

## Section 1

**#1: "If I had known how much everything would change, I might have thought twice before stepping onto that plane. Back then I thought I was in for an exciting adventure, but things didn't go quite the way I imagined."**

**Strengths:** Your opening creates immediate intrigue through contrast—the reflective tone paired with the hint of regret draws readers in effectively. The conditional structure ("If I had known...") signals to your audience that transformation is coming, which is a sophisticated narrative technique.

**Weakness: Vague foreshadowing** → Your introduction promises significant change but doesn't give readers concrete signals about what kind of change to expect. Phrases like "how much everything would change" and "things didn't go quite the way I imagined" are quite general. While mystery can be valuable, your readers need just enough detail to feel genuinely curious rather than uncertain about what story they're entering.

**Exemplar:** *If I had known that a snoring passenger and schoolyard teasing would lead me to discover belonging in a Dutch town, I might have thought twice before stepping onto that plane.*

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**#2: "Every day, I hoped someone would be kind to me, but no one was. The teachers seemed too busy to notice, and I didn't want to seem weak by complaining. I missed home so much that I counted down the days on my calendar. I still had two long months left before I could go home, and the thought of surviving that long made me feel hopeless."**

**Strengths:** Your piece shows genuine emotional depth here—the accumulation of small details (counting days, the calendar, the specific two-month timeline) builds a real sense of isolation. The connection between not seeking help and feeling hopeless is psychologically honest.

**Weakness: Limited exploration of internal conflict** → Your character decides not to complain because she doesn't want to "seem weak," but we don't truly understand *why* this matters so much to her. Is it pride? Fear of rejection? Cultural background? This moment deserves more depth. Right now, readers accept the emotion but don't fully inhabit it alongside your character. The reasoning feels stated rather than explored.

**Exemplar:** *Every day, I hoped someone would be kind to me, but asking for help felt like admitting defeat—like proving that leaving Australia was the wrong choice. So I stayed silent, counting down the calendar days, convinced that showing weakness would only give them more reason to exclude me.*

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**#3: "A week later, Emma invited me to a town parade to see Sinterklaas arrive. Music filled the streets and children laughed. To my surprise, Sinterklaas himself walked up to me, smiled, and gave me a small chocolate shaped like my initial. 'Welkom in Nederland,' he said which meant Welcome to the Netherlands. For the first time since I'd arrived, I felt like I belonged."**

**Strengths:** Your turning point is emotionally satisfying and culturally specific. The detail about the chocolate shaped like the character's initial is a lovely, personalised touch that makes the moment feel genuine rather than generic.

**Weakness: Rushed emotional resolution** → The transition from loneliness to belonging happens quite suddenly. Between receiving a chocolate and hearing "Welcome to the Netherlands," your character shifts from hopelessness to belonging. Whilst the moment itself is touching, the emotional journey compresses too quickly. Your readers need a bit more scaffolding to understand how this single gesture actually rewires her sense of place.

**Exemplar:** *To my surprise, Sinterklaas himself walked up to me, smiled, and gave me a small chocolate shaped like my initial. 'Welkom in Nederland,' he said, which meant Welcome to the Netherlands. In that moment, something shifted. For the first time since I'd arrived, I didn't feel like an outsider wearing the wrong clothes and speaking with the wrong accent. I felt seen. I felt home.*

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■ Your piece captures a genuine coming-of-age moment with real emotional stakes. The bones of your story are strong—you've got a clear problem (isolation), a catalyst (Emma's friendship), and a turning point (Sinterklaas). However, your writing would benefit from giving your middle section more room to breathe. The bullying and loneliness deserve richer detail so readers experience your character's struggle more fully. Additionally, when Emma and Sinterklaas arrive, slow down a moment to show us *exactly* how your character's feelings shift, rather than simply telling us she feels better. Your character's internal world is your greatest strength; trust it enough to linger there.

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## Section 2

If I had known how much everything would change, I might have thought twice before stepping onto that plane. Back then I thought I was in for an exciting adventure, but things didn't go quite the way I imagined.

It all began on a hectic morning when I nearly missed my flight after lingering over breakfast for too long. As if that weren't enough, the person next to me spent the entire trip snoring loudly, making the flight feel endless. By the time I landed, I was tired, hungry, and already wishing I could go home.

When I arrived at my new school, I tried to smile and make friends, but the other students laughed at my Aussie accent and the way I dressed. At first, I thought they were just curious, but slowly, the teasing turned into bullying. They hid my books, whispered behind my back, and sometimes pushed me in the hallways. I felt completely alone.

Every day, I hoped someone would be kind to me, but no one was. The teachers seemed too busy to notice, and I didn't want to seem weak by complaining. I missed home so much that I counted down the days on my calendar. I still had two long months left before I could go home, and the thought of surviving that long made me feel hopeless.

Then, one cold December morning, something changed. A girl named Emma sat next to me and asked if I wanted to be her partner for a project. She was kind and funny, and soon we became friends. She also told me about Sinterklaas, the Dutch Santa, who arrives by boat from Spain every year.

A week later, Emma invited me to a town parade to see Sinterklaas arrive. Music filled the streets and children laughed. To my surprise, Sinterklaas himself walked up to me, smiled, and gave me a small chocolate shaped like my initial. ~~"Welkom in Nederland," he said which meant Welcome to the Netherlands.~~ ["Welkom in Nederland," he said, which meant Welcome to the Netherlands.]

For the first time since I'd arrived, I felt like I belonged. Maybe coming here wasn't the biggest mistake of my life after all. Maybe it was just the hardest adventure that turned into the most magical one.