

Education as an Art

Bulletin of the Rudolf Steiner Association

Vol. 25, No. 1 - Autumn 1965

YOU CANNOT PICK A DANDELION

By Arthur P. Moor

"Isn't it wonderful," said the teacher, "when you go out into the woods and fields, to see what strange and beautiful things are coming up out of the ground! Trees and flowers, grass and bushes, and all kinds of plants, no two alike, with all sorts of different shapes and colors - have you looked closely at some of these?"

Certainly they had. They were normal youngsters, nine-, ten-, and eleven-year olds, naturally interested in anything they could push, pull, touch, lift, examine, taste, hear, or smell.

"Tell me what you have seen," said the teacher. In no time they had recalled berry-bushes, Indian pipes, Jack-in-the-pulpits, many kinds of trees with commentary on which were best for climbing -and a variety of field flowers and stinging nettles.

"Well," said the teacher, "I wonder if any of you know about something I saw the other day. If you know the name of it, don't say it, but raise your hand if you think you know. Walking across a field I saw a slender stem coming up about nine or ten inches from a small plant, and on top of the stem a little ball of white, fluffy stars. If you pick the stem and blow, *whoof*, they scatter into a whole galaxy of stars." There were shining eyes and eager hands raised —

"DON'T SAY IT!" said the teacher. "But I wonder if any of you know what was there before the ball of stars appeared? If so, what did it look like?"

"There was a little yellow flower, with lots of tiny petals all crowded together," said one.

"It looked something like a little sunflower, only there was no brown center," said another. "It was all full of the little petals, like an aster or a chrysanthemum."

"Right!" said the teacher. "And what was it like before that yellow flower opened?"

"It looked like a little umbrella, upside down and almost closed, with a yellow lining showing," said a girl, holding out one hand, palm up, thumb and finger tips together making a bud-like form.

"Right!" said the teacher. "And what was it like before that? Somebody else."

"A tight little cone-shaped green bud," said a boy, making a tighter bud with his fingers, lower down, remembering the stem was then not so high.

By this time some were fairly bursting to name it. "No," said the teacher. "Don't name it yet. But what was it like before that?"

"Just a little bunch of leaves coming out from the center, a sort of green rosette," said a girl.

"And before that?"

"Just a tiny little bit of green coming up out of the dirt!"

"Right!" said the teacher. "Now what do you call all of this?"

"DANDELION!" they exploded in chorus.

"YES!" said the teacher. "Do you like dandelions?" he continued. Of course, they liked dandelions. Who doesn't enjoy the green buds with yellow linings, the cheery gold blossoms scattered among the grass, and the marvelous airy globes of elfin stars - until he has acquired a prejudice, and learned to resent them as an intruder in lawns?

"Did you ever pick dandelions?" Yes, they had all picked dandelions.

"No you haven't!" said the teacher. *"You cannot pick a dandelion! It is impossible to pick a dandelion!* What was it you picked, Bill?"

"It was like what you said at first," said Bill. "The whole ball of fluff that you can blow."

"What! No yellow flower? No little bud, like the upside-down umbrella, nearly closed, with the yellow lining showing? No tight green cone? No cluster of green leaves all coming out from the center? —What was yours like, Anne?"

"I've picked whole bunches of dandelions as yellow flowers," said Anne. "You know, we used to take one and hold it under somebody's chin and say, 'Do you love butter?' Then we'd look to see if the yellow color was reflected from under their chin."

"But when you got a yellow flower, you couldn't blow any white stars from it, could you? And did any of you bother to pick dandelions when you only saw tight green buds, or the plant leaves? But you all said that a dandelion is really all of this. Whatever you picked, you only got a fragment of something.

"You cannot really pick a dandelion —for a dandelion is not a thing that exists all at once. It is a *performance*. And it only happens when the sun and earth, the sky and water are all working together. The pattern may be in the seed, as the pattern of music is in the score, but it doesn't come to life till the players play it, or the singers sing it. The score becomes music only as the players and singers pour themselves into the performance, just as the sun and earth and air and water pour themselves into a dandelion. And every plant, and every living thing is really a world performance —even you."

They were suddenly quiet for a moment.

This was the first lesson in botany.

"Every living thing is a world performance." This is the heart of it a realization that illuminates not only botany but every human life and action.

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Dr. Moor, a retired editorial consultant for The World Book Encyclopedia, is also a former Waldorf School parent. His article is reprinted with kind permission from *The Freeman*, April 1964.