窗下的田，田埂上的发现

那天早上离开学校的时候，天很高，老师带着全班沿河堤走到村外的田埂上。班主任只说了一句话：中午之前，每个人要在田里找到一个自己从没见过东西。

稻子已经割了一多半。割过的田铺着短短的稻茬，割得平平的，像剃过头的头皮；没割的田还站着金黄的稻子，风一过，稻子齐齐低头，浪头朝着风吹的方向跑。我活了十几年，看过无数次稻子，却没有一次像这样站在田埂上，离它那么近。

声音比颜色多。联合收割机在田那头开，声音闷闷的，地面有一点抖。近处是麻雀，一群落在稻茬上，又被谁的喊声惊起来。我旁边的男生突然叫起来，说一只蚂蚱跳到了他手上。大家围过去看，蚂蚱黄绿的，腿很粗，一跳就跳进站着的稻子里，不见了。

田埂上还长着一排狗尾草，穗子沉得弯下来，毛茸茸的扎脖子。老师让我们每人摸一下狗尾草，再摸一下稻穗，问手感有什么不一样。有人说狗尾草是毛的，稻穗是硬的，一粒一粒顶着手指。老师让那个男生再说一遍，他红着脸又说了一遍，全班都记住了那个硬。

田边有一堆芦苇在烧，烟直直的，味道不难闻，焦里带一点甜。老师把我们带上风口的坡，让我们每人深吸一口。她说这就是秋天的味道。有人问甜是从哪来的，老师说，是稻穗被火烘出来的。

我的发现在田中间。一小捆稻穗插在稻茬里，用橡皮筋扎着，穗头很饱满，一看就是有人特意放的。我不敢去碰。老师说，那是收割的人留给鸟的。风一吹，那捆稻穗晃了晃，果然有几只麻雀落上去。

回去的路上，大家话都少了。每个人的鞋上都蒙了一层黄黄的土。回到教室，我朝窗外看，田就在窗下，却觉得有点不认识它了。下午我把田埂写进了笔记本，写了那捆留给鸟的稻穗。写完的时候窗外天暗下来，收割机的声音还隐隐的。

The Field Under Our Window and the Discovery on the Ridge

When we left school that morning, the sky was very high, and our teacher took the whole class along the river embankment to the field ridge outside the village. Our homeroom teacher said only one thing: before noon, each person had to find something in the field he or she had never seen before.

The rice had been cut a little more than half. The cut plots lay under short stubble, cut flat, like a head shaved clean; the uncut plots still stood golden, and when the wind rose, the rice bowed all at once, the waves running in the direction of the wind. I had seen rice all my life, but never once had I stood on a field ridge and looked at it so close.

The sounds were more than the colors. The combine harvester ran at the far end of the field, its sound dull, the ground trembling a little. Near us were sparrows, a flock dropping onto the stubble and starting up again at some shout. The boy beside me suddenly yelled that a grasshopper had jumped onto his hand. Everyone crowded over to look. The grasshopper was yellow-green, its thighs thick, and one jump sent it into the standing rice, gone.

A row of green bristle grass grew along the ridge, its bristly heads heavy enough to bend down, tickling the neck. The teacher had each of us touch a bristly head first and then a rice ear, and asked how the feel differed. One boy said the bristle grass was fuzzy while the rice ear was hard, grain by grain pressing against the finger. The teacher asked him to say it again, and he said it once more with a red face, and the whole class remembered that hardness.

At the edge of the field a pile of reeds was burning, the smoke rising straight, and the smell was not bad, a little sweetness inside the burnt straw. The teacher took us up to the slope at the windward side and let each of us take a deep breath. She said this was the taste of autumn. Someone asked where the sweetness came from, and the teacher said it was the smell of rice ears roasted by the fire.

My discovery was in the middle of the field. A small bundle of rice ears stood stuck in the stubble, tied with a rubber band, the tips full, clearly placed there on purpose by someone. I did not dare touch it. The teacher said it was left for the birds by the harvesters. When the wind blew, the bundle swayed, and sure enough a few sparrows landed on it.

On the way back nobody talked much. The shoes of every child were covered with a layer of yellow dust. Back in the classroom I looked out of the window. The field was still under the window, and yet I felt I did not quite recognize it. That afternoon I wrote the field ridge into my notebook, and I wrote about the bundle of rice ears left for the birds. When I finished, the sky outside was dark, and the sound of the harvester was still faintly there.

带孩子们去看田的那个下午

十月底，我带孩子们去看田。田离学校后门走路二十分钟，主人已经割了一半。我跟学校打了报告，让每家家长签了条子，星期五活动课的下午就出发了。

这些五年级的孩子，一辈子见过的稻子都在碗里和屏幕上。踩上田埂的第一句，几乎都是说地软。田埂被雨和脚踩得多，中间硬、两边松。我在几个低洼处各站一个人，让他们沿埂散开，不许下田。

孩子们散开以后，各看各的。一个女生站在稻茬边上不肯动，说稻茬扎人，怕扎穿鞋。一个男生蹲下来盯着稻茬的切口，喊我过去看，说稻茬是空的，切口是淡黄的，中间还有一个圈。几个孩子围过去，轮流看，每看完一个都发出一声惊。

我让他们停下来，闭上眼睛，听一分钟田里的声音。眼睛一闭，耳朵就尖了。他们听见收割机，听见鸟，听见风蹭稻叶的沙沙，还有一个瘦瘦的女生听见了水沟，说田底下有水在走。一分钟到了，没有人马上睁眼，我也没喊，让他们多听了一会儿。

回程经过村口，晒场上晒着一片玉米，金黄的铺了一地，一个老奶奶拿耙子在上面划格子。孩子们绕着晒场走，没人伸手。那个发现稻茬是空口的男生问老奶奶，玉米为什么要摊开晒。老奶奶头也不抬，说堆着会焐坏，摊开晒透了才收得住。男生把这句话重复了一遍，像背课文。

临走前，我允许每人捡一把掉落的稻穗。孩子们弯腰去找，捡到的高高举起来互相看。先前怕稻茬扎人的那个女生捡了三根，插进文具袋的口袋里。回去的路队很安静，孩子一边走一边回头看，步子比来时慢得多。

第二天早上，孩子们捡的稻穗被捆在一起，摆在教室后墙的植物角。黑板上多了一行他们自己写的字：田在窗外。我没有擦，一直留到月底。

The Afternoon I Took the Children to See the Field

At the end of October I took my class to see the field. The field was a twenty-minute walk from the back gate of the school, and its owner had already cut half of it. I filed a request with the school, had every parent sign a note, and we set out on the afternoon of Friday activity class.

These fifth graders had seen rice their whole lives only in a bowl or on a screen. The first thing they almost all said when they stepped onto the field ridge was that the ground was soft. The ridge had been walked on by rain and by feet, hard in the middle and loose at the sides. I stationed one adult at each low spot and let the children spread along the ridge, with orders not to step into the field.

Once scattered, each of them watched something of their own. One girl stood at the edge of the stubble and would not move, saying the stubble was sharp and might poke through her shoe. One boy squatted down and stared at the cut of a stubble, then called me over, saying the stubble was hollow, the cut pale yellow with a ring in the middle. Several children crowded around and took turns looking, and after each look someone let out a small cry of surprise.

I had them stop, close their eyes, and listen to the field for one minute. With eyes shut the ears grow sharp. They heard the harvester, they heard birds, they heard wind rubbing the rice leaves, and one thin girl heard a ditch, saying water was running under the field. When the minute was up, nobody opened their eyes right away,

and I did not call them, and let them listen a little longer.

On the way back we passed the village entrance, where a spread of corn was drying on the ground, golden all over, an old woman raking squares into it with a rake. The children walked around the drying ground, and nobody reached out a hand. The boy who had found the stubble hollow asked the old woman why the corn had to be spread out. Without raising her head she said a heap will sweat and spoil, and only corn dried through in the open can be stored. The boy repeated her sentence once, like reciting a lesson.

Before leaving, I allowed each child to pick up a few fallen rice ears. The children bent down to search, and whoever found some held them high to show the others. The girl who had feared the sharp stubble found three and put them in the pocket of her pencil case. On the way back the line was very quiet. The children walked and kept turning to look behind, and their pace was far slower than on the way out.

The next morning, the rice ears the children had picked were tied together and placed at the plant corner on the back wall of our classroom. On the blackboard stood one line written by the children themselves: the field is outside the window. I did not erase it, and it stayed until the end of the month.

爷爷用脚量田的那一天

割最后一丘田那天，爷爷带周小羽下田。出门前他把水葫芦灌满，塞一条旧毛巾在裤腰上。周小羽扛着小锄头，锄头对她太大，她非要扛。

太阳还没晒热田，稻茬头上挂着露水。爷爷走到田中间，用脚量田，脚跟顶脚尖，走一趟，报一个数给收割机手。周小羽知道爷爷量田从来不用尺子，她问过，爷爷说这丘田他走了五十年，脚比尺子准。

收割机开起来，前头吞稻子，后头吐稻草，稻草被切成短节，均匀撒在地上。爷爷站在田边看，机器过去一丘，他就走进那一丘，弯腰把掉落的稻穗一根根捡进布袋。周小羽跟着捡，捡得比爷爷快。爷爷不说什么，过一会儿自己也加快了。

中午两人在田边的草棚底下歇。爷爷灌了三口水，把水葫芦递给她，她喝一口就还回去，说水是热的，有股铁味。爷爷笑，说水葫芦就是这样，明天灌点茶水。他们吃带来的馒头，吃完爷爷躺在草棚的影子里，手在后腰上捶了两下，又爬起来说，走，日头不毒。

装稻草的时候，周小羽抱了一小捆稻草往车上送，草捆比她宽，她侧着身子过板桥。车斗里爷爷把稻草踩实，一层稻秆一层绳。有个过路人问这一车稻草留做什么，爷爷说垫牛棚，剩下的沤到开春做田肥。周小羽听见田肥两个字，想起草棚底下那堆去年沤过的黑泥，捏过，是软的。

傍晚过秤。过秤的报了数，爷爷重复一遍，把钱塞进衬衫口袋，扣上扣子，再去装稻草。回家的三轮车上，稻子堆得比爷爷的头高，爷爷坐在稻堆上，一只手按着口袋。

晚上奶奶用新打的米焖饭，揭锅盖的时候白汽很厚，香味扑满整个灶间。爷爷吃了两碗，吃得很慢。周小羽吃了一碗，想起爷爷在田里是站着吃掉两个馒头的。她放下碗朝窗外看，田黑了，只有田埂隐隐的一条白。

The Day Grandfather Measured the Field with His Feet

On the day the last paddy was cut, Grandfather took Zhou Xiaoyu into the field. Before leaving he filled the water gourd, rinsed it, and tucked an old towel into the waistband of his trousers. Zhou Xiaoyu carried the small hoe; it was too big for her, and she insisted on carrying it.

The sun had not yet warmed the field, and dew still hung on the tips of the stubble. Grandfather walked to the middle of the field and measured it with his feet, heel against toe, walked one line, and called the number to the man on the harvester. Zhou Xiaoyu knew that Grandfather never used a ruler to measure a field. She had asked him once, and he said he had walked this field for fifty years, and his feet were more accurate than a ruler.

The harvester started, swallowing rice at its front and spitting straw out at its back, the straw cut into short pieces and scattered evenly on the ground. Grandfather stood at the edge and watched, and when the machine had finished a paddy he walked into it, bent down, and picked up the fallen rice ears one by one into the cloth bag he had brought. Zhou Xiaoyu picked up with him, faster than Grandfather. Grandfather said nothing, but after a while he too sped up.

At noon the two rested under the straw shed on the ridge. Grandfather drank three mouthfuls of water and passed the gourd to her; she took one mouthful and handed it back, saying the water was warm and tasted of iron. Grandfather laughed and said a water gourd is always like that, and tomorrow he would brew some tea in it. They ate the buns they had brought. When they finished, Grandfather lay down in the shade of the shed, knocked his lower back twice with his hand, then got up and said, come on, the sun is not fierce.

While the straw was being loaded, Zhou Xiaoyu carried a small bundle of straw up to the cart. The bundle was wider than she was, and she turned sideways to cross the plank bridge. In the cart bed Grandfather stamped the straw firm, layer of stalk, layer of rope. A passerby asked what the load of straw was kept for, and Grandfather said bedding for the cow shed, and the rest would be composted for field fertilizer before spring planting. When Zhou Xiaoyu heard the word fertilizer, she remembered

the pile of black mud composted last year under the straw shed. She had pinched it once, and it was soft.

At dusk the grain went on the scale. The weighman called out the number, Grandfather repeated it once, put the money into his shirt pocket, buttoned it, and went back to load the straw. On the tricycle home, the grain was piled higher than Grandfather head, and he sat on top of it with one hand pressed on his pocket.

That evening Grandmother cooked rice from the grain that had just been milled. When the lid came off the pot, the steam was thick and white, and the smell filled the whole kitchen. Grandfather ate two bowls, very slowly. Zhou Xiaoyu ate one, and remembered that in the field Grandfather had eaten two buns standing up. She put down her bowl and looked out of the window. The field was black, and only the ridge showed as a faint white line.