

窗子是一本书的第一页

以前每次写作文，我都咬着笔杆数格子。三年级下学期，马老师布置了一样作业：这周下一个雨天，观察雨，写观察日记，写你看见的，不许写下雨了，真美啊。我当场就傻了，雨不就是雨吗，有什么可看的？

那个雨天我趴在窗台上，按老师说的先看雨丝。看了五分钟我才发现，雨丝不是直着掉的。风一吹，它们整片整片地斜过去，像有人拿一把特别大的扫帚从天上往地上扫。雨丝落在空调外机的铁皮上，会溅起一层小白花，一层刚碎，另一层又开起来。我拿铅笔把这些记在草稿纸上，手比脑子快，这是头一回写作文不卡壳。

再看楼下的路。我发现了三件事。第一，撑黑伞的人和撑花伞的人走路不一样，黑伞压得低，走得快；花伞举得高，伞沿上还挂着小风车，转。第二，有个叔叔没带伞，把公文包顶在头上跑，公文包是方的，他跑起来像一只会飞的箱子。第三，一个老奶奶牵着小孙子过水洼，小孙子专门挑有水的地方踩，老奶奶嘴上说他，手里却把伞往他那边低低地罩过去。我在草稿纸上写：伞会说话。写完自己愣了一下，这句话是我自己想出来的。

那个星期我写了四篇观察日记，最长了半页。周五作文课，马老师在班里念了我的日记，念到会飞的箱子，全班笑翻了。她在黑板上写了一句话：不是雨没东西写，是你没凑近看。

后来我养成了一个习惯，只要下雨，先跑向窗台，看够十分钟再干别的。我的观察日记写满了一个本子，里面全是雨：雨丝怎么斜，水洼怎么一圈一圈长大，伞面上怎么藏心事。上个学期考试作文写《一件小事》，我用了老奶奶罩伞那一幕，写完自己检查了两遍，没有一句空话。

现在我觉得，窗子是一本书的第一页，雨天是这本书里最好翻的一页。摘抄本上的好词好句是别人嚼过的，窗外看见的才是自己的。观察这件事，说穿了就一句话：别嫌眼前的东西普通，凑近三分钟，它就开始给你送素材了。

The Window Is Page One

Before, every time I had to write a composition, I gnawed my pencil and counted the grid squares. In the second term of Grade Three, Teacher Ma assigned something unusual: this week find a rainy day, observe the rain, and write an observation journal. Write what you actually see. You are not allowed to write, It rained, how beautiful. I froze on the spot. Rain is just rain, what is there to look at?

On that rainy day I leaned on the windowsill and, as the teacher said, watched the threads of rain first. After five minutes I noticed that the rain does not fall straight down. When the wind blows, whole sheets of it slant sideways, as if someone were sweeping sky to ground with an enormous broom. Where the rain strikes the tin of the air-conditioner unit, it splashes up a layer of tiny white flowers; one layer shatters and another blooms. I penciled these things onto scratch paper, my hand

faster than my head, and for the first time writing a composition did not jam.

Then I watched the road downstairs and noticed three things. First, people with black umbrellas walk differently from people with flowered ones: the black umbrella sits low and moves fast; the flowered one is held high, with a little pinwheel hanging from its rim, spinning. Second, a man without an umbrella ran with his briefcase over his head; the briefcase is square, and running, he looked like a flying box. Third, a grandmother led her little grandson across the puddles, and the boy deliberately stepped where the water was. The grandmother scolded him with her mouth while her hand lowered the umbrella to shelter him from the rain. I wrote on the scratch paper: umbrellas can talk. After writing it I paused for a second. That sentence was mine.

That week I wrote four observation journal entries, the longest half a page. On Friday's composition class, Teacher Ma read my journal aloud to the class, and when she reached the flying box, the whole room roared with laughter. She wrote one line on the blackboard: it is not that rain has nothing to write about, it is that you never looked close enough.

After that I formed a habit: whenever it rains, I run to the windowsill first and watch for a full ten minutes before doing anything else. My observation journal filled a whole notebook, all of it rain: how the threads slant, how a puddle grows ring by ring, how an umbrella hides someone's thoughts. Last term, on the exam composition titled One Small Thing, I used the scene of the grandmother lowering her umbrella, and when I finished I checked it twice; not one empty sentence in it.

Now I think a window is page one of a book, and a rainy day is the best page to turn to. The good words in an excerpt notebook were chewed by someone else; what you see outside the window is yours. Observation, plainly said, is this: do not dismiss the ordinary thing in front of you. Lean in for three minutes, and it starts delivering material to you.

水洼里的天气预报

我写观察日记，起因是一场赌。同桌巍巍说，你作文最差，观察日记你撑不过三天。我不服，给那个学期的雨天排了号，雨一、雨二，一直排到雨十，每个雨天写一页，一页也不许糊弄。

雨一，我看窗外的雨丝。雨丝没法数，我就把带刻度的橡皮尺按在玻璃上，看雨滴往下滑。大滴滑得快，一条直线冲到底；小滴磨磨蹭蹭，滑到一半撞在一起，合成一个大滴，再一起冲下去。我在日记里写：玻璃上的雨滴是一场赛跑，大滴总是赢。写完自己觉得好笑，可是老师批了四个字：观察很准。

从雨三开始，我把眼睛挪到校门口的水洼上，给它画变化图。雨三，水洼只有硬币大；雨五，它有镜子大了，能照出红绿灯，红灯绿灯在水里晃，比在天上还好看；雨七，一个一年级小孩一脚踩进去，波纹一圈圈散开，撞到路沿又弹回来。我在每页日记角上画一个小水洼，从硬币画到镜子。巍巍翻到我的本子，说你这哪是日记，是天气预报。

雨八，我给行人画像。送外卖的叔叔穿一件蓝雨衣，雨衣后摆被风掀起一角，像一面旗，他的前轮压过水洼，水甩到腰那么高；一个打黑伞的叔叔手插在兜里走，伞尖一直点着脚前的地，像怕踩到谁的影子；还有一个穿斗篷式雨衣的老爷爷，走得极慢，脚跟先落地再落脚尖，落一步，抖一下袖口的水。我把他们一个一个写进日记，写完那一页，我觉得自己认识了一群新朋友，虽然我叫不出他们的名字。

雨十正好撞上月考，作文题就是下雨天。别人咬着笔杆，我脑子里全是存货：雨滴赛跑、水洼镜子、雨衣旗子、抖袖口的老爷爷，写都写不完，还得忍痛删掉一个。卷子发下来，作文分旁边批了一句：细节准得像天气预报。我把这句话念给巍巍听，他认赌服输，还问我借本子。

这十页日记教会我的事，后来我想了很久才说明白。坚持不是每天硬写一页，是每次多盯一分钟。素材像存钱，先存才有得花，空着本子去考场，取不出任何东西。现在我一下雨还是忍不住去看窗上的雨滴、门口的水洼、路上的人，这个毛病已经改不掉，我也不打算改。

The Weather Forecast in a Puddle

I started keeping an observation journal because of a bet. My deskmate Weiwei said, Your compositions are the worst in class, an observation journal will not last three days with you. I refused to accept that. I numbered the rainy days of that term, Rain One, Rain Two, all the way to Rain Ten, and on every rainy day I wrote one page, and not one page was allowed to be sloppy.

On Rain One I watched the threads of rain outside the window. Rain threads cannot be counted, so I pressed a rubber ruler with markings against the glass and watched the drops slide down. Big drops raced, shooting straight to the bottom; small ones dawdled, collided halfway, merged into one big drop, and plunged together. I wrote in my journal: raindrops on glass are a footrace, and the big ones always win. I thought it was funny when I wrote it, but the teacher marked four characters: observation is accurate.

From Rain Three on, I moved my eyes to the puddle at the school gate and drew its change chart. On Rain Three the puddle was the size of a coin; on Rain Five it grew to the size of a mirror, reflecting the traffic light, the red and green wobbling in the water, prettier than in the sky; on Rain Seven a first grader stomped in, and rings spread out, hit the curb, and bounced back. In the corner of every journal page I drew a little puddle, from coin size to mirror size. Weiwei flipped through my notebook and said, This is not a journal, this is a weather forecast.

On Rain Eight I drew portraits of pedestrians. The delivery man wore a blue raincoat, and the wind lifted one corner of its back hem like a flag; his front wheel crossed a puddle and water flew up to his waist. A man with a black umbrella walked with hands in pockets, the tip of the umbrella always pointing at the ground before his feet, as if afraid of stepping on someone's shadow. Another old man in a cape raincoat walked very slowly, heel first, then toe, and with each step he shook the water off his cuff. I wrote them into my journal one by one, and when that page was done I felt I had made a crowd of new friends, even though I did not know their names.

Rain Ten landed exactly on the monthly exam, and the composition topic was a rainy day. Others gnawed their pencils while my head was full of savings: the raindrop race, the puddle mirror, the raincoat flag, the grandpa shaking his cuff. I could not write it all down and had to cut one detail out in pain. When the paper came back, beside the composition score was a line: details as accurate as a weather forecast. I read it to Weiwei. He admitted he lost the bet and asked to borrow my notebook.

It took me a long time to put into words what those ten pages taught me. Persistence is not forcing out a page a day; it is watching one minute longer every time. Material is like saving money: deposit first, then spend. Walk into an exam with an empty notebook and there is nothing to withdraw. Now, whenever it rains, I still cannot help watching the drops on the window, the puddle at the gate, the people on the road. I have this habit for good, and I do not plan to cure it.

借来的那本雨天日记

班级图书角有一本本子，牛皮纸封面，上面写着五个字：雨天观察记。图书角开放两个星期，别人都在换小说、换漫画，没有人翻它。星期五轮到我看图书角，我把它抽出来翻开，第一页写着：雨丝不是直着下的，是被风吹斜的，像有人从天上往地上扫叶子。

写这本子的人叫林小满，坐我前面，平时话不多。我往后翻才知道，这是苏老师上学期布置的作业，每人写观察日记，大多数同学写两三天就停了，林小满写满了整个本子。他记窗外的雨丝，说大雨滴在玻璃上赛跑，小滴落在大滴身上，两个合成一个，赢的总是大滴。他记楼下的路：有个叔叔把纸箱顶在头上跑，纸箱湿了一角，他跑起来一高一低，像一只漏气的风筝；卖菜阿姨收摊时把塑料布抖开，水珠飞出去半人高，在路灯底下亮成一片雾。我坐在图书角看了四十分钟，忘了登记。

真正让我服气的是互评课。苏老师把林小满的日记投影到屏幕上，念他给行人写的一段：修车摊的老爷爷雨天不收摊，穿一件补了三处的雨衣，手上有油也有雨，他擦手不用毛巾，在雨衣

上蹭两下就接着拧螺丝。念完班里安静了几秒，然后有人小声说，我天天路过那个摊子，怎么没看见。苏老师说，这就是观察和不观察的区别。

那节课后，那本牛皮纸封面成了图书角最抢手的书，排队借的人排到隔壁班。轮到我第二次借它时，我在最后一页看到林小满写的话：以前我觉得写作文难，是本子空着去要东西；现在每天路上捡一点，本子满了，作文自己会写。

受这本子影响，我也开始写观察日记，写到现在第九篇。我学他的样子先看雨丝，再看来往的人。上周下雨，我记下公交站台上的事：一个姐姐把伞倾向旁边抱孩子的阿姨，自己的书包湿了半边，她一直盯着站牌上的到站时间，好像没发现。我回家给妈妈念，妈妈说了句，你以前可说不出这种话。

现在我的观察日记本也用了小半本。我的心得是：素材不在远处，就在每天路过的地方，区别只在于你停没停那三分钟。一本没人借的日记教会了全班这件事，我觉得它比任何一本畅销小说都值钱。

The Rain Diary I Borrowed

In our class reading corner there was a notebook with a kraft paper cover and five characters on it: Rain Observation Notes. The corner was open for two weeks while everyone swapped novels and comics, and nobody touched it. On Friday it was my turn to mind the corner. I pulled it out and opened the first page, which read: the threads of rain do not fall straight, the wind slants them, as if someone were sweeping leaves from sky to ground.

The writer was Lin Xiaoman, who sat in front of me and rarely talked. Flipping backward I learned that this had been Teacher Su's assignment last term: everyone keep an observation journal. Most students wrote two or three days and quit; Lin Xiaoman filled the whole notebook. He recorded the rain threads outside the window: big drops raced down the glass, small drops landed on big ones, the two merged into one, and the big ones always won. He recorded the road downstairs: a man ran with a cardboard box over his head, one corner of the box got wet, so he ran high on one side and low on the other, like a leaking kite; a vegetable seller shook out a plastic sheet at closing time, and the water flew half a person high, shining like a sheet of fog under the street lamp. I sat in the reading corner for forty minutes and forgot to register the books.

What truly convinced me was the peer review class. Teacher Su projected Lin Xiaoman's journal onto the screen and read his paragraph about pedestrians: the old man at the bicycle repair stand did not close up on rainy days, wearing a raincoat patched in three places, his hands greasy and wet at once, and he dried them not on a towel but by rubbing twice on the raincoat before going back to twisting screws. When

she finished, the room went quiet for a few seconds, then someone whispered, I pass that stand every day, how did I never see it. Teacher Su said, That is the difference between observing and not observing.

After that class, the kraft paper notebook became the most contested book in the reading corner, with a queue reaching the next class. When I borrowed it a second time, I found words on the last page from Lin Xiaoman: I used to think compositions were hard, like going to an empty notebook and demanding things from it; now I pick up a little on the road every day, and when the notebook fills up, the composition writes itself.

Influenced by that notebook, I started my own observation journal, now up to ninth entry. I copied his method: rain threads first, then the people passing by. Last week on a rainy day I recorded what happened at the bus stop: a young woman tilted her umbrella toward a mother holding a baby, and her own schoolbag got wet on one side, but she kept staring at the arrival time on the sign, as if she had not noticed. At home I read it to my mother, and she said, You could never have said such a thing before.

My own journal is now a good part full. My lesson is this: material is not far away, it lies on the road you pass every day, and the only difference is whether you stopped for those three minutes. One notebook nobody wanted to borrow taught the whole class this, and I think it is worth more than any bestseller.