

文具盒里的三层小楼

三年级以前，我的文具盒是一个大口袋。所有东西都躺在同一个格子里，铅笔和橡皮滚在一起，尺子斜着插进来，拉链常常拉不上。上课要用的时候，我就把手伸进去搅一搅，摸到什么用什么。有一回老师让我上台用直尺画线段，我在盒子里摸了半分钟，底下的同学开始笑，我的耳朵热了，尺子还是倒着被我拿上去的。

四年级换了新文具盒，它里面自带两层：一个主格，一个用拉链隔开的薄层，主格里还有一条松紧带。开学第一晚，我趴在桌上研究它，忽然觉得它像我们楼下那座三层小楼。我就给文具们分了楼层：靠门的一楼住我每天用得最多的东西，两支削好的铅笔、橡皮，手一伸就够得着；二楼住改错要用的东西，一把短尺、一支备用铅笔，插在松紧带上；顶楼的薄层住不常用的，圆规、备用橡皮、还有妈妈多放的铅笔芯。从那天起，圆规再也没扎到过我的手，因为它住在最里面。

分完楼层的第二天，发生了一件小事。数学课要画图形，老师话音刚落，我的尺子已经从二楼抽出来了，前后不到三秒。以前同样的动作，我要在主格里翻十几秒。那节课我画得比平时快，下课还帮同桌找到了他的三角板。

不过新的麻烦也来了。文具盒里东西住得整齐，可是会添新住户。美术课发下来的水彩笔头、科学课捡的小石头、同学给的贴纸，都会被我顺手塞进盒子。不到一个月，一楼又被饼干渣和纸屑占领了。我妈提醒我，小楼也要有人打扫。我们班的黄老师正好把每周五放学前三分钟定成全班整理时间。我就用这三分钟做三件事：把不属于文具盒的东西全部掏出来，纸屑扔进垃圾桶；把一楼二楼的东西按位置摆回去；最后试一遍每样东西闭着眼能不能摸到。摸不到的，就给它重新找个楼层。

坚持每周清理以后，我的文具盒再也没鼓起来过。最明显的好处出现在期末考试。考数学那天，我提前把笔和尺子按楼层摆好，开考铃响的时候，别的人在倒文具盒，我直接开始写名字。那一场我做完以后还剩下八分钟，检查出两道计算错。

现在谁问我文具盒怎么收拾，我就带他看我的小楼。一楼靠门住常用的，二楼住改错要用的，顶楼住偶尔才用的，每周五打扫一次。文具住得踏实，我上课就不用为它们分心。这是我四年级学会的一件事，很小，但是管用。

The Three-Story Building in My Pencil Case

Before fourth grade, my pencil case was one big bag. Everything lay in the same compartment, pencils rolling against erasers, a ruler jammed in sideways, the zipper rarely closing. In class I would plunge my hand in and stir, using whatever I touched. Once the teacher asked me to draw a line segment on the board with a straight ruler. I fumbled inside the case for half a minute while the class below started to laugh. My ears burned, and I carried the ruler up upside down.

In fourth grade I got a new case with two built-in levels: a main compartment, a

thin zippered layer, and an elastic strap inside. On the first night I lay on the desk studying it, and it suddenly looked like the three-story building downstairs from my home. So I assigned floors to my stationery. The ground floor by the door housed what I used most every day, two sharpened pencils and my eraser, within instant reach. The second floor housed correction tools, a short ruler and a spare pencil, clipped onto the elastic strap. The top thin layer housed the occasional ones, the compass, a spare eraser, and the pencil leads my mother added. From that day the compass never pricked my hand again, because it lived at the very back.

Something small happened the day after the move-in. In math class, before the teacher finished her sentence about drawing shapes, my ruler was already out of the second floor, under three seconds. The same action used to take me a dozen seconds of digging. I finished the drawing faster than usual that day, and even helped my deskmate find his set square.

But a new trouble came along. A tidy case keeps attracting new tenants: watercolor pen caps from art class, a pebble from science class, stickers from classmates, all shoved in on the spot. In less than a month the ground floor was overrun with cookie crumbs and paper scraps. My mother reminded me that even a building needs cleaning. Our teacher, Ms. Huang, had just set the last three minutes of every Friday as class tidying time. I used those three minutes for three things: pull out everything that did not belong and throw the scraps away; put the ground and second floor items back in place; then test, eyes closed, whether I could find each thing. Anything I could not find got a new floor.

After I kept up the weekly cleaning, my case never bulged again. The clearest payoff came at final exams. On math exam day I set my pens and ruler on their floors before the bell. While others were dumping their cases out, I wrote my name right away. I finished with eight minutes to spare and caught two calculation mistakes.

Now when anyone asks how I keep my pencil case tidy, I show them my little building. The ground floor by the door for daily tools, the second floor for correction tools, the top floor for the occasional ones, and one cleaning every Friday. The stationery lives steadily, so my mind stays on the lesson. It is a small thing I learned in fourth grade, and it works.