

花的名字

周六早上，公园刚开门，进门口的花坛就围了不少人。一丛黄色的花，花瓣薄得像绸子，在雪松绿篱前站成一排。儿子松开我的手，蹲在花坛前，冷不丁地问：妈妈，这朵花叫什么？

我愣了一下。花就在眼前，风一吹一晃，我却说不出一个字。我只记得小时候春天，我妈指过类似的花，说这叫萱草，可眼前这朵有六片花瓣，颜色更亮，多半不是同一种。我蹲下来，老老实实告诉儿子：我也不知道。咱们一起查吧。

他一点也不失望，反而更来劲了，自己站起来催我掏手机。我把那朵花拍了个仔细，花瓣、叶子的形状、整片花丛，都用拍照识别去搜。屏幕转了几秒，结果出来了：鸢尾，鸢尾科，花期四月到五月。儿子把这几个字一个一个念出来，然后跑回花坛边，蹲着数那朵花的花瓣：一、二、三……六。他像报喜一样回头喊我：真的是六片！

回家的路上他一直说个不停：为什么叫鸢尾？为什么叶子像剑？这些问题我答不全，就跟他约好，回家接着查。到家我们翻出去年买的那本《野花野外图鉴》，找到鸢尾那一页，上面有一行字：叶似剑形，故名。他用手指顺着图上的叶子描了一遍，点点头，一副似懂非懂的样子。

睡前，他翻出一张硬卡纸，要我帮他做卡片：正面画一朵黄色的花，背面写鸢尾、六片花瓣、喜欢太阳。他把卡片贴在书桌角上，紧挨着去年做的蒲公英卡片。

看着那张卡片我忽然想：我像他这么大的时候，也蹲在花坛前问过我妈花的名字。我妈答上来一些，答不上来的，就那么糊过去了。几十年过去，那些没名字的花还在路边一年一年地开。现在我儿子蹲在同样的地方，这一次，我们不糊过去。花的名字像一扇小门，推开它，后面是一整个天地，跟着他走进去，什么时候都不晚。

The Name of the Flower

On Saturday morning, the park had just opened, and the flower bed by the entrance was already crowded with people. A cluster of yellow flowers, petals thin as silk, stood in a row in front of the cedar hedge. My son let go of my hand, crouched in front of the flower bed, and asked out of nowhere: Mom, what is this flower called?

I froze. The flower was right in front of me, swaying in the wind, and I could not give it a name. I only remembered that in spring my mother had pointed at a similar flower and said it was a daylily, but this one had six petals and a brighter color, so it was probably not the same. I squatted down and told my son honestly: I do not know either. Let us look it up together.

He was not disappointed at all. On the contrary, he seemed more excited, stood up and urged me to take out the phone. I photographed the flower carefully, the petals, the shape of the leaves, and the whole patch, then used the photo search to identify

it. The screen spun for a few seconds, and the result came out: iris, family Iridaceae, blooming from April to May. My son read the words out one by one, then ran back to the flower bed and crouched down to count the petals: one, two, three... six. He turned and shouted to me like delivering good news: It really is six!

On the way home he kept talking: Why is it called iris? Why are the leaves like swords? I could not answer everything, so I promised him we would keep looking when we got home. As soon as we arrived, we took out the Wild Flowers Field Guide we had bought last year and found the page about iris. One line read: the leaves are shaped like swords, hence the name. He traced the leaf on the picture with his finger and nodded, half understanding, half not.

Before bed, he found a piece of cardboard and asked me to help him make a card: a yellow flower on the front, and on the back the words iris, six petals, loves the sun. He stuck it at the corner of his desk, right next to last year's dandelion card.

Looking at that card, I suddenly thought: at his age, I also crouched in front of flower beds and asked my mother the names of flowers. She answered some, and the ones she could not answer I simply let go. Decades passed, and the flowers without names still bloom by the roadside year after year. Now my son is crouching in the same place, and this time we will not let it go. The name of a flower is like a small door. Push it open, and behind it is a whole world; walking in with him is never too late.

花名墙

周五的科学课，我带着孩子们走出教室，去校门口对面的大花坛。我备了教案，打算讲花的组成部分：萼片、花瓣、雄蕊、雌蕊。可到花坛跟前，教案就被孩子们放到一边去了。

他们围住花坛角上那一片紫色的花，问题一个接一个：老师，这花叫什么？老师，它为什么上面紫下面白？老师，蜜蜂会不会嫌花香？最后一个严一凡提的，全班哄笑，我没笑。我说：这是个好问题，咱们把它们都查了。

我其实留了一手：找学校花工老周借来一本卷了边的华北常见花草手册，还让孩子们用班级平板给花拍照。我们坐在槐树荫下，一页一页翻书。紫色的花找到了：鲁冰花，也叫羽扇豆，从国外来的，种在路边做观赏。念到从国外来的时候，孩子们发出一阵惊叹，好像那朵花忽然成了转学生。蜜蜂嫌不嫌气味，书里没有，我们把它记在问题单上，标成没解决。

回教室，孩子们坐不住，提议做一面墙。我给他们一张牛皮纸，他们自己分工：有的抄花名，有的画花，有的把我口述的外来名字拼上去。花名墙贴在教室后墙，上面有十一种花，三个没解决的问题，还有严一凡在角上写的一行字：蜜蜂，你真的不喜欢花的味道吗？

第二周，有孩子从家里带来一本书，把那个问题的答案找到了：蜜蜂不怕花的味道，倒是怕人身上香水的气味。我让严一凡把这行用红笔补到墙上，底下画了一只歪歪扭扭的蜜蜂。

后来我常想，那天的教案其实没讲完，花的组成部分是隔周才补上的，可孩子们记住了十一种花的名字，记住了书也有答不出的事，还记住了提问不会被笑话。好奇心不是教出来的，是孩子蹲在花坛边自己冒出来的。大人能做的，是当场接住它，认真地跟孩子一起把它查明白。

The Flower Name Wall

On Friday, the science class left the classroom with me, heading to the big flower bed across from the school gate. I had prepared a lesson plan about the parts of a flower: sepals, petals, stamens, and pistils. But the moment we reached the flower bed, the children set the plan aside.

They gathered around the purple flowers in the corner, and question followed question: Teacher, what is this flower called? Teacher, why is it purple on top and white below? Teacher, do bees mind the smell of flowers? The last one came from Yan Yifan. The whole class laughed, but I did not. I said: that is a good question. Let us look them all up together.

I had made one preparation in advance: I borrowed from Old Zhou, the school gardener, a dog-eared handbook of common flowers and plants of northern China, and the children photographed the flowers with the class tablet. We sat in the shade of a locust tree and turned the pages one by one. The purple flower was found: lupine, also called fan flower, brought from abroad and planted along roads for viewing. When I read the words brought from abroad, the children burst into sounds of wonder, as if the flower had suddenly become a transfer student. Whether bees mind the smell was not in the book, so we wrote it on the question sheet and marked it unsolved.

Back in the classroom, the children could not sit still and proposed making a wall. I gave them a sheet of kraft paper, and they divided the work themselves: some copied the flower names, some drew the flowers, some spelled out the foreign names I dictated. The flower name wall went up on the back wall, holding eleven kinds of flowers, three unsolved questions, and one line written by Yan Yifan in the corner: Bees, do you really dislike the smell of flowers?

The next week a child brought a book from home and found the answer: bees do not mind the smell of flowers; what they mind is the smell of perfume on people. I had Yan Yifan add that line to the wall in red pen, with a crooked little bee drawn under it.

I often think about that day afterward: we never finished the lesson plan; the

parts of a flower had to wait until the next week. Yet the children remembered eleven flower names, remembered that books cannot answer everything, and remembered that a question will not be laughed at. Curiosity is not taught into children; it rises by itself when they crouch beside a flower bed. What grown-ups can do is catch it on the spot and take it seriously, looking it up all the way through together with them.

女儿当小老师

上周末在公园，我看见女儿在给一个比她小的小孩讲花。她指着花坛边一棵开满粉白花的树，说这是海棠，西府海棠，花是香的，果子红了能吃，酸的。小小孩仰着头哦哦地应。女儿讲得有模有样，我在几步外站着，忽然想起一年前的同一个地方，也是这棵树，她问过我一个问題。

那天也是春天，她蹲在花坛边的草地上，抬头问我：爸爸，这棵树叫什么？我张口就来：桃花。她说不像，桃花没有这么白，也没有果子。我又看了看，说那就是梨花。她说梨花是纯白的，这个底下带粉。父女俩一人一句，谁也说服不了谁。最后她拍拍膝盖站起来，说：走，咱们查去。

我们就蹲在树底下查。她举着我的手机，够着树枝拍花，又蹲下去拍掉在地上的花和叶子，拍完还捡了一片完整的叶子夹在书里当标本。手机识别出来是西府海棠，她不信，又翻出公园门口的植物介绍牌，一块一块找，找到海棠那一块，指着学名那一行给我看。那天下午，我们在花坛边站了小半个钟头，路人都当我们在看花，其实我们在跟一块牌子较劲。

从那以后她上了瘾。小区里的玉兰、路边的连翘、绿化带里的红叶石楠，见一个问一个，问完就查，查完非给我讲一遍。有的名词我也记不住，她就第二天在饭桌上考我。我答不上来的时候，她学着我一年前的口气说：没关系，咱们查去。

所以今天，听见她给别的小孩讲海棠，我一点也没觉得稀奇。只有我自己知道，那些花名不是她背下来的，是我们蹲在花坛边、站在介绍牌前、翻着手机一页一页查出来的。她讲给那个小孩听的每一句，背后都站着一年前那个蹲在草地上提问的她，和答不上来话的我。

回去的路上她问我：爸爸，明年咱们还去那个花坛吗？我说去。她说那明年她就能讲更多花了。我看着窗外，春天正从路边的连翘枝上一朵一朵过去。陪孩子认花这件事，起头是一个问不出答案的问题，后头是一整条长长的路，而我们俩都还在路上。

My Daughter the Little Teacher

Last weekend in the park, I watched my daughter explaining flowers to a child younger than her. She pointed at a tree by the flower bed covered with pink-white blossoms and said: this is crabapple, West Prefab Crabapple, the flowers are fragrant, and the fruit turns red and is edible, sour. The little child looked up and

answered oh, oh. I stood a few steps away, and it suddenly struck me that a year earlier, in the same spot, by the same tree, she had asked me a question.

That day it was spring too. She crouched on the grass by the flower bed and looked up at me: Dad, what is this tree called? I blurted out: peach blossom. She said no, peach blossoms are not this white and do not bear fruit. I looked again and said then it is pear blossom. She said pear blossoms are pure white, and these have pink at the bottom. Father and daughter, one line each, neither convincing the other. Finally she brushed off her knees, stood up and said: come on, let us go look it up.

So we crouched under the tree and searched. She held up my phone, reaching toward the branches to photograph the flowers, then crouched to photograph the fallen flowers and leaves, and afterward picked up one whole leaf to press in a book as a specimen. The phone identified it as West Prefab Crabapple. Not trusting it, she went to find the plant information boards at the park gate, reading them one by one until she found the crabapple board, then pointed at the line of scientific names to show me. That afternoon we stood by the flower bed for nearly half an hour; passersby thought we were admiring the flowers, when really we were wrestling with an information board.

After that she got hooked. The magnolias in our neighborhood, the forsythia by the road, the red-tip photinia in the green belts, she asked about each one, looked each one up, and then insisted on explaining it to me. Some names I could not remember either, so at dinner the next day she quizzed me. When I could not answer, she copied my tone from a year ago: it is fine, let us go look it up.

So today, hearing her tell another child about crabapple, I was not surprised at all. Only I know that those flower names were not memorized by her; we found them crouching by flower beds, standing before information boards, turning phone pages one by one. Behind every sentence she told that little child stands the girl who once crouched on the grass asking questions, and the me who had no answer.

On the way home she asked: Dad, will we go to that flower bed again next year? I said yes. She said then next year she will be able to talk about even more flowers. I looked out the window, where spring was passing blossom by blossom along the forsythia branches by the road. Accompanying a child to learn flowers begins with a question nobody can answer, and behind it stretches a long, long road, and the two of us are still on it.