蚂蚁给我当了一学期的同桌

我有个习惯，从初一起就有：随身带个小本子，蹲在花坛边记蚂蚁。记了一学期，本子写满了两本。期末复习那阵子，我妈让我把闲书闲事都收起来，我把两个本子也收进了抽屉。结果复习到一半，我鬼使神差又把本子翻了出来。这一翻，翻出了我整个初中最好的一次成绩。

那天我背历史年代，背了忘、忘了背，烦得很。翻蚂蚁本子解闷，看到十月我记过：蚂蚁走的路不是直的，是先乱走，走熟了才成一条线。我盯着这句话愣了半天。历史年代不也是这样吗？一个年代孤零零地背，就是乱走；把它跟前后的事连起来，路就成线了。我拿铅笔在年代旁边画箭头，把洋务运动、甲午、戊戌串成一条线，再背，居然一遍就记住了。

我顺着这个想法把别的科也改了。数学错题以前是一道一道抄的，像散米粒。我改成先写这一类题的共同线，再把错题挂在线上当分支。英语单词以前按字母表背，我改成按话题串，一串带一串。那半个月，我复习的顺序全变了：先找线，再补点。

期末考完，我自己估的分比平时高。发完成绩单那天，我把两个蚂蚁本子从抽屉里拿出来，擦干净，放回书包。我妈看见了没说话，后来她跟别人讲：那两个黑本子倒成了功臣。

我的学习心得讲出来很简单：知识不是米粒，是蚁路。单看一粒米，搬起来费劲；看清了路，米自己会往家走。观察蚂蚁教会我的不是蚂蚁，是找线。错题本、年代线、单词串，全是蚁路这个想法生出来的。

现在我的本子还在记蚂蚁，不过记的东西多了：记完蚂蚁，我会顺手想一想，今天学的哪一课也有条线。观察的习惯留下来了，它就不只在花坛边起作用，它在每张课桌上都跟着我。

The Ants Were My Deskmates for a Whole Term

I have had a habit since the first year of middle school: a small notebook in my pocket, and notes about ants taken while crouching by the flower bed. After one term the notebook was filled to the end of two volumes. During the final review my mother told me to put away all idle reading and idle doings, so I put the notebooks in a drawer. Halfway through reviewing, I found myself pulling them out again. That single act led to the best grades of my middle school years.

That day I was memorizing historical dates. I forgot what I had just learned, over and over, and got frustrated. I opened the ant notebook to rest my mind, and found a line from October: the paths of ants are not straight at first; they wander wildly, and only after the wandering does one line remain. I stared at that sentence for a long while. Are historical dates not the same thing? A date memorized alone is wandering; connect it to the events before and after, and the road becomes a line. I took a pencil and drew arrows beside the dates, stringing the Self-Strengthening Movement, the Sino-Japanese War, and the Reform Movement into one line, and one round of memorizing held.

I carried the idea into other subjects. My math mistakes used to be copied one by one, like scattered grains of rice. I changed it: first write the common line of a type of problem, then hang the mistakes on the line as branches. I used to memorize English words in alphabetical order; I changed it to topic chains, one chain pulling the next. For half a month my whole review order changed: find the line first, then fill in the points.

After the final exams my own estimate came out higher than usual. On the day the report card was handed out, I took the two ant notebooks out of the drawer, wiped them clean, and put them back in my schoolbag. My mother said nothing at the time. Later she told others: those two black notebooks turned out to be heroes.

My reflection is simple: knowledge is not grains of rice, it is ant roads. A single grain is heavy to carry; once you see the road, the grain travels home by itself. What the ants taught me was not ants, it was how to find the line. The mistake notebook, the date line, the word chains, all of them grew from the idea of the ant road.

I still record ants in my notebook, but now I record more: after writing about ants, I like to think about which lesson I learned that day also has a line in it. Once the habit of observing stays with you, it works not only by the flower bed but at every desk, following you everywhere.