

Synopsis for *My Heart I Give to Children* by Vasily Sukhomlinsky

2-line Summary:

My Heart I Give to Children - an inspiring account of a teacher's work with young children in a community recovering from the trauma of war.

Short Synopsis:

My Heart I Give to Children is an inspiring account of a Ukrainian teacher's holistic approach to the education of thirty-one young children in a rural community recovering from the trauma of war. The book describes extracurricular work during a preschool year and the following four years of primary education.

Medium Synopsis:

My Heart I Give to Children is an inspiring account of a teacher's work with thirty-one young children in a rural community recovering from the trauma of war. The book describes extracurricular work during a preschool year and the following four years of primary education. Vasily Sukhomlinsky was the principal of a combined primary and secondary school in central Ukraine. He used excursions into the surrounding countryside, relationships with members of the local community, and a multitude of practical work activities to stimulate children's wonder, curiosity and imagination, to build their health and resilience, and to develop empathy for others.

Long Synopsis:

***'Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons,
It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth.'***

With these words from Walt Whitman's 'Song of the Open Road' Vasily Sukhomlinsky closes his account of how he educated young children in a Ukrainian village during the aftermath of the Second World War.

This very readable translation of an educational classic is the best possible introduction to the work of Vasily Sukhomlinsky (1918-1970), an outstanding educator whose work is even more relevant today than it was fifty years ago.

Sukhomlinsky was principal of the same rural school in Pavlysh, central Ukraine, for twenty-two years. His remarkable work attracted thousands of visitors, some of whom travelled from the length and breadth of the Soviet Union and beyond to see his school with their own eyes. The following comments from two visiting principals are indicative of the impression the school made on educators.

"Pavlysh Secondary School should be renamed a university! We say this quite seriously: a feeling of wonder and admiration overwhelms anyone who with the slightest love for children and schools." (V.A. Karakovsky)

"I have spent only one day in this remarkable school ... but I have learnt as much as I did in four years at teachers college." (M. Manukian)

Not content with a purely administrative role as principal, Sukhomlinsky wanted a class of his own, so he could continue to be a teacher, and share his experience with his staff. He asked the parents in his area to send their children to school a year early, so he could work with a preschool group. *My Heart I Give to Children* describes his work with that group of children over a five year period, during the experimental preschool year and the four years of primary schooling that followed. Sukhomlinsky used excursions into the surrounding countryside, relationships with members of the local community, and a multitude of practical work activities to stimulate children's wonder, curiosity and imagination, to build their health and resilience, and to develop empathy for others.

My Heart I Give to Children was many years ahead of its time. It addresses issues such as our relationship with nature, how to nurture children's souls in the face of the sometimes negative influences of mass media, how to help children develop empathy for others, how schools can develop strong relationships with families, how children's brains function and develop, how to foster an intrinsic love for learning, and how to support children who struggle to acquire skills in literacy and numeracy. The work is addressed to school principals and teachers, and anyone interested in the upbringing of young children. It is the sort of work that will remind teachers why they took up the profession.

5 Points of Interest about the Book:

1. Sukhomlinsky rose to prominence in the Soviet Union during the period of relative liberalism known as the 'Khrushchev thaw', which came to an end with the deposing of Khrushchev in 1964. During the late 1960s, when editorial restrictions were tightened, Sukhomlinsky had difficulty getting *My Heart I Give to Children* accepted for publication. Through contacts in East Germany he managed to secure its publication in a German translation in 1968, and it was finally published in Russian, the language in which it was written, in 1969.
2. *My Heart I Give to Children* went on to become Sukhomlinsky's most popular work, selling millions of copies in 30 languages.
3. The children described in *My Heart I Give to Children* are real students, though their names have been modified to protect their identities.
4. The 2012 Russian language edition of *My Heart I Give to Children*, prepared by Sukhomlinsky's daughter, is based on Sukhomlinsky's original 1966 manuscript, and differs significantly from the first edition of 1969. It contains less material of an ideological nature, more information about the students' family backgrounds, and more of Sukhomlinsky's original thoughts, including references to Freud and to the American poet Walt Whitman. Alan Cockerill's new translation of the work is the first to be based on this 2012 edition. Two earlier English language translations are Holly Smith's translation, published in 1981 by Progress Press in Moscow, and Robert Weiss's abridged translation, published in 2003 by Laurelhurst Publications, Eagle Point, Oregon.
5. *My Heart I Give to Children* was many years ahead of its time. Sukhomlinsky touches on many current themes: the role of play in early childhood education; neuroscience, the development of a child's brain, and the role of the brain in learning; the importance of emotional engagement in learning; how to strengthen

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ties between school and family; the importance of health checks and screening before students commence school; the role of concrete experiences and excursions in language development and the acquisition of literacy and numeracy; and the development of resilience, social skills and empathy.

Book Details and Purchase Information

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