同一窝蚂蚁，我看三遍

科学老师布置了一项作业：观察一种小动物，写一份记录。我在小区花园里选了一窝蚂蚁，就在滑梯下面的沙坑边上。我原本打算十分钟搞定它。

第一遍看，我记下的只有：洞口三个，蚂蚁很多，来回走。写完自己读了一遍，干巴巴的，像一份说明书。那天晚上我翻科学书，书上写观察要用眼睛，还要用尺子、用时间。我合上书，决定明天再去。

第二遍我蹲了二十分钟，带了一根冰棍棍和一块手表。我用棍子在离蚁洞一步远的地方轻轻画了一条线，数蚂蚁过线。十分钟里过去了四十七只，其中嘴里叼东西的有三十一只。我还看清了它们分两种：头大的走得慢，头小的跑得快。这些我全记进本子，字都写歪了，因为腿麻。

第三遍隔了两天。我想知道它们从哪儿搬来东西。我沿着队伍走，走到花坛边，发现它们排着队搬我们喂鱼剩下的鱼食渣。回来的路上我数了，从鱼食到洞口一共十四步大蚂蚁的步子。我把路线画在记录本上，标上时间：下午四点十分到四点四十。

交作业那天，老师在我的记录上写：三遍看同一窝，这才是观察。同桌凑过来看，说你写得像侦探小说。我心里清楚，不是我会写，是我看得够久。第一遍看见的是黑点，第二遍看见的是分工，第三遍看见的是路线。每一遍都是新的。

这份记录让我明白一个理：细节不是聪明人一眼看出来的，是老老实实看出来的。我以前写作业总想一遍成，写观察日记才知道，好东西是第二遍第三遍才肯露面的。蚂蚁不躲我，它们就在那儿，你待多久，它们就给你看多少。

现在我的文具盒里常年放着一根冰棍棍。它提醒我：看东西，别只看一遍。

I Watched the Same Nest of Ants Three Times

Our science teacher assigned one task: observe a small animal and write a record. I chose a nest of ants in our neighborhood garden, at the edge of the sandpit under the slide. I had planned to finish it in ten minutes.

The first time I watched, all I wrote down was: three holes, many ants, walking back and forth. That evening I read it over. It was as dry as an instruction manual. I opened my science book, and the book said observation needs eyes, but also a ruler and time. I closed the book and decided to go back the next day.

The second time I crouched for twenty minutes, bringing a popsicle stick and a wristwatch. With the stick I drew a light line one step away from the nest and counted ants crossing it. In ten minutes, forty-seven passed, and thirty-one of them carried something in their mouths. I also saw there were two kinds: the big-headed ones walked slowly, the small-headed ones ran fast. I wrote all of it into my notebook, with crooked handwriting, because my legs had gone numb.

The third visit came two days later. I wanted to know where they brought their food from. I followed the line to the flower bed and found them carrying scraps of the fish food we had thrown there. On the way back I counted: from the fish food to the nest hole was fourteen big steps of a large ant. I drew the route in my record book and marked the time: 4:10 to 4:40 in the afternoon.

On the day I handed in the work, my teacher wrote on my record: watching the same nest three times, now that is observation. My deskmate leaned over and said it read like a detective story. I knew it was not because I write well, but because I watched long enough. The first look showed black dots, the second showed the division of work, the third showed the route. Every look was new.

This record taught me one thing: details are not spotted at a glance by clever people; they come out of honest, patient looking. I used to want every piece of homework done in one pass. Keeping observation diaries showed me that the good stuff only reveals itself on the second and third look. The ants do not hide from me. They are just there. However long you stay, that is how much they let you see.

There is a popsicle stick in my pencil case all year round now. It reminds me: never look at something only once.