

Section 1:

#1: Opening Scene (First paragraph)Strengths: Your opening creates a lovely atmospheric setting with sensory details like "crusty paper" and "musty smell." The image of Riley curled up in the attic corner with a flickering candle establishes an intimate, cosy mood that draws readers in.

Weakness: Unclear narrative flow → The transition between Riley texting her friend and discovering the diary feels abrupt. You write "She flicked open her phone to text her friend a thank-you for dropping her here, then put it away. Her eyes softened when she read the scrawly handwriting," but it's unclear how she moved from her phone to reading the diary. The connection between these actions needs clearer linking.

Exemplar: *After putting her phone away, Riley's attention turned to the weathered diary in her hands. Her eyes softened when she read the scrawly handwriting.*

#2: Diary Entry Beginning (Dear Diary section)Strengths: Your use of authentic childlike voice is excellent, with phrases like "sooo long" and "TWO WHOLE WEEKS!" The excitement and anticipation come through clearly, making the young Riley feel genuine and relatable.

Weakness: Missing emotional depth → While the diary captures a child's excitement, it lacks deeper feelings about being the new kid. You mention Riley was "the new kid" but don't explore the nervousness, loneliness, or relief that would naturally accompany making a first friend in a new place.

Exemplar: *So, I was the new kid, and I felt really nervous because I didn't know anyone. But then Molly came up to me and invited me to a sleepover!*

#3: Ending Connection (Final paragraphs)Strengths: Your circular structure connecting the spark metaphor from the mother's warning to the friendship theme is clever. The revelation that Molly is still Riley's best friend creates a satisfying emotional payoff.

Weakness: Rushed resolution → The ending feels hurried after the detailed diary entries. The transition from reading the diary to the phone call happens too quickly. You write "Riley's phone buzzed" immediately after the emotional moment, which doesn't give readers time to absorb the significance.

Exemplar: *Riley sat quietly for a moment, letting the memories wash over her. Then her phone buzzed, and she smiled through her tears as she saw the familiar name.*

■ Your piece shows strong emotional connection and creative structure, particularly in how you link childhood memories to present-day friendship. The diary format effectively captures a child's authentic voice and excitement. However, your writing would benefit from deeper emotional exploration and smoother transitions between scenes. The middle section with detailed diary entries is your strongest part, but the beginning and ending need more development to match this quality. Additionally, consider slowing down key emotional moments to let readers fully experience Riley's feelings. Your use of the spark metaphor works well, but you could strengthen it by weaving it more subtly throughout the piece rather than stating it so directly at the end.

Overall Score: 42/50

Section 2:

Sparking a Friendship

#1 Riley gently unfolded the crusty paper, ignoring the musty smell. A candle nearby flickered invitingly, and soon she was curled up in a secluded corner of her parents' attic. She flicked open her phone to text her friend a thank-you for dropping her ~~here~~ [off], then put it away. ~~Her eyes softened when she read the scrawly handwriting, 25-years-old.~~ [After putting her phone away, Riley's attention turned to the weathered diary. Her eyes softened when she read the scrawly handwriting from 25 years ago.]

#2 Dear Diary,

I am going to my first sleepover! With Molly. I waited sooo long because Molly's mum always plans years in advance. Let me tell you what happened!

So, I was the new kid, and Molly came up to me and invited me to a sleepover! But I had to wait for TWO WHOLE WEEKS! Now the day is here. I'm going in an hour. Mum keeps telling me to 'be polite'.

Now I have to decide whether to leave you here or keep you with me. There was really no decision at all [—] you're coming with me!

UPDATE: We're at Molly's house! While Molly's in the bathroom, I'm updating. When I said to Molly's mum, "Hello Mrs ~~Schwanger~~ [Schwanger], I'm Riley. Thank you for having me!" like Mum told me to [,] ~~But~~ [but] she just said, "Call me Penny."

We've chosen our FAVOURITE movie to watch! And we're going to toast marshmallows over the stove and make s'mores.

Molly is filled with good ideas. She said we could melt the chocolate in the ~~fridge~~ [microwave], get strawberries, dip them in the chocolate and have it with ICE CREAM! And I brought popcorn, but Molly says the salt makes her lips swell, so she made nachos for us.

UPDATE: We've finished the movie, and we've still got an hour. We played Roblox together, and I brought my speaker and my new—SQUEEEEE!—phone to play music. It was so cool. Now we're going to play some board and card games and then stargaze and then go to bed after reading and stories.

UPDATE: It's bedtime! Usually I don't like going to bed, but the day was tiring. And I played my favourite podcast to get over my homesickness. And I cuddled Monica, my axolotl. I'm half-asleep already. Molly insisted on sleeping beside me, so we're both on the floor because Molly only has a single bed.

But that's alright. I have a feeling that this could spark something beautiful.

Riley out!

#3 Riley, the 35-year-old Riley, found tears in her eyes, but they were tears of happiness. Her mother called, "Careful with the candles[—] a spark could start a flame!"

A spark. A spark of friendship.

~~Riley's phone buzzed. Her best friend was calling to ask whether she needed a ride back. With blurry eyes, she looked at the profile picture.~~ [Riley sat quietly for a moment, letting the memories wash over her. Then her phone buzzed—her best friend calling to ask whether she needed a ride back. Through blurry eyes, she smiled at the profile picture.]

Molly ~~Shwanger~~ [Schwanger].