

Section 1:

**#1 "It was the kind of rainy Tuesday that soaked through your socks and your spirit. I slumped into my usual seat at the back of the classroom, my schoolbag thudding onto the floor with a heavy, wet sound. As I reached in for my history book, my fingers brushed something small and metallic, tucked deep into a torn corner of the lining."**

Strengths: Your opening creates a strong mood with sensory details. The rain soaking through "socks and spirit" helps readers feel the character's emotions.

Weakness: Limited character introduction → Your opening focuses on setting the mood but gives readers little information about who the main character is. We don't know their name, age, or other key details that would help us connect with them from the start.

Exemplar: *"It was the kind of rainy Tuesday that soaked through your socks and your spirit. I, thirteen-year-old Jamie, slumped into my usual seat at the back of Ms Henderson's Year 8 classroom, my schoolbag thudding onto the floor with a heavy, wet sound."*

**#2 "One evening, helping in the library, I noticed a shelf slightly off-track. Behind it: an old wooden door, with the same spiral-triangle symbol etched into the center. My heart thudded. I slid the key into the lock. It turned."**

Strengths: You create suspense through short sentences and build excitement about what might be behind the door.

Weakness: Undeveloped setting details → The discovery of the door happens too quickly without enough buildup or details about the library setting. The reader can't visualise where this important door is located or why no one else has found it before.

Exemplar: *"One evening while helping Mrs Pritchard shelve books in the dusty west wing of our school's century-old library, I noticed a tall bookcase slightly off-track. When I pushed it gently, it moved to reveal an old wooden door hidden in the shadowy alcove, with the same spiral-triangle symbol etched into its worn centre."*

**#3 "The room inside was small and forgotten. Dust hung in the air like mist. On a table sat a cracked mirror and a single leather-bound journal. I opened it."**

Strengths: Your description of the dust "hanging like mist" creates a vivid image of an abandoned space.

Weakness: Missed opportunity for emotional response → You describe the physical room but don't show the character's emotional reaction to finding this secret place. How does it make them feel to discover something no one else knows about?

Exemplar: *"The room inside was small and forgotten, with dust hanging in the air like morning mist. My heart raced with excitement as I stepped into a space that felt untouched for decades. On a wooden table sat a cracked mirror and a single leather-bound journal that seemed to call to me."*

■ Your story has a compelling premise about finding a key that leads to greater awareness of others. The symbolism of the key "unlocking" the character's perception is clever. However, your piece would benefit from deeper character development—we need to know more about the main character beyond their newfound awareness. Also, you could strengthen the middle section by showing specific examples of how the character uses their new awareness to help others. The ending feels a bit rushed—consider expanding on how the character continues to use their gift after the key disappears. Adding more dialogue would make the story more engaging and help readers connect with the characters. You might take paragraph seven (where the character discovers the door) and expand this moment of discovery with more tension and details. Additionally, paragraph ten (where the character reads the journal) could include more specific entries to create a stronger emotional impact.

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**Score: 44/50**

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Section 2:

Title: The Key in the Bag

It was the kind of rainy Tuesday that soaked through your socks and your spirit. I slumped into my usual seat at the back of the classroom, my schoolbag thudding onto the floor with a heavy, wet sound. As I reached in for my history book, my fingers brushed something small and metallic, tucked deep into a torn corner of the lining. #1

I fished it out.

A key.

It was small and old, its bronze surface worn smooth with time. Jagged teeth, a looped handle, and a strange symbol carved into one side — a spiral tucked inside a triangle. It felt warm in my hand, oddly comforting, like it had been waiting for me.

At first, I thought someone had slipped it into my bag. But no one claimed it, and no one else even noticed it. The key stayed in my pocket. I'd find myself holding it during class, during lunch, when I couldn't sleep at night. And that's when I began to notice things.

The world around me sharpened. I saw how Mia, always so quiet, flinched when her phone buzzed. How Mr. Kline gripped the edges of the lab counter to stop his hands from shaking. I saw the exhaustion in Ms. Henderson's eyes behind her firm, expressionless face. It was as if the key had unlocked something — not a door, but my awareness.

One evening, helping in the library, I noticed a shelf slightly off-track. Behind it: an old wooden door, with the same spiral-triangle symbol etched into the center. My heart thudded. I slid the key into the lock. It turned. #2

The room inside was small and forgotten. Dust hung in the air like mist. On a table sat a cracked mirror and a single leather-bound journal. I opened it. #3

Inside were handwritten pages — letters, confessions, and private thoughts of students who had come before me. Stories of pain, hope, fear, and loneliness. One line stopped me cold:

"I feel invisible. No one sees what I carry."

That night, I understood. The key wasn't magic in the fairy-tale sense — no glowing lights or secret powers. But it had changed me. I started speaking up, reaching out, listening. I wrote letters of my own and left them where someone might find them — tucked in books, slid under desks.

Then one morning, the key was gone.

I searched everywhere, but it had vanished as quietly as it had come. And still, I felt no panic.

Because I didn't need it anymore.

The key had done its job. It had unlocked not a door, but something far more important — the part of me that finally saw others clearly.