The Water Quality Report (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Nadia joined the environmental research team, she assumed her first summer would be spent quietly reading in the library. Instead, her supervisor asked her to conduct a study of the river that ran along the edge of the old industrial park. The project had been requested by a national agency that monitored drinking water, and the deadline was uncomfortably close. Nadia had never led anything before, and she was honest enough to admit that she was nervous.

The team comprised four people: Nadia, a chemist named Peter, a student who mostly took photographs, and a retired teacher who volunteered on Saturdays. They met on the first morning in a small room with a broken heater. Peter had prepared an agenda with five points on it, and he insisted they follow it exactly. Nadia later admitted that this discipline saved them weeks of confusion. They agreed to take water samples from twelve places along the river, once a week, for two months.

The fieldwork was harder than expected. Rain turned the banks into mud, and one of their instruments broke on the second day. Every sample had to be labelled, sealed and carried back to the laboratory before dark. In the evenings, Peter would classify the samples according to where they had been taken and how cloudy the water looked. Nadia found this system oddly satisfying, because it turned a chaotic pile of bottles into something orderly.

Analysing the results was a different matter. The chemistry of a polluted river is complex, since dozens of substances react with one another in ways that change with temperature. Peter identified one compound that clearly came from an old paint factory upstream. He explained that it was harmless in tiny amounts but dangerous if it built up in fish. Nadia had to calculate the average concentration for each site, then check her figures twice. She made two mistakes in the first week and learned to be patient with herself.

By September they had enough data to tell a story. Nadia drew a simple chart showing the pollution levels rising sharply just below the old factory and falling again further downstream. Anyone could understand it in ten seconds, which was exactly the point. Her supervisor said that the visual evidence was the most important component of the whole report, more persuasive than any paragraph of text. The document was sent off in October, and three months later the factory was ordered to install new filters. Nadia never forgot that a summer of mud and broken instruments had actually changed something.

Woordenlijst

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