

Section 1

#1 - Opening paragraph: "In the corner of a narrow garden, hemmed in by brick and shadow, a single sunflower sprouted in early spring. It was not planted with care, nor expected to thrive. Yet it rose—awkwardly at first, its stem crooked like a question mark—toward the pale morning light."

Strengths: Your opening creates a strong visual image with "hemmed in by brick and shadow" and establishes the underdog nature of the sunflower effectively. The metaphor "its stem crooked like a question mark" cleverly introduces uncertainty as a central theme.

Weakness: Unclear transition logic → The connection between the sunflower not being "planted with care" and it rising "awkwardly" needs strengthening. The phrase "yet it rose" suggests defiance, but the relationship between neglect and awkward growth isn't clearly established.

Exemplar: *Yet it rose—tentatively at first, finding its own way through the shadows, its stem crooked like a question mark searching for answers.*

#2 - Mid-section: "By midsummer, the sunflower had grown tall. Its petals flared like flames, its centre dark and heavy with promise. But something had changed. One morning, Steve noticed it had stopped turning. While others in nearby gardens bowed to the sun, this one remained still—its golden face tilted west, toward the fading light."

Strengths: Your contrast between this sunflower and others creates effective dramatic tension. The phrase "dark and heavy with promise" adds depth to the flower's symbolism.

Weakness: Rushed character development → Steve's realisation about the sunflower feels sudden without sufficient buildup. The phrase "something had changed" is vague and doesn't prepare readers for the significant shift in the flower's behaviour.

Exemplar: *Over several mornings, Steve began to notice subtle changes. The sunflower's daily ritual of following the sun had gradually slowed, until one morning he realised it had stopped turning altogether.*

#3 - Conclusion: "On the final day of summer, Steve stood in the garden as dusk fell. The air was thick with the scent of dry grass and fading blooms. He reached out and touched the sunflower's brittle leaves. They crumbled in his hand, but the stem remained upright."

Strengths: Your sensory details like "thick with the scent of dry grass" create an evocative atmosphere. The image of crumbling leaves while the stem stays upright powerfully reinforces the theme of resilience.

Weakness: Incomplete emotional resolution → While Steve's physical transformation is clear, his internal change needs more specific detail. The phrase "felt something shift—not loudly, but deeply" remains too abstract for readers to fully understand his growth.

Exemplar: *In that moment, Steve understood that strength didn't come from bending toward what others expected, but from choosing your own direction, even when it meant standing alone.*

■ Your piece demonstrates solid thematic development through the parallel journeys of Steve and the sunflower. The central metaphor works well to explore themes of conformity versus individuality. However, your character development needs more gradual progression rather than sudden realisations. Additionally, some transitions between paragraphs feel abrupt and would benefit from clearer connecting phrases. Your descriptive language creates vivid imagery, but occasionally the symbolism becomes heavy-handed. To improve the substance, focus on showing Steve's internal changes through specific actions and thoughts rather than abstract statements. Also, develop the relationship between Steve and his parents more thoroughly to strengthen the conflict between conformity and self-expression. The ending would be more powerful if you showed concrete ways Steve plans to embrace his newfound independence.

Overall Score: 44/50

Section 2:

#1 In the corner of a narrow garden, hemmed in by brick and shadow, a single sunflower sprouted in early spring. It was not planted with care, nor expected to thrive. Yet it rose—awkwardly at first, its stem crooked like a question mark—~~toward~~ [towards] the pale morning light.

#2 Steve watched it from his bedroom window. His parents called it a weed, but to Steve, it was a mystery. Each day, the sunflower twisted its head eastward, following the sun's golden arc like a loyal servant. It was, at first, a symbol of what Steve believed he should be: bright, obedient, reaching ~~toward~~ [towards] approval.

He tried to mirror it. At school, he smiled when spoken to, nodded when corrected, and ~~coloured~~ [coloured] inside the lines. His teachers praised his neatness. His parents admired his silence. But inside, Steve felt like a shadow stitched to someone else's feet—present, but never quite belonging.

#3 By midsummer, the sunflower had grown tall. Its petals flared like flames, its centre dark and heavy with promise. But something had changed. One morning, Steve noticed it had stopped turning. While others in nearby gardens bowed to the sun, this one remained still—its golden face tilted west, ~~toward~~ [towards] the fading light.

Was it broken? Or had it simply chosen?

Steve began to sit beside it. He traced its rough stem with his fingers, felt the warmth trapped in its leaves, smelled the earthy sweetness of its pollen. It did not speak, but it did not need to. Its stillness was a kind of defiance—a quiet refusal to follow the path laid out.

He started painting. Not the sun, but the shadows. Not perfect flowers, but twisted stems and wilting petals. His art was messy, bold, and strange. His parents frowned. "Why paint something so sad?" they asked.

Steve didn't answer. He didn't need to.

As summer waned, the sunflower's head drooped, heavy with seeds. Its petals browned at the edges, curling like burnt paper. Yet even in decay, it held its posture—facing west, as if watching the sun leave rather than arrive.

Steve understood. The sunflower had inverted its purpose. It no longer chased light—it challenged it. It had become a symbol not of growth through obedience, but of strength through resistance.

On the final day of summer, Steve stood in the garden as dusk fell. The air was thick with the scent of dry grass and fading blooms. He reached out and touched the sunflower's brittle leaves. They crumbled in his hand, but the stem remained upright.

He turned west, just as it had. The sky was streaked with orange and violet, colours that didn't ask to be understood. And in that moment, Steve felt something shift—not loudly, but deeply.

He was no longer the boy who followed. He was the boy who watched the sun go, and stayed standing.