
Section 1:

#1 Strengths: ■ Your opening paragraph effectively establishes an emotional connection with readers through vivid imagery of Riverdale Creek's decline. ■ You've created a powerful contrast between past vibrancy and current deterioration that immediately draws interest.

Weaknesses: Overreliance on emotive language → Your writing relies heavily on emotional appeals in this section without providing specific examples of what made the creek special. Phrases like "danced with dragonflies" and "eerily quiet" create mood but don't give readers concrete details to fully visualise the change. You could strengthen this by including specific wildlife that has disappeared or recreational activities that no longer take place.

Exemplar: ***"In the heart of our town, Riverdale Creek once teemed with native fish and echoed with the splashes of local swimmers, but today its banks stand empty, with water levels reduced to half their former depth and pollution visible in the murky flow."***

#2 Strengths: ■ You effectively incorporate scientific information through Dr. Chen's quote about algal blooms and their impact. ■ You successfully explain the technical concept of nitrate pollution in accessible language.

Weaknesses: Disconnected expert quotes → Your expert quotes appear somewhat isolated without connecting them clearly to the community impact. When Dr. Chen explains algal blooms, there's no follow-up about whether these blooms have actually been observed in Riverdale Creek or what specific impacts locals have noticed. This makes the scientific information feel somewhat detached from the community story.

Exemplar: ***"'Excess nitrates can lead to algal blooms, which suffocate aquatic life and threaten the entire ecosystem,' explains Dr. Maria Chen, a hydrologist with the state university. Several residents have already reported seeing the creek's surface covered with green scum last summer, and local fishing enthusiasts have noted fewer fish catches each year."***

#3 Strengths: ■ Your conclusion effectively returns to the emotional core of the issue while providing a call to action. ■ You skillfully connect environmental concerns with community identity and values.

Weaknesses: Vague call to action → While your conclusion is emotionally compelling with phrases like "courage to care" and "raise our voices," it doesn't provide specific actions readers can take. The ending feels inspirational but leaves readers without clear direction on how they personally can contribute to saving Riverdale Creek.

Exemplar: ***"So let's not allow our streams to go silent. Join the Creek Keepers' monthly cleanups every first Saturday, reduce fertiliser use on your lawn, or attend the upcoming***

town council meeting on May 5th to support stricter runoff regulations that will make Riverdale a place where water, wildlife, and wonder still flow freely."

■ Your feature article demonstrates strong storytelling abilities with a compelling narrative arc from problem to potential solutions. The inclusion of both scientific data and community efforts creates a balanced approach to the issue. To improve your piece, consider adding more specific local details throughout to ground the story firmly in Riverdale. For example, name specific wildlife that's disappeared or particular sections of the creek that have been most affected. Also, your solutions section could benefit from more concrete examples of what green infrastructure might look like in Riverdale specifically. Try breaking up some of your longer paragraphs to improve readability and create more focus on key points. Additionally, while statistical information strengthens your article, explaining what the numbers mean in practical terms would help readers better understand their significance. Your concluding paragraph is strong but would have more impact if it tied directly back to the opening image of children at the creek.

Score: 38/50

Section 2:

Headline: "Silent Streams: The Fight to Save Riverdale's Vanishing Waterways"

#1 In the heart of our town, Riverdale Creek once danced with dragonflies and echoed with the laughter of children. Now, its banks are eerily quiet. What was once an ~~exciting~~ [vital] artery of our community has thinned to an ~~unclear~~ [murky] stream, choked by plastic. The life that once thrived within and around its waters is slipping away, and with it, a part of our identity.

As the town of Riverdale expands, so does its environmental footprint. Local residents have noticed a ~~pure~~ [sharp] decline in water quality over the past five years, but few ~~realize~~ [realise] the reach of the issue. According to a 2023 report from the Department of Environmental Conservation, nitrate levels in Riverdale Creek have increased by 47% since 2018, largely due to ~~fertilizer~~ [fertiliser] runoff from nearby lawns and agricultural zones. This contamination isn't just unsightly; it's dangerous.

"Excess nitrates can lead to algal blooms, which suffocate aquatic life and threaten the entire ecosystem," explains Dr. Maria Chen, a hydrologist with the state university. "These blooms release toxins harmful to both humans and animals and deplete oxygen levels in the water."

The degradation of our waterways is not limited to chemical pollutants. Every rainfall turns city streets into tributaries, washing plastic wrappers, oil, and debris into the storm drains, which ultimately empty into the creek. This form of non-point source pollution is particularly difficult to control. As environmental engineer Tom Young notes, "Unlike a factory pipe, you can't point to one source. It's everyone's responsibility, and that makes it harder to fix."

But the fight is not without hope. Local high school environmental science teacher, Mrs. Cynthia Ruiz, has turned this issue into a teaching moment. "My students are testing water samples, tracking pollution trends, and presenting their findings to town officials," she says. "They're not just learning science, they're living it."

Indeed, the youth of Riverdale are rising to the challenge. Last spring, a student-led initiative called *Creek Keepers* hosted a cleanup day that drew over 200 volunteers. They collected nearly 1,500 pounds of trash in one afternoon, a clear signal that the community cares deeply, even if change is slow.

Statistically, grassroots efforts like these can yield significant results. A 2021 study by the Environmental Protection Agency showed that consistent community engagement in local cleanups and education campaigns can reduce urban runoff by up to 35% over five years.

#2 Still, lasting progress demands systemic change. Experts urge the adoption of green infrastructure, permeable pavements, rain gardens, and stricter regulations on lawn ~~fertilizers~~ [fertilisers]. These solutions may seem technical, but their impact is profound. "Green infrastructure is about mimicking nature," says Dr. Chen. "It slows down water, filters pollutants, and gives the earth time to heal."

Transitioning to such systems requires political will and public awareness. That's why storytelling and education, especially from young voices, are so vital. They remind us that this isn't just about water chemistry or municipal codes. It's about preserving the natural places that shape our childhoods, our culture, and our future.

#3 We cannot afford to wait until Riverdale Creek is just a memory in dusty photo albums. The solutions exist. The science is clear. ~~What's needed now is courage, the courage to care, to act, and to restore.~~ [What's needed now is courage – the courage to care, to act and to restore.]

So let's not allow our streams to go silent. Let's raise our voices, clean our creeks, and make Riverdale a place where water, wildlife, and wonder still flow freely.