

Section 1:

#1: "CRASH! Something smashed downstairs. Leo sat up in bed, heart pounding. He crept down the stairs, thinking it might be a cat or maybe a burglar. But in the living room, there was no one, only his shadow... dancing on the wall."

Strengths:

- Your opening with the onomatopoeic "CRASH!" immediately creates tension and hooks the reader.
- You've crafted a vivid scene with sensory details that place us in the moment with Leo.

Weakness: Prompt disconnection → Your story begins with an intriguing premise about a dancing shadow, but it doesn't establish a clear quest or goal for Leo as requested in the prompt. The opening focuses on an unusual occurrence rather than setting up a hero's journey structure. "CRASH! Something smashed downstairs" creates mystery but doesn't frame Leo as a hero with a specific mission.

Exemplar: *"CRASH! Something smashed downstairs. Leo sat up in bed, heart pounding. Ever since his parents left on their research expedition, he'd been determined to prove he could be brave. Finding what caused that noise would be the first step in his quest to show everyone—especially himself—that he wasn't afraid of anything."*

#2: "The attic was dusty and full of spider webs. Leo hadn't been there since his parents left on their research trip last year. The shadow pulled him toward an old box. Inside were photos, notebooks, and a letter from his dad."

Strengths:

- You've created a compelling setting with the dusty, cobwebbed attic that evokes mystery.
- The discovery of the box and letter provides an emotional connection to Leo's absent parents.

Weakness: Underdeveloped hurdles → While the attic scene presents an interesting development, it resolves too quickly with minimal obstacles. Leo simply follows his shadow and immediately finds the answer. There's no sense of struggle or challenge that a hero typically faces on a quest. The hurdles mentioned in the prompt aren't evident as Leo doesn't need to overcome significant difficulties to reach this revelation.

Exemplar: *"The attic was dusty and full of spider webs. Leo hadn't been there since his parents left on their research trip last year. Three times he tried to turn back, his courage failing as shadows flickered ominously amongst forgotten treasures. But each time his own shadow blocked the exit, gesturing insistently toward a corner where something glinted beneath years of dust."*

#3: "That night, Leo didn't hide from his shadow. He played music. He danced. He drew pictures in the candlelight, and his shadow followed joyfully. From then on, the shadow behaved. Not because it had to—because it wanted to."

Strengths:

- You show character growth through Leo's changed approach to his shadow.
- The imagery of Leo and his shadow dancing and drawing in candlelight is charming.

Weakness: Rushed resolution → The resolution comes too quickly and easily after Leo reads the letter. There's no climactic moment where Leo must make a difficult choice or take a brave action to complete his quest. The central conflict resolves without Leo actively working toward a defined goal, which weakens the sense of achievement.

Exemplar: *"That night, after hours of trying to communicate, Leo finally understood what his shadow needed. 'You're not just showing what's inside me,' he whispered, 'you're trying to tell me something I've forgotten.' With trembling hands, he played his parents' favourite melody on the dusty piano. As notes filled the room, his shadow danced the story of their journey across the candlelit walls, revealing clues about when they might return."*

■ Your piece shows wonderful creativity with the concept of a living shadow, but needs strengthening to meet the hero's quest prompt. The protagonist lacks a clear goal beyond understanding his shadow, and the hurdles he faces are minimal. You could improve by establishing a more defined quest at the beginning—perhaps Leo actively seeking to find his parents or solving a mystery they left behind. Also, consider adding more challenging

obstacles that test Leo's determination. The resolution would feel more satisfying if Leo had to work harder to achieve his goal. Additionally, you might develop the emotional journey more deeply by showing how Leo's feelings about his parents' absence connect to his shadow's behaviour. This would add depth to both the character and the magical element in your story.

Overall Score: 38/50

Section 2:

CRASH! Something smashed downstairs. Leo sat up in bed, heart pounding. He crept down the stairs, thinking it might be a cat or maybe a burglar. But in the living room, there was no one, only his shadow... dancing on the wall. #1

Leo blinked.

"That's impossible," he whispered.

It wasn't just flickering. It was spinning, waving, and making silly faces. Leo rubbed his eyes. Shadows didn't move by themselves. Did they?

Leo lived with his Gran in a cozy house by the sea. The air always smelled of salt and flowers. Spring sunlight poured through the windows and made long, lazy shadows stretch across the floor. But Leo's shadow was different.

At school, it copied the teacher in silly ways. It pulled funny faces behind Millie during ~~math~~ [maths]. At lunchtime, it pretended to eat her sandwich.

"Your shadow is weird," Millie whispered.

"I know," Leo groaned. "It won't stop!"

He tried everything—standing still, covering windows, even hiding in the dark. But his shadow kept moving on its own.

One evening, during a glowing sunset, Leo lost his temper.

"Why are you acting like this?!" he shouted. "You're supposed to follow me—not embarrass me!"

His shadow froze... and pointed toward the attic.

The attic was dusty and full of spider webs. Leo hadn't been there since his parents left on their research trip last year. The shadow pulled him toward an old box. #2

Inside were photos, notebooks, and a letter from his dad. It said:

"If your shadow begins to act on its own, don't be afraid. Shadows show what's inside us. Be patient. Be kind."

Leo looked at his shadow. It seemed... lonely.

That night, Leo didn't hide from his shadow. He played music. He danced. He drew pictures in the candlelight, and his shadow followed joyfully. #3

From then on, the shadow behaved. Not because it had to—because it wanted to.

Now, Leo walks to school with a shadow that's a little cheeky, but kind. They laugh, run, and sometimes dance on the hill where the sunset turns the world gold.

And if you ever see a shadow wave at you... it might just be Leo's.