the bell sooner

The teacher told the children about the speed of sound. Everyone was interested to learn that sound does not travel all that quickly—about 340 metres per second.

'Consider this,' said the teacher. 'You see a ball hit the ground and bounce up. You only hear the sound of the ball hitting the ground when it is already in the air.'

Misha said that he had observed that phenomenon but had not been able to explain it. 'Now I understand...' added Misha.

But the one who showed the most interest in the way sound travels was Yurko. He put a question to the teacher. 'The sound of the bell ringing for our break travels to us from the corridor. Does that mean that the sound is first heard near the door, where the back row of desks is, and then near the blackboard, where the front row is?'

'Yes, that is true,' answered the teacher.

'Could you please move me to the back row?'

'Why?' asked the teacher in surprise.

'I want to be the first to hear the bell, so I can go out for my break sooner.'

Sew a patch for me

Nine-year-old Kolya went to his mother with his head hanging low. 'Mum,' he said quietly, 'I've ripped my shirt.' His mother looked at his torn sleeve and replied, 'All right. I'll patch it. Take off your shirt.'

Kolya took off his shirt, stood next to his mother, and watched her sew a small patch on to his shirt sleeve. Three-year-old Katya sat next to her mother. She thought the patch on the shirt sleeve looked very nice. 'Mum, sew a patch for me,' she asked. 'All right,' answered her mother. 'Take off your blouse.'

Katya took off her blouse, and a few minutes later she came out, beaming with joy, to show everyone her sleeve. 'Mum sewed a patch on my blouse for me! Look how beautiful I am!' she exclaimed.

The children looked with amazement at Katya's blouse.



Stories

Grandma Motrya and Andreika

Andreika is studying in grade two. He sits by the window. Outside the window is a well. Sometimes Grandma Motrya, who lives next to the school, comes to the well for water. Andreika often sees Grandma Motrya and tells his teacher, 'Maria Petrovna, Grandma Motrya has come to fetch water.'

'Go and help her draw up the bucket,' his teacher will say. And Andreika will run and help the old lady to draw water and quickly return to class.

Today there is a test during the arithmetic lesson. Andreika cannot find a way to solve the problem. Suddenly he sees the old lady.

'Maria Petrovna!' Andreika exclaims joyfully, 'Grandma Mariya has come to fetch water!'

'Go and help her draw up the bucket.'

Andreika runs to help. Five minutes pass, then ten, then twenty, but he is nowhere to be seen. The bell rings, and Andreika has still not returned. Maria Petrovna collects all the exercise books with the answers to the test.

Andreika enters the classroom, all flushed and wet.

'Where have you been?' asks the teacher in surprise.

'I've been carrying water for Grandma Maria. I carried ten buckets for her, and washed her floor...'

Boris's nesting box

The air smelt of spring. Olya, a Pioneer leader from grade seven, came to speak to the grade three students. 'Children, soon the starlings will arrive,' she said. 'But we don't have enough bird houses. Who would like to make a nesting box?'

Nearly all the children raised their hands. Boris was one of them. At home, he began to make the

nesting box all by himself, but it was difficult to plane the wood evenly, and to hammer the pieces together without any gaps. His father helped him.

The nesting box turned out beautifully and was very cosy. The Pioneer leader praised Boris. 'Yours is the most beautiful bird house,' she said. Boris wanted to climb a tree and attach his nesting box, but the Pioneer leader said, 'The older school students will take these nesting boxes out into the fields and put them up in forest belts, so that the starlings will live there as well.' Boris was very pleased that his bird house would be out in the fields.

The summer passed and autumn arrived. Now Boris was studying in grade four. One day his teacher asked him to go and get some chalk. There was no chalk on the table in the corridor, but Boris knew that it was stored in cupboard nearby. He opened the cupboard and saw his nesting box on the shelf. Someone had pulled the roof off, and it was full of chalk.

Boris burst into tears. His teacher came out from the classroom and asked, 'Why are you crying, Boris?'

Petrik left his exercise book at home

Yesterday the children came to school sad. They knew that the following day their teacher, Maria Petrovna, would be travelling far, far away, to live by the deep blue sea. That is where her husband—a pilot—was living, and she was travelling to join him with her son.

During lessons everyone was quiet and gloomy. They could not forget that after the final bell, they would be saying goodbye to their teacher and would never see her again. Every student wanted to write and read and answer questions as well as possible, so as to earn Maria Petrovna's praise.

During the arithmetic lesson the teacher said, 'I will not be asking anyone to come out to the board today. Open your exercise books, and I will check your homework.'

When the teacher reached Petrik's desk, he did not have an exercise book. Petrik blushed with shame and said, 'I left it at home...'

Maria Petrovna did not say anything, and she also blushed. Petrik sat there wishing he could sink through the floor.

The next day Maria Petrovna caught a bus to the station, which was about five kilometres from the village. She bought tickets and sat waiting for the train, which was due soon.

The sun rose, and Petrik approached Maria Petrovna. He was puffing from walking quickly.

'Maria Petrovna,' he said quietly. 'Here is my exercise book. I did solve the problem... I don't know how I could have left it at home yesterday!'