

Section 1

#1: "One picture made him freeze. It was a Polaroid, its edges softened by time, its colours mellowed into a sepia-like warmth."

Strengths:

- Your opening immediately creates interest by showing Felix's reaction before revealing what caused it.
- The sensory details about the photograph help readers picture it clearly in their minds.

Vague Temporal Transition → Your piece moves from the photograph's discovery to Felix's childhood memory without clear signals to guide readers through the time shift. The phrase "He'd forgotten how photos could do that" appears suddenly after describing the hand, making it unclear when Felix begins remembering versus simply observing. This abrupt movement between past and present can confuse readers about which moment they're experiencing.

Exemplar: "He'd forgotten how photos could do that—unlock doors to rooms he didn't even know he'd sealed off. As he closed his eyes and pressed the cool photograph against his cheek, the scent of old paper mingled with something familiar: pipe tobacco and damp earth. The memory surfaced slowly."

#2: "Now, when Felix looked at the photo, he saw what he hadn't seen then. Mama had framed the shot in a hurry, trying to catch her son's pure happiness."

Strengths:

- Your writing effectively contrasts Felix's childhood understanding with his adult perspective.
- The detail about his mother trying to capture happiness adds emotional depth to the scene.

Underdeveloped Emotional Realisation → Whilst your piece tells readers that Felix now understands the gravity of the moment, it doesn't fully show how this realisation feels or develops. The sentence "Papa Leo never returned from that trip" appears without showing Felix's thought process or emotional response to this understanding. Readers need to experience Felix discovering this meaning, not simply be told the conclusion he reaches.

Exemplar: "Now, when Felix looked at the photo, he saw what he hadn't seen then. His mother must have framed the shot hastily, her focus on capturing his joy whilst something far heavier

weighed on her. That blurred hand in the background—it wasn't casual at all. Felix's throat tightened as he understood: Papa Leo had known he wouldn't return."

#3: "Felix cleaned the dust from the polaroid with care. Placing it back in the shoebox, now reverently, he felt it was much more than just a relic..."

Strengths:

- The careful action of cleaning the photograph demonstrates Felix's changed attitude towards the memory.
- Your conclusion connects the specific photograph to broader ideas about memory and love.

Unclear Resolution → Your ending tells readers what Felix feels but doesn't show what this discovery means for him moving forwards. The phrase "life retains its most poignant stories" sounds meaningful but remains abstract. Readers finish without knowing how this realisation might change Felix or what he'll do with this newfound understanding. The conclusion needs to ground these big ideas in Felix's specific experience.

Exemplar: "Felix cleaned the dust from the Polaroid with care, then placed it not back in the shoebox, but on his desk where he could see it. He'd spent years avoiding these memories, but now he understood: Papa Leo's love hadn't vanished with that final wave—it lived in this moment, preserved and waiting to be remembered."

■ Your piece demonstrates strong descriptive ability, particularly in the sensory details surrounding the photograph. The central concept—a character discovering hidden meaning in an old photo—offers genuine emotional potential. However, your writing would benefit from slowing down at crucial moments to let readers experience Felix's discoveries rather than summarising them. Additionally, the middle section where Felix remembers Papa Leo feels rushed; you could expand this memory to show more specific interactions that reveal their relationship. Consider also making the ending more concrete by showing what Felix does with his new understanding rather than stating general ideas about memory and love. Your vocabulary is sophisticated, which strengthens the writing, but ensure each reflective moment gives readers time to feel alongside Felix rather than observe from a distance.

Overall Score: 43/50

Section 2:

One picture made him freeze. It was a Polaroid, its edges softened by time, its colours mellowed into a sepia-like warmth. #1 There was a boy in it, no more than eight years old, grinning toothily, clutching a bright, red toy biplane. His hair was a wild tangle, his knees smudged with dirt—dirt—unmistakably a young Felix. Except it wasn't the boy's joyous face that had captured his attention; it was the figure ~~on~~ [in] the blurred background, a large and gnarled hand that gave an uncertain wave from the frame's edge.

Felix frowned. He remembered that plane. It had been his most prized possession, flown endlessly over flowerbeds and imaginary battlefields. He remembered the thrill of unwrapping it, the weight of the balsa wood in his small hands. But the hand... whose was it? A faint, almost imperceptible ache began in his chest, a whisper of a memory just out of reach.

He'd forgotten how photos could do that—~~that-unlock~~ [unlock] doors to rooms he didn't even know he'd sealed off. He closed his eyes, pressing the cool, slightly textured photo against his cheek. The scent of old paper and something else, something like pipe tobacco and damp earth, filled his senses.

Suddenly, it clicked: Papa Leo.

That plane had been given to him by his grandfather, a quiet man with few words but profound warmth. It was an afternoon like this: late summer, the sun already low. Papa Leo was leaving, not for the evening, but for a 'long visit' to a distant relative. Felix hadn't registered the gravity in his mother's eyes then, or the unusual tightness in Papa Leo's embrace; he'd simply been overjoyed with his new toy.

#2 Now, when Felix looked at the photo, he saw what he hadn't seen then. Mama had framed the shot in a hurry, trying to catch her son's pure happiness. She hadn't noticed, or perhaps she hadn't wanted to ~~immortalize~~ [immortalise], the faint outline of Papa Leo in the background. His hand wasn't triumphantly waving to bid farewell but rather in a gentle, almost hesitant motion. A silent adieu to more than his grandson's fleeting attention. Papa Leo never returned from that trip.

A wave of deep sorrow, laced with tender warmth, washed over Felix. The photograph wasn't a picture of a boy and his plane; it was a captured moment of unspoken farewell, a testament to the quiet dignity of loss that a child couldn't comprehend. That blurred hand wasn't just waving; it was holding onto a last glimpse, a last connection, before fading into memory. #3 Felix cleaned the dust from the ~~polaroid~~ [Polaroid] with care. Placing it back in the shoebox, now reverently, he felt it was much more than just a relic: a tangible link to a love that had triumphed over time and an unexpected reminder that in the quietest corners, life retains its most poignant stories. And sometimes, all it takes is a forgotten photograph to bring them into focus.