

Section 1

#1: Opening paragraph (First three sentences)

Strengths:

- Your opening creates a strong mood change with the thunder interrupting the peaceful scene
- The focus on Hope and her musical struggle gives readers a clear character goal from the start

Awkward sentence structure → The phrase "hushing the once quiet whisper of the breeze" creates confusion because a whisper is already quiet, so calling it "once quiet" doesn't make clear sense. Also, "her pencil collapsed" is an odd verb choice since pencils don't typically collapse—they fall or drop. The word "slided" is incorrect grammar (the past tense of slide is "slid"). These small errors pull readers out of your story just when you're trying to draw them in.

Exemplar: *A sudden strike of thunder crashed across the gorge, silencing the gentle breeze that rustled through the pines.*

#2: Middle section (Paragraph describing Hope's entry into the building)

Strengths:

- You build mystery effectively with the hidden door and descending staircase
- The sensory details about the wind smelling of metal and damp earth help readers imagine the scene

Unclear sequencing and word choice → The phrase "led her not toward a window, but a heavy slab door" is confusing because wind doesn't usually "lead" someone to a door in a physical sense. Additionally, "mysterious objects that lay before it" is too vague—what are these objects? Your readers can't picture the scene clearly. The phrase "her boot walked the first step" also sounds strange because boots don't walk on their own; Hope walks.

Exemplar: *As Hope approached the building, a gust of cold wind drew her attention to a heavy stone door hidden behind scattered debris.*

#3: Discovery of the cello (Paragraph beginning with "She took one last look")

Strengths:

- The description of the cello creates intrigue with specific visual details like "paint flaked like burnt sugar"
- Connecting the cello to the legend of Lira adds depth to your story

Vague descriptions and logic gaps → The phrase "wood like gold rested beneath the flakes" needs clearer meaning—is the wood golden in colour, or valuable like gold? The "spiral carving that looked like a human ear, somehow alive" is interesting but you don't explain why it looks alive or what makes it special. Also, you say "the wood feeling light weight as she gently picked it up with her hands"—this repeats the idea of picking up twice and uses "light weight" as two words when it should be one word (lightweight). Most importantly, you don't explain how Hope knew exactly where to find the cello or why she immediately connected it to Lira's legend.

Exemplar: *In the centre of the room rested a cello with paint that flaked like burnt sugar, revealing golden wood beneath. On its back, a spiral carving resembled a human ear, its curves so precise they seemed almost alive.*

■ Your story has a solid foundation with an interesting premise about a struggling musician finding inspiration through a mysterious instrument. The connection between Hope's creative block and the legendary cello creates natural tension that keeps readers curious. However, your piece would benefit from more careful word choices and clearer explanations of how events unfold.

When you write "her recent work had grown into songs—flat and predictable," this tells us about Hope's problem, but you could strengthen this by showing us an example of why her music feels flat to her. Does she keep writing the same patterns? Does nothing feel fresh? Additionally, the middle section where Hope enters the building moves very quickly. You could slow down here and help us understand what Hope is thinking and feeling as she makes the choice to enter a ruined, dark building. Why isn't she more afraid?

Your descriptions sometimes try to do too much at once, like "its bottom layers remained eerily in contact"—in contact with what? Be specific so readers can follow your meaning. Also, think about the logical flow of your story. Hope finds a legendary cello in perfect playing condition in an abandoned

building—would there be dust on it? Would the strings still be good after sitting there? These small realistic details make stories more believable.

Finally, your ending feels rushed. After Hope plays just once, the rain stops and she suddenly has all the inspiration she needs. Consider extending this moment. What does the music make her feel? What does she see or remember while playing? Give readers time to experience the transformation with Hope rather than just telling us it happened.

Overall Score: 42/50

Section 2

#1 A sudden strike of thunder crashed across the gorge, ~~hushing the once quiet whisper~~ [**silencing the gentle whisper**] of the breeze as it rustled ~~with~~ [**through**] the pines. Hope, who had been calmly composing a piece of sheet music, flinched, her pencil ~~collapsed~~ [**dropping from her hand**] and her paper ~~slid~~ [**slid**] away. Her recent work had grown into songs—flat and predictable like the old pieces from centuries before. She sighed as she picked up the wrinkled paper. As she stood back up, her eyes caught the Fire Wood Manor, its top floors a pile of rubble and areas that exposed rebar and concrete, but its bottom layers remained eerily in ~~contact~~ [**intact**].

#2 Inspiration struck—maybe its ~~dome~~ [**domed**] nature could help her with her stale music—and also help her to get out of the rain. As Hope approached the building [,] a gust of wind, cold and smelling of metal and mingled with damp earth, ~~led her not towards a window, but a heavy slab door that was hidden among mysterious objects that lay before it~~ [**drew her attention to a heavy stone door half-hidden behind scattered rubble**]. She pushed the door and the hinges creaked, revealing a long spiral staircase ~~and as it descended further, it became~~ [**that descended into**] complete darkness.

She took one last look of worry at it and ~~her boot walked~~ [**stepped onto**] the first step. ~~Descending a final step, her boot~~ [**After descending the stairs, her boot**] scraped across the stone ~~pavements~~ [**pavement**]. #3 Hope looked ~~in front of her~~ [**ahead**], and there laying in the ~~centre~~ [**centre**], rested a cello. It wasn't merely old; it looked ancient, its paint flaked like burnt sugar, ~~the~~ [**with**] wood like gold ~~rested~~ [**resting**] beneath the flakes. It held only one imperfection: a spiral carving on the back that looked like a human ear, somehow alive.

A legend of a cellist appeared from her childhood memory, Lira—a cellist from two decades past. Her music was said to be so emotional it could create tears from the toughest people—until she disappeared, together with her instrument, which locals said was carved from a single pine tree from her backyard. Hope picked up the instrument, the wood feeling ~~light-weight~~ **[lightweight]** ~~as she gently picked it up with her hands~~ **[in her hands]**. ~~Hesitance erupted~~ **[Hesitation rose within her]**, but she placed the bow on the strings and started playing. An echo seemed to start from the strings. The notes, low and vibrating, ~~creating~~ **[created]** an impossibly ~~dreamable~~ **[dreamlike]** sense of warmth.

Hope opened her eyes and gasped. The rain outside had ended and she knew she no longer needed inspiration for what to write next. The music had found her.