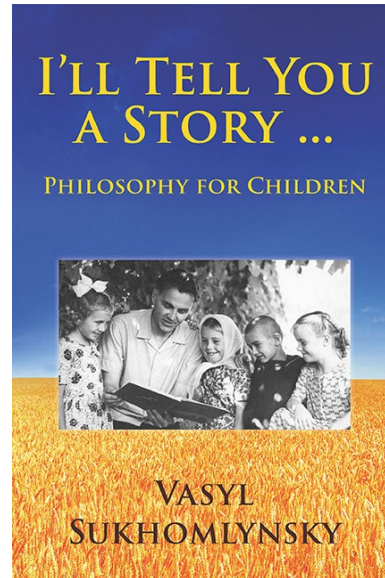


Sample Stories and Reflections from
I'll Tell You a Story ... Philosophy for Children
By Vasyl Sukhomlynsky



Stories and vignettes

Dad came home

In one happy family, two little girls, Zina and Zoia, lived and grew. They were both two years old. Every day they would wait impatiently for their father to come home from work. They would run to meet him at the gate, and their father would lift them into his arms, holding Zina in his right arm and Zoia in his left. That was how he entered the house, with his daughters in his arms, and their happy mother welcomed them as they came in.

But then a great misfortune visited our land: fascist troops invaded. The girls' father went to the frontline.

For three years he fought the invaders. Letters often arrived, in which he asked their mother to kiss Zina and Zoia, and their mother cried as she kissed them. 'Mum, don't cry,' the little girls would say. 'Dad will come home.'

Then there were no letters for several months. Suddenly, a letter came from their father's friend on the frontline. He wrote to Zina, Zoia, and their mother, that their father and husband had been wounded, and would soon be coming home.

One sunny morning in early spring, Zina and Zoia were playing in the garden. They were now five years old. They were standing next to a melting snowman and wondering how they could get it to survive for just one more day. Their mother was standing by the house.

‘Dad is coming!’ she shouted.

Zina and Zoia saw a tall, well-built soldier approaching, with a bag over his shoulder. Joyfully screaming ‘Dad!’, the girls ran to meet him. They stretched out their arms, expecting that he would lift them into his arms as he always did, Zina in his right arm, and Zoia in his left.

But their father was silent and did not lift them up. The children wanted to take his hands in their little hands, so that he would lift them up, but they suddenly saw that he did not have any arms. The sleeves of his great coat were hanging limp.

The girls lifted their heads and looked fearfully into their father’s eyes.

He bent over them, and tears fell from his eyes onto the white snow. Zina and Zoia hugged their father, resting their cheeks on his empty sleeves, and wept.

‘Don’t worry Dad, you don’t need to lift us in your arms. We’re not little anymore,’ whispered Zina.

‘We’re five already,’ added Zoia.

Mum, put that letter in the drawer

This happened in the spring of 1945 in a large village near the Dnipro River. All the local men were still on the frontline, but by then they were fighting in Europe, far away from Ukraine.

Every day, the postman, Grandpa Yukhym, would deliver several blue envelopes to women in the village. As soon as the envelopes were opened, the air was filled with moaning and wailing, because those blue envelopes were notices about the death of their loved ones: husbands and fathers. Everyone—adults and children—knew what those blue envelopes meant.

One mother had four little children. Early in the morning, when the children had eaten breakfast and she was getting ready for work, Grandpa Yukhym came. He took a blue envelope from his bag and handed it to the mother. Her heart sank with grief. The children stared at the envelope, eyes wide with fear.

The oldest daughter, Mariia, approached her mother, took the envelope from her hands, held it tightly to her chest, and stiffened like an adult.

‘Mum, please, don’t open that letter!’ she pleaded. ‘Put it in the drawer, right down the bottom!’

The other three children also started crying. They hugged their mother and begged through their tears, ‘Please, put the blue letter in the drawer!’

Straw hats

A young boy came from the big city to a quiet little town on the banks of the Dnipro River for his summer holidays. He was met by a sailor who worked on a steam ship that cruised up and down the Dnipro. It sailed all the way to the Black Sea. The sailor took the boy to the home of an old wartime friend of his father’s.

The boy settled into a small room with a window that looked out on the Dnipro. Every day, the boy would go to the beach to play and to swim. The beach was crowded with other

holidaymakers who enjoyed spending their summer vacation in that hospitable town with its white houses.

On the very first day, the boy noticed an old man sitting by the riverside. He was sitting on a rock, and three large straw hats were spread out beside him on the sand, though he himself, for some reason, was not wearing a hat. His face was lined with deep wrinkles, and he sat gazing at the waves of the Dnipro. The boy observed throughout the day that nobody bought any hats from the old man. All three straw hats lay on the beach untouched until evening.

The boy felt sorry for the old man. Every day the boy was given fifty *kopiika* to buy himself an ice-cream. [A *kopiika* was roughly equivalent to a cent.] One day, the boy approached the old man and asked him how much a hat cost.

‘Twenty-five *kopiika*,’ replied the man quietly, but he did not raise his head or look at the boy.

‘I’ll take two hats, please,’ said the boy.

The old man gave the boy two hats and put the coins into his pocket. The boy expected that the old man would be grateful and would thank him, but the old man did not even look at him. It seemed to the boy that the man was concentrating on something in the distance.

The next day, there were three new straw hats laid out by the rock. And again, nobody approached the old man to ask him about his hats. When it was time for the boy to have lunch, he took out his ice-cream money and bought two more hats from the old man. The old man did not raise his head this time either, but the boy could swear that he was listening attentively to his every word.

It continued like that every day: the boy would buy two hats from the old man and take them to his room looking out on the Dnipro. Now he observed that the man listened attentively not only to his words, but to the sound of his footsteps.

The last day of the summer holidays arrived. The boy’s father was coming to collect him. The boy went to see the old man one last time and bought two more hats. He was about to leave, when the man lifted his hand and rested it on the boy’s shoulder.

‘Farewell, young man,’ he said quietly. ‘You are a good person.’

The boy felt his heart contract with compassion.

‘How do you know that I am leaving?’ was all he could whisper.

The old man raised his head, and the boy saw that he had no eyes.

They sat in silence for a long time.

‘Do you make these hats yourself?’ asked the boy.

‘Yes, I make them myself ... At night ... If it wasn’t for this work, I would have died by now,’ said the old man.

The boy sighed heavily and said, ‘I’ll come again next summer. Please don’t die! All right?’

‘All right, young man,’ promised the old man softly, and his hands trembled. ‘Now I’ll have to make sure I don’t die.’

Let him believe

There was a student in our class named Petro Rybalka. His faithful dog Som came to school with him every day for three years. Som did not just keep Petro company, he carried a drawstring bag with the sneakers that Petro needed for the physical education class in the gym.

As the winter break approached, Petro's parents made plans to move somewhere far away, and they did not want to take Som with them. No matter how much Petro begged his parents not to leave the dog behind, they would not listen. 'You know what?' Petro said to us before leaving, 'I'll leave my bag and my sneakers with you, and I want you, Mykola, to have Som and take care of him.'

So, I adopted Som and moved his doghouse to my front yard. Som became very sad, but he did not completely give up hope. Every morning, as I left for school, I would give Som the bag with Petro's sneakers in it, and he would cheer up right away, nuzzling up to me and wagging his tail. I would walk to school, and he would trot along beside me carrying the bag.

Near the school entrance, I would take the bag from him, and he would look at me as if to say, 'Where is Petro?' Then Som would wait by the school entrance until the end of classes. When I went home, I would give him the bag with the sneakers again, and again he would cock his head sideways and look at me with a puzzled expression. My friends and I walked home together, looking at Som from time to time, and we all felt bad.

'Why are we fooling him?' asked Stepan. 'Leave the bag at home, Mykola. Hide it and forget about it! Som needs to know the truth!'

So, we decided to ask our teacher, Ivan Petrovych, whether we should hide the bag from Som.

'No, boys, I wouldn't do that,' said Ivan Petrovych. 'Let him believe. That way it will be easier for him to keep going.'

After a pause, the teacher added, 'People could learn a lot from a good dog.'

A smile

It was a quiet, sunny morning. In a green meadow that stretched from the edge of the village, yellow dandelions were flowering, bees and bumblebees were buzzing, and a lark was sporting in the blue sky.

On this beautiful morning, a little three-year-old girl came out of her house. She had light blue eyes and fair hair the colour of ripening wheat. Her name was Marynka. She set off through the green meadow. She smiled when she saw a many-coloured butterfly. At that moment, she wanted the whole world to share her smile.

Still smiling, Marynka followed the butterfly. The butterfly flew slowly, as if it understood the little girl wanted to have a good look at it.

Suddenly Marynka saw an old man walking towards her. His gaze was stormy, his eyebrows frowning and his eyes full of malice. Marynka brought her smile with her as she walked towards the old man. She was hoping that the old man would smile back. How could anyone be gloomy and unfriendly on such a joyful day?

Already in the depth of the girl's soul a little wave of fear stirred, but she kept smiling, bringing her smile with her as she met the old man, and appealing to him: you smile too, grandpa.

But the old man did not smile. His gaze remained dark, his eyebrows lowered and his eyes malevolent.

Marynka's heart was gripped by fear. The smile faded from her eyes. At that moment it seemed to her that the whole world had become dark and gloomy.

The green meadow turned grey, the dandelions turned from yellow suns into purple spots, the blue sky turned pale, and the silver song of the lark began to waver, like a stream that is running dry.

Marynka burst into tears. A minute later, the old man was already far away. Now she could only see his back, but even his back seemed evil and unwelcoming.

The little girl kept walking through the meadow. Her heartbeat quickened when she saw that someone else was walking towards her. It was an old lady with a stick.

Marynka was now on her guard and looked searchingly into the old lady's eyes. The old lady smiled. And it was such a kind, sincere smile, that the whole world came to life again around the girl, vibrant, singing, sparkling with dozens of colours of the most subtle shades. The dandelions blazed like little suns, the sound of the bees and bumblebees resounded, the lark played melodies on its silver strings.

Marynka smiled, and again the many coloured wings of the butterfly fluttered before her. The old lady stopped on the path, looked back at the little girl and smiled again.

The new teacher

The grade three students suffered a great misfortune. Their teacher, dear old Antonina Nychyporivna, died.

The children grieved for her for a long time. Only gradually, and with great difficulty, did they become accustomed to their young new teacher. It made it even harder that her name was also Antonina, though her patronymic was Petrivna.

Antonina Petrivna seemed to the children to be too happy and carefree. The children doubted if she would be able to love them as tenderly, as demandingly and as strictly as Antonina Nychyporivna.

One day, black-eyed Fedko was running outside when he fell and drove a large splinter into his hand. The boy ran to Antonina Petrivna. The young teacher, who was always so happy and carefree, gave a little scream and turned pale. She sat Fedko on her knee but did not know what to do next. Andriiko, an irrepressible mischief maker, walked up to her and said very quietly, 'You need to pull the splinter out with your teeth.'

Antonina Petrivna bent over the boy's hand and pressed her lips to the wound. When she raised her head, a large splinter was sticking out between her bloodied teeth. The children looked at their young teacher, their eyes now shining with delight.

That night, in thirty-seven households, the children told their mothers about their new teacher for the first time.

I asked grandma

Pavlyk is a lively and mischievous grade four student. His grandfather died fighting on the frontline. At home, his grandmother keeps his grandfather's medals and awards in an old chest.

Not long ago, a portrait of Pavlyk's grandfather was painted and hung on the classroom wall next to Pavlyk's desk. Pavlyk's eyes shone with pride when he saw his grandfather, as if still alive, his chest covered in medals.

But his joy soon turned to bitterness, as people began to use the painting to reproach him. If he did not complete an assignment, his teacher would say, 'You should be ashamed of yourself. Your grandfather was a hero, and you are sitting next to his portrait.'

One day Pavlyk brought a piece of old mirror to school and began to reflect sunbeams onto his desk. Olenka, who sat next to him, whispered, ‘How can you behave like that during a lesson? Do you think your grandfather would have played with sunbeams?’

Pavlyk felt bitter and depressed.

One Saturday, the teacher said, ‘We are going for a walk in the forest today. Run home with your books and quickly bring some food to eat.’

Pavlyk went over to the open window, jumped out, and was about to run home when he saw his teacher walking towards him. How she had managed to get there so quickly he could not imagine.

She reproached him, saying, ‘Is that how students are supposed to behave? Ask your grandmother if your grandfather ever jumped out the window.’

The next day, Pavlyk raised his hand and said, ‘I asked Grandma.’

‘What about?’ asked the teacher, who had forgotten what she had said.

‘I asked if Grandpa ever jumped out the window.’

‘And what did your grandmother say?’ asked the teacher.

‘Once, when Grandpa had to stay back after school, he climbed out through the chimney.’

A grandson’s request

Three grandsons—Petryk, Ivas and little Tarasyk—came to visit Grandpa Taras at the melon plantation. They spent a long time with him. He treated his grandsons to watermelon, rockmelon, honey, apples and cherry juice.

As they were leaving, he gave each boy a large watermelon. He walked with them as far as the scrub on the edge of the plantation. The grandfather turned back, and had almost reached his hut, when he suddenly heard someone calling him. His seven-year-old grandson, Tarasyk, had run back from the edge of the plantation and was calling, ‘Grandpa Taras!’

His grandfather asked, ‘What’s the matter, Tarasyk? Why have you come back?’

‘Grandpa, can we please steal one watermelon?’ asked Tarasyk.

The unexpectedness of the question caught the old man off guard. He opened his mouth to scold the boy, but looking at Tarasyk’s pleading eyes, and the skin peeling off his sunburnt nose, he remembered something. Trying not to smile, he said sternly, ‘Look at me! No more than one watermelon. And take it ... I mean steal it ... from that side over there.’

Grandpa Taras turned and walked back to his hut, smiling all the time, and remembering his childhood.

His grandson Tarasyk, jumping for joy, ran back to the scrub to give the other boys the joyful news: Grandpa said they could steal one watermelon.

Joy in a child’s eyes

It was a warm, sunny day, and everything seemed to be joyfully welcoming the spring. The orchards were flowering, and birds were twittering. A flock of cranes flew across the azure sky. Somewhere a spring brook was babbling happily.

However, underneath a tall poplar, a little boy was standing and crying. He did not see the orchards in flower. He did not hear the twittering of the birds. To him the sky seemed black, not blue. The flock of cranes seemed a thread of tears.

People walked past the little boy and did not notice him crying.

Only one old man saw the crying boy, walked up to him, and put his hand on his head. The old man spent a long time talking to the boy, asking him about something. Through his tears, the boy told the old man all about what was troubling him.

They talked like that for about an hour. Their conversation ended with the boy smiling. He noticed that the orchards were in flower. He heard the birds twittering. He saw a flock of cranes shimmering in the blue sky and thought, 'Spring has come!'

The most beautiful thing is when one person dries another's tears and awakens a smile.

A kind word

A mother had a little girl named Olia. When Olia turned five years old, she fell gravely ill. She caught a cold, took to her bed, began to cough, and weakened by the minute.

One by one, relatives began to visit the sorrowful mother: Olia's aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers. Everyone brought something delicious and nutritious: linden honey and scrumptious butter, fresh wild berries and nuts, quail eggs and chicken soup. Everyone said, 'You should eat well, and you should breathe fresh air, then the illness will disappear into the deep forests and swamps.'

Olia ate the honeycomb and the scrumptious butter, the wild berries and nuts, the quail eggs and chicken soup, but nothing helped. The little girl could hardly get out of bed.

One day, all her relatives gathered around the sick girl's bed. Her ninety-year-old Grandpa Opanas said, 'She is missing something, but I cannot tell what.'

Suddenly the door opened, and Olia's one-hundred-year-old great-grandmother walked into the house. All the relatives had long forgotten her. She had kept to herself for many years, not going anywhere and not visiting anyone. However, when she found out about her great-granddaughter's illness, she decided to set out to visit Olia.

The great-grandmother approached the sick girl's bed, sat on a stool, took Olia's hand into her own wrinkled one and said, 'I don't have honeycomb or scrumptious butter. I don't have fresh wild berries or nuts. I don't have quail eggs or chicken soup. I am old and can hardly see. I have brought to you, my dear great-granddaughter, only one gift: my sincere wish. One wish has planted itself in my heart—that you, my little flower, be healed and rejoice again in the bright sun.'

And this kind word carried such great strength of love that little Olia's heart began to beat more quickly, her cheeks became rosier, and joyful little fires began to flicker in her eyes.

'That's what little Olia was missing,' said Grandpa Opanas, 'A kind word.'

The autumn maple

We went to the forest to admire the trees' autumn attire. We stopped by a tall maple tree and sat on the ground. How beautiful it was! The maple stood there dressed in its gorgeous attire, and not a single leaf stirred or made a sound.

'Look, children,' said the teacher. 'The maple is asleep. It is dreaming of all the things it saw from spring to autumn. Look at that yellow leaf, the colour of a dandelion. In spring the maple was enchanted by the beauty of a dandelion, and it remembered that beauty. It went to sleep recalling the beauty of the dandelion, and that leaf turned yellow.'

And over there you can see a leaf the colour of the morning dawn, a tender pink. And that one is like the crimson evening sky on the eve of a windy day.

And look over there at that branch. That leaf is as bright and beautiful as the wing of an oriole. Probably an oriole once settled on that branch, and now the maple is dreaming of its wing.'

We all admired the beauty with bated breath. Everyone was silent, as if afraid of disturbing the maple's magic sleep.

The fir tree and the linden tree

Autumn arrived. The leaves turned yellow and withered. The linden tree was sad, because it was about to shed its bright leafy gown and sleep till spring. An evergreen fir tree grew just beside the linden tree. The linden tree knew that the fir tree would remain green throughout the winter, so it asked its neighbour, 'Please, dear fir tree, when spring comes, tell me what the winter was like. I'll be asleep and will not see it ... The woodpecker told me that winter is beautiful and the colour of silver. Is it really so beautiful?'

Winter came. The linden tree slept, but the fir tree admired winter's evening stars and its white blanket of snow.

Spring arrived. The snow melted, and springs, streams and brooks filled the air with the sound of running water. A lark trilled high in the sky. The linden tree woke up and asked the fir tree, 'Dear fir tree, tell me all about the winter.'

The fir tree was silent for a while, then it sighed and quietly said, 'Can you hear the sound of the babbling streams?'

'Yes, I can,' answered the linden tree.

'Their song is a recollection of winter.'

The flower of friendship

Dmytryk was in grade three. His father had died, and his mother was often sick. He had two little sisters. His mother often could not work, and then it was very difficult for the family. Sometimes, when Dmytryk's mother saw him off for school, she did not give him any lunch or any money for lunch. On days like that, Dmytryk spent the lunch break waiting for the next lesson, standing by a window with an aquarium. He used to watch the fish and wait for the bell to ring. The break seemed very long, and the boy wanted it to end as soon as possible.

One day, during the lunch break, a girl with blonde hair and deep blue eyes approached Dmytryk. He knew that her name was Katrusia and that she was studying in grade four. One day at an assembly he had spent a lot of time looking at her eyes and admiring how beautiful they were. Katrusia had looked over at him and had been embarrassed ... When Katrusia came over to the aquarium, stood next to him, and even touched his hand with hers, Dmytryk's heartbeat raced.

'Dmytryk, would you like some bread and butter?' asked Katrusia.

Dmytryk felt uncomfortable and ashamed, and his face turned red.

'Take it, don't be ashamed,' said Katrusia. 'And here's a piece of sausage and half an apple. Mum always cuts my apple into halves so it will be easier to eat.'

Dmytryk accepted the bread and butter, and the sausage and the apple. It all tasted very good. He forgot to thank Katrusia, and when he thought of it during the lesson, he felt very ashamed.

The next day the same thing happened. Katrusia gave Dmytryk half her lunch. Dmytryk had a feeling that she was giving him the bigger half. They stood by the aquarium, ate, and watched the goldfish.

After they had eaten, the boy and girl dreamt about what it would be like to be a fish in an aquarium. Do they realise that outside the walls of their little home there is a wide and wonderful world with a sky, a sun, clouds and stars? Now Dmytryk did not want the break to end so quickly. Now, for some reason, the lunch break seemed shorter.

And then, one day, someone noticed that Katrusia was giving half her lunch to Dmytryk and wrote about it in the school newspaper. Wasn't it wonderful, they wrote, that she had the awareness to help a fellow student? If only everyone could be like Katrusia ...

At the next lunch break, Katrusia ran to the aquarium, but Dmytryk was not there. She cried. Dmytryk was sitting on a bench at the far end of a half-lit corridor. He was afraid that someone would come up to him and ask, 'Was that you they wrote about in the school newspaper?'

And sure enough, two girls ran up to him. He did not know what class they were in. They were about two years older than him. They sat down next to Dmytryk, and one of them said, 'This is where he was hiding ... We have been looking for you, Dmytryk. Our class has decided to help you. Look, we have brought you some lunch. Please take it and don't be shy.'

Dmytryk burst into tears and ran away. He ran to his class, collected his books, and walked home. The next day he came to school pale, with tortured eyes. Now Katrusia and Dmytryk kept far apart, but they were experiencing the same feeling. It seemed to them that the beautiful flower that they loved and admired, that is known as friendship, had been taken by dozens of hands, and that dozens of fingers were now poking at every petal.

The lamplighter

A river flowed through green meadows and thick forests. It was deep and free flowing, but quiet and gentle. Its clear water had flowed for many centuries. Boats and even small ships sailed on that river.

On the banks of the river lived an old lamplighter. Every evening, he climbed into his boat, rowed to the middle of the river, and lit a lamp. Its light flickered in the middle of the river until dawn, showing the way to travellers. Waves tenderly lapped at the shore. The river was glad: people loved her, and she felt needed by them.

But people needed lots of wood to make tables and chairs, and they cut down the forests on the banks of the river. It seemed to people that the green meadows were an unnecessary luxury, and they ploughed them to grow corn.

The cold springs that fed the river dried up, and the river itself choked with thirst and died. For a few years, where the boats and ships had sailed, a stream babbled in spring, and then it too dried up. The old riverbed was now used for vegetable gardens. The only reminder of the river that had flowed there was the post where the lamplighter kept hanging his lamp each spring, as he was accustomed to doing.

But the rain clouds gathered less and less often overhead. Hot winds blew in from the desert and knocked at people's doors.

As soon as dusk fell, the old lamplighter would walk through the fields, light his lamp and hang it on the post. A little boy named Serhiiko asked him one day, 'Grandpa, why do you still light your lamp? There has not been any river here for a long time.'

'So people can more easily see their stupidity,' he replied.

The scent of apples

It is a quiet autumn day. The apple orchard hums with the sound of bumblebees. They have swarmed to an apple that has fallen from a tree and is lying on the ground. Sweet sap is oozing from the apple, and it is covered with bumblebees.

The sun sets, but the scent of apples warmed by the sun still lingers. Somewhere a cricket starts singing. Suddenly an apple falls to the ground with a thump ... The cricket falls silent, and a frightened bird flits by. Beyond the forest, a star appears in the evening sky. The cricket starts singing again.

Now the moon is drifting across the sky, but the apples still smell of the hot sun.

Reflections

On Moral Education (extract: pp. 5–7)

A characteristic of the art of education is that the whole process involves an intervention in the life of the human spirit—in all that is so complex and at times hard to capture in the way a person expresses themselves. I am firmly convinced that all the actions and deeds that we motivate our students to undertake should be part of the life of the human spirit. Only then will our everyday lives and relationships constitute an education, without the need for any specially invented forms of activity. If I give a spade to a child and ask them to plant a tree, that means that the future work that forms the essence of my intention, the tree itself, the earth and water that will feed its life—all of these things will express spiritual impulses and relationships. One of the most unacceptable failings in education is the fact that children's work—sometimes very significant work—appears to be divorced from the life of the spirit, does not inspire children or develop conviction, does not awaken thought, feelings or the exercise of the will.

In order to see themselves as others see them, little people must learn to see life. They must learn to see another person, to understand and feel the beauty in them, to be inspired with feelings of admiration, to compare themselves with what they have seen and understood, and to measure their own worth against those whom they consider to be models. I consider it very important to tell adolescents and young men and women about how others have lived their lives, about what they have achieved, and how they have fulfilled their duty to future generations, who in their turn will accept the baton from them, continuing their creativity and constructive efforts. I have tried to do this in the story 'The happiest person in the world' (p. 544).

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, and 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. In essence, education is a lengthy process, taking many years, that prepares young people to realise the essential truth that human beings are of supreme value. This is a realisation not as a consumer, not in a selfish sense, but in an altruistic sense, with a concern for others. One of the most subtle aspects of educational skill is the ability to foster in our pupils a need to relate to other human beings in this way.

In this connection we need to reflect on one very important aspect of the extremely complex process of education. In education two things are in sharp contrast: affirmation and negation. We are always trying to affirm something or to negate, to overcome something. The wisdom of our educational approach depends on the interrelationship between these two things. When affirmation predominates, creative work and mutual trust reign. Teachers and parents breathe easily, and the children being educated obey their educators. When our relationships with children consist mostly of negation, as we strive to overcome their vices, school life becomes a burden, and it is unbearably hard for teachers and parents.

Less flowery talk about love for humanity in general, and more concrete deeds and heartfelt participation in life, in the creation of joy—this should be the rule in moral education. It is very dangerous when good deeds are done for show, when a child helps a friend in order to win approval and praise.

The ideal of education is when the gift of our inner resources to others remains in our hearts as something precious and untouchable. The need to relate to others is one of the most private of feelings. Leo Tolstoy considered even feelings of patriotism to be of this nature.

In childhood an exceptionally important role is played by self-education, self-discovery, the development of resilience, of an ability to make demands of oneself and exercise self-control. The spirit and psyche are inseparable from the body, and strength of spirit is manifested in an ability to harness our physical energy, in an ability to combine physical resilience with sensitive and tender feelings. I have always been astonished that children's physical education, in both theory and practice, is divorced from the spiritual and psychological development of the personality. This separation is unacceptable. Physical effort must always incorporate the spiritual and psychological realm and awaken a person's awareness of their strength of spirit. Only then will people acquire the ability to educate themselves.

I would like to emphasise once again the importance of developing spiritual and psychological resilience in the early years. If you miss the early years, you miss everything. It is completely unacceptable to encourage grade one students to think that they are still little, that they are not yet strong enough and things are too hard for them. Children do not want to think and feel that they are weak, defenceless and small. That they are small and need to be defended by you, that they must be protected from misfortune and danger, should be thought but not expressed. In children's hearts and minds you should implant the thought: 'I am strong and courageous. I do not need defending. I should defend others. The world is full of creatures who are much weaker than me, and I should defend them.'

Fairy tales in the life of a child (extracts: pp. 7–11)

Childhood is an important stage in life, not a preparation for a future life but a genuine, bright, unique, unrepeatable stage in life. And how that childhood is spent, who leads children by the hand during their early years, what enters their hearts and minds from the surrounding world, determines what sort of people today's infants will become. During the preschool and early school years, a person's character, way of thinking, and speech are formed. Perhaps everything that enters the minds and hearts of children from a book, from a textbook or a lesson, only enters because alongside the book is the surrounding world: nature, fields and meadows, the blue sky and the misty haze on the horizon, the song of the lark and rustling at night, the howling of a cold winter wind and the strange ice patterns on the window panes, the opening petals of a snowdrop and the scent of new leaf awakening; and because little children observe good and evil in the world that surrounds them. It is in this real world that they take their first difficult steps on the long road from birth to the day when they can open a book and read it independently.

Why do fairy tales develop speech and thought more powerfully than any other means? It is because the images in fairy tales are so laden with emotional colouring. The words from a fairy tale live in a child's consciousness. Children's hearts miss a beat when they hear or pronounce words that create a world of fantasy. I cannot imagine school instruction that does not include making up and listening to fairy tales.

There was once an incident at our school. A teacher took the first graders to the forest. The children sat on the grass. The trees in the forest rustled quietly in the wind and somewhere a wild pigeon sang, 'Coo ... coo ... ' They could clearly hear the sound of running water in a brook nearby.

The teacher opened a book and read a fairy tale. The fairy tale told that in a land far, far away, on a very high mountain, beneath a blue stone, a Little White Cloud was born, tiny and delicate, like a baby bird. In the morning, a light breeze began to blow, touching the wings of the Little White Cloud, and it flew off into the sky ...

The children sat completely still, listening with bated breath; the sparks of a daydream could be seen in the children's eyes. Once he finished reading, the teacher spoke:

'This is a fairy tale. In reality, nothing like this could happen. A cloud is not a bird—it does not have wings. The wind cannot caress a cloud, as the fairy tale suggested. A cloud is made of drops of water. Like the morning mist—you know? Grey, unpleasant ... '

The light in the children's eyes was extinguished.

My little daughter Olia came home crying.

'Why are you crying, Olia? Has someone hurt you?'

Olia explained her misfortune. How joyful it was to believe that a little cloud is a fairytale bird with tiny wings, but it turned out that there was no mountain, no magical blue stone, no wings, no loving wind, only cold grey fog.

'I want the Little Cloud to have wings', said Olia quietly. Then I understood what the matter was. I told Olia my own fairy tale about the faraway mountain, the magical blue stone, and a girl named Olia.

'Is it true?' asked Olia with a mixture of joy and anxiety.

'Yes, it is true, Olia ... '

Joy bloomed in the child's eyes like a wildflower.

I bring up this incident because it illustrates the subtle influence we can have on a group of children. We live in the age of knowledge. Every object, every phenomenon has an origin and a cause. Everything is becoming understandable, knowable, subject to natural laws. But we must not forget that alongside the unbreakable natural laws of the surrounding world there exists the world of childhood. Children discover the world and their peers, their teachers and their parents, in their own way. Their thoughts are directed to the world of reality on the wings of a fairy tale. And so, when a white cloud becomes just a cluster of grey drops of moisture, the world of childhood is dimmed, and a child's thinking is crippled. When we impoverish the world of childhood, we close children's eyes to people, making their entry into society more difficult.

As soon as children cross the school threshold, they are drawn towards school and their peers, because they want to collectively experience the incomparable emotions that a fairy tale evokes. They are drawn towards their teachers because it is from them that they hear fairy tales, listening with bated breath. Teachers are remembered for the rest of a child's life when they enter the child's spiritual life primarily as storytellers. Heartfelt memories of their class take root in children's emotional memories when they gather in the classroom on a quiet evening, sitting close to each other, listening to a fairy tale, while outside the window the winter dusk descends, or a quiet summer night reigns.

Fairy tales, games, imagination—these are life-giving wellsprings of children's thinking, of noble feelings and emotions. ... Language, with all its subtle nuances, enters a child's consciousness through fairytale imagery, becoming a part of a child's spiritual life and a way

of expressing their thoughts and feelings. Without fairy tales—tales that are bright and alive, tales that capture a child’s thoughts and feelings—it is impossible to imagine children’s thinking and children’s speech as the first step in developing human thinking and speech.

Fairy tales are inseparable from beauty, and foster the development of aesthetic sensibilities, without which, in turn, nobility of soul, as well as empathy, are impossible. Through fairy tales, children discover the world not only with their reason, but also with their hearts. And not only discover, but also respond to the events and phenomena of the surrounding world, developing their own notions of good and evil. From fairy tales children develop their first conceptions of justice and injustice.

Dear friend and educator! Do not deprive children of seeing the world reflected in the magical mirror of fairy tales. If you wish your students to become rational, curious and intelligent, if your aim is to educate them to be sensitive to the subtlest variations in other people’s thoughts and emotions—educate, awaken and inspire their minds with the beauty of words and thoughts, the beauty of their native language, whose magical power is revealed first and foremost in fairy tales. Fairy tales are the cradle of thought. Structure children’s education in such a way that they treasure heartfelt memories of this cradle for the rest of their lives ...

Whenever I am asked how I compose fairy tales with children, I am reminded of my Grandma Mariia. When I think of my childhood, I see her black eyes and feel the magic of her fairy tales. At the time, it appeared to me that Grandma was witnessing the fairy tale unfold: her gaze was directed into the faraway steppe or the dense leaves of the orchard, into the evening twilight or a white blizzard. I used to dream that one day I would finally catch a glimpse of that place where Grandma watched the tale unfold and would learn myself to see things that were miraculous, fairytale, extraordinary ...

It is a warm summer evening. The first star appears in the blue sky. Today the children are coming to see me: pre-schoolers, first-graders and second-graders. We sit beneath a hundred-year-old oak tree. The village falls silent. The steppe begins to slumber. Mysterious sounds drift to us from the orchard. The lake is asleep. The whole world around us is sleeping, except for a star shining in the sky and a cricket chirping in the field.

This is our School Beneath the Blue Sky. Children enter a fairytale world. On these beautiful summer evenings, we become poets—we compose fairy tales. Everything that we see appears to us in these magical hours as if part of a fairy tale. Our School Beneath the Blue Sky is a wellspring of living thought and speech, to which I lead the children each day, so that they can become people with big hearts, and intelligent, compassionate, and wise thinkers.

For thirty-five years I have touched their hearts with words. Decades of work—not easy, but joyful—have convinced me that fairy tales and art are the most sensitive and the gentlest way of connecting with a child. Fairy tales are the childhood of thought. They make the world of childhood bright and interesting.

We wrote thousands of tales. Who is the author? That magical Ukrainian night, several generations of little children and I: we were all creators of those tales of the School Beneath the Blue Sky.

I tell you tales. They are created spontaneously. Every one of us—the children and I—becomes a poet in these magical hours. If I cannot find the sparkling word I need, the children help me. We have composed thousands of fairy tales. Our creativity is not something unique or extraordinary. It is accessible to every teacher and every student, because all children are poets if their teacher will but lead them into the world of creativity.

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