我教学生剥橘子

我在小学教语文，年年冬天都带一届新的孩子。去年冬至那天的班会，我抱了一兜橘子进教室，说今天不上课，分橘子。孩子们欢呼，我以为这事简单，没想到一只橘子把手教出了名堂。

橘子发下去，多数孩子张嘴就咬，连皮带肉。我喊停，说橘子要先剥。会剥的几个演示，指甲掐进橘蒂，转一圈，皮揭起来像掀盖。不会剥的急，抠得指甲缝里全是汁。旁边会剥的凑过去手把手教，教室里一片橘皮的清苦味。我站在讲台上没帮上什么忙，忽然有点惭愧：这双手的活儿，我早忘了是怎么学的，孩子们却正在彼此传递。

剥开之后问题更多。白丝，一半孩子嫌苦要抠掉，一半直接连丝嚼。我没讲道理，借了教室后面的暖炉，把橘子搁在炉边烤。烤过之后白丝不苦了，橘子还甜。有个女孩问我为什么，我说大概是热气把脾气磨掉了。她想了想说，跟人一样。全班笑，我也笑，这句是那天最好的造句。

围炉分橘子那节课后来出了名，别的班来问，我照方抓药：自己剥，丝撕净，一人一瓣传着吃。高年级的男孩起初嫌幼稚，剥得比谁都快，吃完主动去撕下一位的丝，嘴上说不为别的，就为看着乱。我记在观察日记里，没告诉家长。有些变化说出来就轻了，让它自己在橘子上一瓣一瓣长着。

期末散学，有个孩子的母亲塞给我一兜橘子，说孩子回家让她别扔橘皮，说老师晒过橘皮泡水好喝。我道谢收下，回家摆在窗台。水没泡，皮慢慢干了，卷起边，颜色沉下去，像一页书签。

今年冬至，我又抱了一兜进教室。指甲掐进橘蒂，转一圈，皮雾喷出，前排的孩子打喷嚏，全班笑。我站在讲台上等这阵笑过去，心里踏实：课本会翻过去，手序不会。一兜橘子教不会多少道理，可剥皮、撕络、让一瓣先给别人，这些会在他们手里存很多年，像橘皮的香，呛一次，记一冬。

I Taught My Students to Peel Tangerines

I teach Chinese in an elementary school, and every winter I get a new class of children. Last year on the winter solstice I carried a bag of tangerines into the classroom for the class meeting and said no lesson today, we share tangerines. The children cheered. I thought it would be simple. I did not expect a tangerine to teach a lesson about hands.

When the tangerines went around, most children bit straight in, peel and flesh together. I called stop and said a tangerine must be peeled first. The few who knew how demonstrated: nail into the stem, one turn around, the skin lifting like a lid. The ones who could not peel grew frantic, digging until their nail beds were full of juice. Those who could leaned over to guide the others hand over hand, and the classroom filled with the clean bitterness of peel. I stood at the podium useless, and felt a flash of shame: I had long forgotten how these hands learned their work, while the children were passing it to one another right now.

After peeling came more questions. Half the children picked off the white threads, calling them bitter; the other half chewed them on. I did not lecture. I borrowed the heater from the back of the classroom and set tangerines by it to roast. After roasting the threads stopped being bitter and the fruit turned sweeter. A girl asked why. I said perhaps the heat files down the temper. She thought a moment and said, just like people. The class laughed, and so did I. That was the best sentence made that day.

The stove-side tangerine lesson later became famous. Other classes asked, and I followed the same recipe: peel your own, tear the threads clean, pass one segment at a time. Boys from the upper grades first called it childish, then peeled faster than anyone, and after finishing went on to tear the threads for the next person, saying it was for nothing, they just hated seeing mess. I wrote it in my observation journal and did not tell the parents. Some changes grow light if spoken of; let them keep growing on the tangerine, one segment at a time.

At the end-of-term dismissal the mother of one student pressed a bag of tangerines into my hands, saying her child told her at home not to throw the peels, because the teacher dried peels and steeped them for drinking. I thanked her, took them home, and laid them on the windowsill. I never steeped them. The peels dried slowly, edges curling, color deepening, like a page turned into a bookmark.

This winter solstice I carried another bag into the classroom. Nails into stems, one turn around, peel mist spraying, the front row sneezed, the whole class laughed. I stood at the podium waiting for the laughter to pass, feeling settled: textbooks get turned past, but the order of the hands does not. A bag of tangerines teaches few great truths, but peeling, tearing the threads, letting one segment go to someone else first, these will stay in their hands for many years, like the smell of peel: one sting, and the memory lasts all winter.

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