

楼下那棵银杏，我记了整整一年

三年级那会儿，每次写春天，我都要翻《好词好句》，抄一句春姑娘来了。五年级秋天，班主任布置了一个任务：每人选一个观察对象，记满一年。我想了半天，选了楼下那棵银杏，因为它每天都在，不用我跑远路。

第一页笔记只有一行：叶子黄了，风一吹就掉。妈妈看了一眼说，这一句谁都会写。我不服气，第二天特意站到树下往上看，又低头看地面。叶子边缘是一圈浅黄，黄得像是被火燎过；叶柄断开的地方有一点透明的汁；地上的叶子积了薄薄一层，踩上去的声音和踩水泥地不一样。那天我写了半页纸，写完自己读了一遍，确实和第一行不一样。

冬天我记树皮。树皮裂成一条条竖纹，缝里嵌着雪，雪落在树上化得比落在地上慢。我还数过树枝的分杈，发现它总是先分成两股，再各自分成两股。春天最难记。四月初芽才冒出一丁点绿，我蹲在树下看了好一会儿，在笔记里写：芽小得像米粒，绿得不敢大声。五月叶子长成巴掌大，我算了算，从米粒到巴掌，用了三十八天。

六年级上学期的作文写《窗外》，我把笔记里银杏发芽那一段搬了进去。老师当堂朗读，读完说了一句：这个绿是看出来的，不是抄出来的。那天放学，我绕到树下拍了拍它的干。

现在我的抽屉里躺着四本笔记，春芽、夏叶、秋落、冬皮，各一本。这一年给我最大的体会是：观察不是去找东西写，而是把日子过成素材。记录细节也不能只写叶子黄了，要写黄成什么样，像被火燎过，这就是黄的样子。我以前写作文爱编，编一个助人为乐的故事交上去；现在我明白了，编出来的东西自己都不信，看出来的东西不用编。以前我总抱怨没东西可写，其实东西一直在楼下站着，只是我以前从不抬头看它。接下来我还要记下去，看它把这四个季节再走一遍。

The Ginkgo Tree Below My Building: A Year of Notes

In Grade Three, every time I wrote about spring, I opened my book of good words and good sentences and copied one line: Miss Spring has arrived. In the autumn of Grade Five, our homeroom teacher gave us a task: each person picks one thing to observe and keeps notes for a full year. I thought for a long time and chose the ginkgo tree below my building, because it was there every day and I would not have to walk far.

The first page of my notes had only one line: the leaves turned yellow, and the wind blew them down. My mother took one look and said anyone could write that sentence. I was not convinced. The next day I stood right under the tree and looked up, then looked down at the ground. The edge of each leaf had a pale yellow ring, yellow as if scorched by fire; where the leaf stem broke off there was a bit of clear juice; the fallen leaves formed a thin layer, and walking on them sounded different from walking on concrete. That day I wrote half a page. I read it back myself, and it

really was different from that first line.

In winter I recorded the bark. It cracked into long vertical lines, snow settled in the cracks, and snow on the tree melted more slowly than snow on the ground. I also counted how the branches fork, and found that a branch always splits into two first, and then each half splits into two again. Spring was the hardest to record. In early April the buds pushed out just a point of green. I squatted under the tree and watched for a long while, then wrote in my notes: the buds are small as grains of rice, green too quietly to speak aloud. By May the leaves had grown to the size of a palm. I counted the days: from a grain of rice to a palm took thirty-eight days.

For the composition Out of My Window in the first term of Grade Six, I moved the paragraph about the ginkgo buds straight out of my notes. My teacher read it aloud in class, then said one sentence: this green was seen, not copied. After school that day I walked around to the tree and patted its trunk.

Now four notebooks lie in my drawer: spring buds, summer leaves, autumn fall, winter bark, one for each. The biggest lesson of this year is that observing is not hunting for something to write about; it is turning daily life into material. Recording details cannot stop at the leaves turned yellow. You have to write what kind of yellow it is, like a ring scorched by fire, and that is what yellow looks like. I used to invent stories for my compositions and hand in made-up tales of helping others. Now I understand that invented things do not even convince the writer, while things you have seen need no invention. I used to complain that I had nothing to write about. The material had been standing downstairs all along. I simply never looked up at it. I will keep recording, and watch this tree walk through the four seasons once more.

那节没在教室里的作文课

初一第一次月考作文，题目是《校园的冬天》。我在座位上坐了二十分钟，本子上只有两行：冬天来了，校园里很冷。我实在想不出第三行，冬天在我脑子里只有冷这一个字。

发下作文本那天，老师在评语里写：下节语文课，不上课，下楼。我们以为要去玩，到了操场边，老师让我们散开，每人找一处冬天的校园，看五分钟，不许说话。我走到花坛边。草全黄了，黄草底下压着去年秋天落下的梧桐叶，叶子一半烂了一半还硬着。花坛的水泥沿上有一层薄薄的霜，我用手指抹了一下，指尖先是凉，然后那点凉变成一小片湿。墙根的爬山虎只剩筋，一条一条贴在墙上，像谁把一把干面条按在了那里。风从领口灌进来，我缩了一下脖子，听见自己的鞋踩在冻硬的地面上，声音又干又脆。

回到教室，老师说，现在写，把你刚才摸到的、听到的、看见的都写进去。那一次我写了四

百多字，写完了自己都吃惊。我写爬山虎的干筋，写手指抹霜，写凉变成湿。同桌凑过来看，说，你怎么写得出烂了一半的叶子。我说，因为我看了它五分钟。

后来我把那天的经历变成了习惯。降温那天我会去摸一下栏杆，看它比平时凉多少；下雪前我注意天是什么颜色，云压得低不低，风里有没有一点冰碴。我发现季节不是四个字，季节是一堆细节：霜是薄的，风是灌进领口的，叶子是一半烂一半硬的。把这些细节记下来，作文里就有东西可放。

这次经历改变了我对写作的看法。以前我以为好作文靠好词好句，背得越多写得越好；现在我知道了，背来的句子是别人的，摸出来的细节是自己的。观察也不是看一眼那么简单，眼睛看颜色，手摸冷热，耳朵听声音，皮肤感觉风往哪里钻，五个地方一起记，细节才立得住。从那以后，我的作文本里再没有出现过校园里很冷这种句子。冷不冷，得让读者自己从霜、从干面条一样的爬山虎、从灌进领口的风里感觉到。这是我上中学后学到的最重要的一课，它不在课本里，在操场边的花坛旁。

The Composition Lesson We Did Not Spend in the Classroom

In the first monthly exam of seventh grade, the composition topic was Winter on Campus. I sat at my desk for twenty minutes with only two lines in my notebook: winter has come, and the campus is very cold. I could not think of a third line. In my head, winter had only one word: cold.

The day the notebooks came back, my teacher wrote in the margin: next Chinese class, no class. We go downstairs. We thought we were going to play. By the sports field, the teacher told us to spread out, each find one corner of winter on campus, look at it for five minutes, and not talk. I walked to the flower bed. The grass had gone fully yellow, and under the yellow grass lay plane tree leaves fallen last autumn, half rotted and half still stiff. On the concrete edge of the bed was a thin layer of frost. I wiped it with my finger. My fingertip turned cold first, and then that cold became a small patch of wet. The ivy on the wall base was left with only its veins, one by one pressed against the wall, as if someone had stuck a handful of dry noodles there. Wind poured in through my collar, I shrank my neck, and I heard my own shoes on the frozen ground, a dry, brittle sound.

Back in the classroom, the teacher said: write now, put in everything you just touched, heard, and saw. That time I wrote over four hundred characters, and I was surprised at myself. I wrote about the dry veins of the ivy, about wiping the frost with my finger, about cold turning into wet. My deskmate leaned over and asked how I could write a leaf half rotted. I said, because I looked at it for five minutes.

Later I turned that day into a habit. On a cold snap I touch the railing to see how much colder it is than usual. Before snow I notice what color the sky is, how low

the clouds hang, whether the wind carries tiny bits of ice. I discovered that the seasons are not four characters in a word; they are a pile of details: the frost is thin, the wind pours into your collar, the leaf is half rotten and half stiff. Write the details down, and your composition has something real to hold.

This experience changed how I see writing. I used to think good compositions came from good phrases, that the more you memorized the better you wrote. Now I know that memorized sentences belong to other people, while details you touched with your own hand belong to you. Observing is not just a glance, either. The eyes take the color, the hand takes the cold or warmth, the ears take the sound, the skin feels where the wind slips in. Record with all five at once, and the details stand up. Since then, a sentence like the campus is very cold has never appeared in my notebook again. Whether it is cold should be felt by the reader through the frost, the ivy like dry noodles, and the wind pouring into the collar. This is the most important lesson I have learned since middle school. It is not in the textbook. It is beside the flower bed by the sports field.

我的季节账本：惊蛰那天，我真的听见了雷

初二寒假，爷爷送我一个牛皮本子，说：往后每个节气，出去看一眼，回来记一笔。我那时正为作文发愁，老师总说我写的东西一看就是坐在屋里想出来的。我想，那就试试。

第一个节气是雨水。那天没下雨，我在本子上写：雨水那天没下雨，风里有土味。惊蛰我等了一天。第三天后半夜，雷真的响了，我从床上坐起来听，第一声闷，像有人在楼上滚一个木桶；第二声近，窗玻璃嗡了一下。我摸黑在本子上记：雷先闷后近，玻璃会响。第二天早上我翻书，书上说惊蛰始雷，我心想，书上这句话，我是用半夜坐起来换来的。

夏至那天中午，我按爷爷说的，在小区空地上站直，看自己的影子。影子缩在脚底下，短短一团，像踩着一顶黑帽子。我拿尺量了影子的长度，记在本子上。冬至再量，影子长出一大截，拖到身后的地砖缝上。两个数字并排写在账本两页上，谁也不用讲道理，一看就明白夏天太阳高、冬天太阳斜。

霜降那天早上，我特意去看车棚的铁皮。霜是斜着长的，朝着一个方向，像一层立起来的白绒毛。我伸手碰了一下，绒毛倒了，变成一个湿指印。我把这个指印也记了。后来月考作文写《秋天的早晨》，我把这段原样搬进去。阅卷老师在旁边画了个波浪线。那篇作文是我两年来分数最高的一篇，没有一句好词好句，全是账本里的东西。

这个学期下来，账本记满了，我的体会也攒了一堆。记录让等待有了形状。以前惊蛰春分只是日历上的字，现在惊蛰是我爬起来听的那两声雷，夏至是我脚底下那顶黑帽子。季节从名词变成了我经过的日子。细节让文章有了重量。雷先闷后近，霜是斜着长的，这些细节没法编，编不出玻璃嗡那一下。观察是写作最老实的路。它不快，一个节气十五天，一个细节要等半夜的雷。

但它给的东西全是自己的，谁也抄不走，老师也一看就知道不是抄的。

爷爷的牛皮本子快写完了，我已经在准备第二个。下个节气是立冬，我打算去看水面第一天结冰是结在边上的还是结在中间的。这个问题我答不上来，得等。等答案从水面上自己长出来，再写进文章里——这是我跟着季节学到的最要紧的一件事。

My Season Ledger: On the Day of Awakening Insects, I Truly Heard the Thunder

Over the winter break of eighth grade, my grandpa gave me a kraft-paper notebook and said: from now on, on each solar term, go out and take one look, then come back and write one line. I was worrying about my compositions then. My teachers always said my writing smelled like it had been thought up sitting indoors. I figured, all right, I will try.

The first term was Rain Water. That day it did not rain. I wrote in the notebook: no rain on Rain Water, and the wind smelled of soil. For Awakening Insects I waited three days. On the third night, past midnight, thunder really rolled. I sat up in bed and listened. The first roll was muffled, like someone upstairs rolling a wooden barrel; the second was closer, and the window glass hummed once. I scribbled in the dark: thunder comes muffled first, then near; the glass hums. The next morning I opened my book, and it said thunder begins at Awakening Insects. I thought: that line in the book, I paid for it by sitting up at midnight.

At noon on the Summer Solstice, following grandpa, I stood straight on the open ground in our compound and looked at my shadow. It shrank under my feet, a short dark clump, like a black hat I was standing on. I measured its length with a ruler and wrote it down. On the Winter Solstice I measured again, and the shadow had stretched far, trailing onto the seam of the tiles behind me. The two numbers sit side by side on two pages of the ledger. No one has to explain anything: one look shows that the summer sun is high and the winter sun is slanted.

On the morning of Frost Descent, I went to look at the tin roof of the bike shed on purpose. The frost grew slanted, all leaning one way, like a layer of white fuzz standing up. I touched it, and the fuzz collapsed into a wet fingerprint. I recorded that fingerprint too. Later, for the monthly exam composition Autumn Morning, I moved the passage in as it was. The grader drew a wavy line beside it. That was the highest-scoring composition I had written in two years, without a single borrowed fine phrase, filled entirely with things from the ledger.

By the end of the term the ledger was full, and so were my lessons. Recording

gives waiting a shape. Awakening Insects and Spring Equinox used to be words on a calendar. Now Awakening Insects is the two rolls of thunder I got up to hear, and Summer Solstice is the black hat under my feet. The seasons turned from nouns into days I actually passed through. Details give writing weight. Thunder muffled first then near, frost growing slanted, these cannot be invented; no one can invent that hum of the window glass. Observing is the most honest road in writing. It is not fast. One solar term is fifteen days; one detail may wait for midnight thunder. But everything it gives is your own. No one can copy it away, and a teacher can tell at a glance that it was not copied.

The kraft notebook from my grandpa is nearly full, and I am already getting the second one ready. The next term is the Start of Winter. I plan to watch whether ice forms first along the edge of the pond water or in the middle. I cannot answer that question. I have to wait. Wait for the answer to grow out of the water by itself, then write it into the composition. That is the most important thing I have learned by following the seasons.