

Saturday Is for the Birds

1 When my mom asked our neighbor Mr. Grant whether he would help me with my bird-watching project for biology class, I was both relieved and worried: relieved because Mr. Grant knows all about birds and enjoys watching them; worried because I do not. On Saturday morning, my favorite thing to do is sleep in. But this assignment requires me to walk a local trail three Saturday mornings in a row and document the birds I encounter. My biology teacher has stressed the importance of being observant and patient. Patience is not a skill I am known for.

2 That first Saturday, as Mr. Grant and I walked quietly down the trail, I wondered whether it would be rude to put my earbuds in and listen to some music. Just as I slid my hand into my pocket, Mr. Grant stopped and tilted his head. He smiled and lifted a finger.

3 “Do you hear that?” he whispered.

4 I shook my head. I didn’t hear a thing. We stood still and listened, and Mr. Grant looked at me expectantly. I shook my head again and began to wonder if every Saturday was going to be this frustrating. But then, I *did* hear something! It was a high-pitched wheezing sound.

5 “Is that a bird?” I whispered.

6 Mr. Grant nodded. “That’s a chickadee,” he answered. “And it sounds just like its name. *Chick-a-dee-dee-dee!*”

7 I had to smile. That was exactly what the bird sounded like. But no matter how hard I looked, I couldn’t see it. Mr. Grant explained that sometimes birds are identified by sound alone because they can be hard to see, especially small ones like chickadees.

8 We continued down the trail. Occasionally Mr. Grant would hand me his binoculars and point toward a tree, but I had trouble focusing on what looked to me like a small blur that flew away as soon as I located it. I covered a yawn and wished I was at home, just getting out of bed and sitting down to breakfast.

9 By the end of the hike, Mr. Grant had spotted chickadees, cardinals, blue jays, and an American goldfinch. He flipped through his guidebook to show me their colorful pictures.

10 “How did you see so many?” I asked, half annoyed and half in awe.

11 “Listening and looking,” he said. “You’ll see.”

12 The second Saturday, Mr. Grant said, “Remember, eyes open for something that doesn’t belong. A different color, perhaps, or a movement.”

13 The first hundred yards were quiet, but then I heard a bird singing very close by. “Right up on that branch,” Mr. Grant whispered, passing me the binoculars.

14 The binoculars jiggled unsteadily as I searched. Suddenly, a bright red bird appeared. “I see it!” I whispered, surprised at how excited I felt.

15 “A male northern cardinal,” Mr. Grant said with satisfaction. “Beautiful.”

16 That morning, I spotted more cardinals and even saw a bird Mr. Grant called a yellow-bellied sapsucker. I was so intent on listening for birdsong and watching for movement in the trees that I was surprised when Mr. Grant told me it was time to head home.

17 The chickadee had remained elusive, however. “Patience,” Mr. Grant said, checking my notes. “Your list is growing. So is your skill.”

18 Our third Saturday is almost here. I have been thinking about chickadees all week. I even studied pictures of them online. I noticed that the chickadee has a stripe of bright white across its cheek. Mr. Grant told me to look for “something that doesn’t belong.” That’s what I will look for—a flash of white! Even if I don’t spot a chickadee this Saturday, I know what to do now. I’ll have plenty of mornings to spend on the trail.

Read “Saturday Is for the Birds.”

Consider what the narrator learns about patience and observation from Mr. Grant. In your own words, write a multi-paragraph story about the final Saturday of bird-watching on the trail that tells what happens when the narrator searches for a chickadee.

Use what you have learned from the passage to help you write your story.

Remember to —

- provide a beginning, a middle, and an end to your story
- put events in the order in which they happen
- include descriptions of people, objects, and settings
- use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar

Use the space provided to write your story.