电影让作文课开了口

那个月的作文，我批得头疼。四十二本里三十几本写着「今天我很开心」，开心在哪里没有。写妈妈的爱就是送伞，写同学帮助就是借橡皮，句子都对，里面没有人。我在讲台上念过范文，讲过要把过程写具体，孩子们点头，下笔照旧。我把三十几个「我很开心」圈出来，摆在讲台上，没忍心点名。于是周三的作文课，我抱来投影仪，说这节课先不放笔，先看一部片子。

我选的是那部十几分钟的默片，讲一个老修鞋匠收留了总来偷零件的男孩。没有一句台词，只有雨声、锤声、收音机的杂音。选它是因为干净：没有对白替观众说话，孩子只能靠自己看。放映时全班屏着息，最坐不住的赵一凡半张着嘴，手指在桌面无意识地跟着锤子敲。修鞋匠把男孩偷藏的零件悄悄擦干净放回工具箱那段，教室里响起一片很轻的吸气声，像一屋子人同时被什么碰了一下。

灯亮，我把作文本收走，只聊片子。孩子们抢着说：说修鞋匠左手一直揣在兜里，后来才知道是坏的；说男孩最后给修鞋匠撑伞，伞是歪的；说收音机坏了以后修鞋匠对着它吹了口气，像哄孩子。我说把这些记下来。第二天交上来，三十几本里第一次出现了钉子、麻线、歪着的伞。有个孩子写：他对着收音机吹气的时候，我想起我爷爷对着旧自行车链条吹气的样子。我在那句下面画了三条线。

后来我把那部默片存进教案，旁边写了一行给自己的提醒：不是孩子没有感受，是他们缺一件全班共同看过、共同屏息过的事。我讲一百遍要写细节，不如让他们一起安静地看过一个细节。那节课之后我常想，我们总急着教表达，却忘了先给他们值得表达的东西。

The Film That Opened the Composition Class

That month I graded compositions with a headache. More than thirty of forty-two books said today I was very happy, with nowhere to show the happiness. The love of a mother meant an umbrella, the help of a classmate meant an eraser. Every sentence was correct, and no person lived inside them. I had read model essays aloud and explained that process must be written concretely. The children nodded and wrote the same way. I circled the thirty-some claims of happiness and set them on the platform, unable to name anyone. So in the composition class on Wednesday I carried in the projector and said: before pens, a film.

I chose the silent short of a dozen minutes about an old cobbler who takes in the boy who kept stealing his parts. Not one line of dialogue, only rain, hammering, and the static of a radio. I chose it for its bareness: without dialogue speaking for the audience, the children could only watch with their own eyes. The class held its breath through the screening. Zhao Yifan, who could never sit still, held his mouth half open, fingers tapping the desk unknowingly along with the hammer. When the cobbler quietly polished the stolen parts and put them back in the toolbox, a soft intake of breath rose through the room, as if a whole room of people were touched by something at once.

When the lights came on, I took the notebooks away and talked only about the film. They spoke one over another: the cobbler kept his left hand in his pocket, and only later did we learn it was hurt; the boy held an umbrella over the cobbler at the end, crooked; after the radio broke, the cobbler blew a breath onto it, the way one soothes a child. I told them to write these down. The next day, for the first time, nails, waxed thread, and a crooked umbrella appeared in more than thirty books. One child wrote: when he blew on the radio, I remembered my grandfather blowing on the chain of his old bicycle. I drew three lines under that sentence.

Later I saved the silent film in my lesson plan with a line to myself: it is not that children lack feeling; they lack one thing the whole class has watched and held breath over together. I can explain a hundred times that details matter, and it is worth less than letting them watch one detail quietly together. I often think since then: we are always in a hurry to teach expression, forgetting first to give them something worth expressing.