

Section 1

#1: "The river, a ribbon of silver hidden beneath a canopy of rustling leaves, was a secret whispered by the wind."

Strengths:

- Your descriptive language creates a beautiful picture of the hidden river, making readers feel like they've discovered something special.
- The imagery helps us imagine the peaceful, secret nature of this place.

Telling Rather Than Showing: → Whilst your description is lovely, you're telling us the river is "a secret whispered by the wind" rather than showing us why it feels secret. Consider describing what makes it feel hidden – perhaps the way the branches block the path, or how Eliza had to push through thick bushes to find it, or that she'd never noticed it before despite walking these woods many times.

Exemplar: *The river lay beneath a canopy of rustling leaves, its silver waters glimpsed only through gaps in the branches. Eliza had walked these woods for years, yet somehow she'd never noticed the narrow path that led her here.*

#2: "At first, the river was a mirror of her grief. Its waters, sluggish and choked with fallen branches, mirrored the stagnation in her own life."

Strengths:

- Your parallel between the river's condition and Eliza's emotions is clear and easy to follow.
- The word "stagnation" effectively captures how Eliza feels stuck.

Repetitive Phrasing: → You've used the word "mirror" twice in two sentences ("was a mirror" and "mirrored"), which makes the writing feel repetitive. Additionally, you're stating the connection very directly rather than trusting your readers to make the link themselves. When you write both that the river "was a mirror of her grief" and that it "mirrored the stagnation," you're explaining the same idea twice.

Exemplar: *The river's waters moved sluggishly, choked with fallen branches. Eliza watched a dead leaf circle in the same spot, unable to move forward.*

#3: "The river, like Eliza, was healing. The sound of the water was no longer a mournful sigh but a cheerful song."

Strengths:

- Your contrast between the beginning and end of the story shows clear character growth.
- The change from "mournful sigh" to "cheerful song" effectively demonstrates the transformation.

Explaining the Symbolism Too Directly: → You're telling us that "the river, like Eliza, was healing" rather than allowing readers to understand this through the descriptions themselves. When you state the meaning so plainly, it makes the symbolism feel less powerful. Your readers are clever enough to notice the connection between the clearer water and Eliza's improving mood without being told.

Exemplar: *The water rippled over smooth stones, its steady rhythm filling the quiet air. Eliza found herself humming along.*

■ Your piece tells a touching story about grief and healing through the symbol of a river. The connection between cleaning the river and Eliza healing herself is clear and meaningful. However, your writing would become stronger if you showed readers what's happening rather than explaining it to them. For example, in your opening paragraph, instead of writing "the world seemed muted, the vibrant colours of life replaced with a dull grey," you could show us Eliza walking past her favourite flowers without noticing them, or sitting at dinner pushing food around her plate. Additionally, your third paragraph tells us the river "mirrored the stagnation in her own life," but you could show this by describing Eliza sitting motionless by the water for hours, or returning home to find she'd forgotten to eat lunch. Also, your final paragraph explains that "the river was not just a place, but a journey," which states your theme very directly. Trust your readers to understand the deeper meaning by focusing on specific moments – perhaps show Eliza smiling at the fish, or bringing a friend to see the river she's cleaned. When you show rather than tell, your readers become more involved in discovering the story's meaning for themselves, which makes the experience more powerful and memorable.

Overall Score: 42/50

Section 2:

~~Eliza~~ #1 had always felt a disconnect, a hollowness that echoed in the quiet corners of her heart. Since her grandmother's passing, the world seemed muted, the vibrant colors of life replaced with a dull gray [; she walked past flower gardens without noticing their blooms, and conversations around her faded into background noise]. Then, one crisp autumn afternoon, while wandering through the overgrown woods behind her house, she stumbled upon it: the forgotten river.

The river, a ribbon of silver hidden beneath a canopy of rustling leaves, was a secret whispered by the wind. The air hung heavy with the scent of damp earth and decaying leaves, a smell that usually repelled her, but now, strangely, comforted. The sound of the water, a gentle murmur against the stones, was a soothing balm to her frayed nerves. She sat on the bank, a smooth, grey stone nestled in her palm. It was the first of many she would collect, each one a silent witness to her journey.

~~At first, the river was a mirror of her grief. Its waters, sluggish and choked with fallen branches, mirrored the stagnation in her own life.~~ #2 [At first, the river's waters moved sluggishly, choked with fallen branches and tangled weeds.] The stone felt cold, heavy, a burden she couldn't seem to shed. The sight of the water, once a source of peace, now evoked only sadness. She remembered her grandmother's stories of the river, how it used to be a lively place, filled with laughter and children.

As weeks turned into months, Eliza began to visit the river daily. She started clearing the debris, pulling out the dead branches and fallen leaves. The physical act of cleaning the river seemed to cleanse her own spirit. She noticed the subtle changes: the water, slowly but surely, began to flow more freely. The stone in her hand, warmed by the sun, began to feel less burdensome.

One day, she saw it: a flash of silver, a small fish darting through the clear water. It was a sign of life, a symbol of hope. ~~The river, once a reflection of her sorrow, was now a testament to her resilience.~~ [The river had transformed; where debris once blocked its flow, water now ran clear and swift.] The stone felt lighter now, a reminder of her strength.

~~The river, like Eliza, was healing.~~ #3 [The water rippled steadily over smooth stones.] The sound of the water was no longer a mournful sigh but a cheerful song. The scent of the earth, now mingled with the fresh smell of blooming wildflowers, was a promise of new beginnings. Eliza ~~realized~~ [understood] that the river was not just a place, but a journey, and she, like the river, was finally flowing again; she returned each day, watching the fish dart between the rocks, feeling the warm stone in her pocket]. The fish became a symbol of her own renewed vitality.