

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

2-line Summary:

These ethical tales and reflections by the eminent Ukrainian educator and writer Vasyl Sukhomlynsky paint a picture of village life in post-war Ukraine.

Short Synopsis:

A collection of over 800 ethical tales for children of varying ages, from preschool to senior secondary, by the eminent Ukrainian educator and children's writer Vasyl Sukhomlynsky. The stories, which paint a picture of village life in post-war Ukraine, are accompanied by Sukhomlynsky's reflections on teaching values to children.

Medium Synopsis:

A collection of over 800 ethical tales for children of varying ages, from preschool to senior secondary, by the eminent Ukrainian educator and children's writer Vasyl Sukhomlynsky. The stories, which paint a picture of village life in post-war Ukraine, are accompanied by Sukhomlynsky's reflections on teaching values to children. The stories were written for children of various ages, from preschool through to senior secondary school. They include tales about plants and animals, descriptions of natural beauty, vivid accounts of human relationships in families, at school, and in the broader community, and heartrending scenes from the war years.

Long Synopsis:

I'll tell you a story ... Philosophy for children is a collection of over 800 ethical tales for children of varying ages, from preschool to senior secondary, by the eminent Ukrainian educator and children's writer Vasyl Sukhomlynsky. The stories, which incidentally paint a picture of village life in post-war Ukraine, are accompanied by Sukhomlynsky's reflections on teaching values to children. The collection was compiled by Sukhomlynsky's daughter, Professor Olha Sukhomlynska, and has been adeptly translated from Ukrainian.

The stories include tales about plants and animals for younger children, which at times are reminiscent of Aesop's fables. The stories for older children include vivid accounts of human relationships in families, at school, and in the broader community, and heartrending scenes from the war years.

The ethical tales were written to support the values education program at the combined primary and secondary school in the village of Pavlysh, in central Ukraine, where Sukhomlynsky served as the principal from 1948 until his death in 1970. The stories also served as models for the children's own writing. The stories are organised in sections, with each section having a theme and being introduced by reflections on values education relating to that theme.

The inculcation of values was at the heart of Sukhomlynsky's holistic approach to education. He considered the development of humane qualities to be even more important than the development of intellectual or vocational skills. In one of the reflections in this book Sukhomlynsky writes:

Children meet each other every day at school, in the corridors, in the classrooms. They look each other in the eye, share secrets, argue, enjoy each other's company, get upset, sometimes fight, nursing injuries great and small. Sometimes in our daily work we lose sight of the subtleties of these human relationships. Dear educators, do not forget that understanding these human relationships is your first responsibility. How each of your pupils views other human beings, what they discover in them, what they impart to others, and what remains in their hearts from others—this is a hundred times more important than whether or not they have completed today's homework.

Sukhomlynsky believed that whatever vocation his students chose, their happiness would be determined to a large extent by their ability to harness their energies to creative ends and develop positive relationships with others. He also considered the development of strong character to be an area in which anyone could excel, regardless of their physical, intellectual or artistic abilities. In the moral sphere there were limitless opportunities for every individual to shine.

The themes covered in the stories include: developing an appreciation of beauty, the development of empathy and love for others, respect for elders, developing a sense of duty, the nature of maturity, the role of parents, the development of a conscience, self-discipline and the modification of desires, hard work, generosity, kindness and cruelty, curiosity and the quest for knowledge, the role of teachers, the development of talent, acceptance of diversity, the role of tact and good manners, patriotism and self-sacrifice.

As we read Sukhomlynsky's reflections and stories, we are prompted to examine our own values and gain fresh insights into the role that values play our lives. Among the hundreds of little stories, there are many gems that will move us and that we will want to share with the young people in our lives.

5 Points of Interest about the Book:

1. Sukhomlynsky (1918–1970) was an eminent Ukrainian educator and children's writer whose books have been read by millions of people around the world. Sukhomlynsky was a remarkable human being who suffered great trauma during his life, living through civil war, famine, wartime battle injuries, the death of his first wife and child at the hands of the Gestapo, and persecution by Soviet ideologues. Somehow, he transmuted all that suffering into great love and compassion, especially for the children in his care. Sukhomlynsky's work and personal example deserve to be better known in English-speaking countries.
2. Sukhomlynsky's stories, fables and vignettes are very short and pithy, often making a strong impression in a one or two pages of text. (e.g. 'Dad came home' (p. 183), 'Straw hats' (p.326))
3. A key feature of Sukhomlynsky's approach to education was the conscious fostering of the personal quality of empathy. The stories in this book often show great psychological insight into the inner worlds of children, parents and grandparents. (e.g. 'A smile' (p. 301), 'Mariika's thoughts' (p. 319), 'Why a mother ran from the field' (p. 179), 'The oriole' (p. 128), 'The wooden stork' (p. 185))
4. Sukhomlynsky's stories are set in rural Ukraine in the aftermath of World War II and give insights into the history and culture of a country that is once again under siege. (e.g. 'Put that letter in the drawer' (p. 184), 'A grandson's request' (p. 291), 'A hut in the forest' (p. 324))
5. Sukhomlynsky's stories are frequently read in schools in Ukraine, and his educational legacy may have contributed to the strength and resilience shown by Ukrainians in the current war.

Book Details and Purchase Information

Book Title: *I'll tell you a story ... Philosophy for children*

Written by: Vasyl Sukhomlynsky

Compiled by: Olha Sukhomlynska (Sukhomlynsky's daughter)

Translated by: Nataliya Bezslova, Alan Cockerill and Berta Karaim

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