

Section 1

#1: Opening Paragraph "The swings creaked in the wind, slow and uneven, like a breath half-remembered. Rust clung to the chains, flaking off in thin curls that shimmered faintly before the light swallowed them."

Strengths:

- Your opening creates a strong sense of atmosphere through sensory details like the creaking swings and visual imagery of rust flaking away.
- The simile "like a breath half-remembered" establishes a nostalgic, haunting tone that carries through the piece.

Unclear Transition: → The shift from describing the swings to introducing Ella feels abrupt. You move from focusing on the playground's decay to suddenly placing Ella at the gate without connecting these two observations. The reader needs a smoother bridge between the setting description and the character's arrival to understand why we're suddenly focused on her presence.

Exemplar: *The swings creaked in the wind, slow and uneven, like a breath half-remembered. Rust clung to the chains, flaking off in thin curls that shimmered faintly before the light swallowed them. **Through the fence, a figure approached—Ella, drawn back to the place she'd tried to forget. She stood at the gate, her hand resting on the cool metal bar.***

#2: The Sandbox Paragraph "The sandbox was still there, but someone had forgotten to cover it. The wind had smoothed it flat, no mountains, no trenches, no plastic soldiers buried mid-battle."

Strengths:

- Your list of absent features (mountains, trenches, soldiers) effectively shows what childhood play looked like compared to the empty present.
- The detail of the tilted shovel creates a poignant image of abandonment.

Vague Description: → The phrase "someone had forgotten to cover it" lacks emotional weight and doesn't match the rest of your descriptive style. This distant, factual statement pulls the reader away from the intimate, memory-filled atmosphere you've built. Since this is Ella's perspective and the playground holds personal significance, the observation should reflect her emotional connection rather than sound like a neutral report.

Exemplar: *The sandbox was still there, **uncovered and exposed to seasons of neglect.** The wind had smoothed it flat, no mountains, no trenches, no plastic soldiers buried mid-battle.*

#3: The Laugh and Movement"A sudden laugh rose from the hill below, brief as a spark and was swallowed by the stillness. Ella looked up, expecting shapes to form out of the dark. But nothing stirred. Only the paired swings rocked in the wind, their hollow rhythm echoing in the emptiness."

Strengths:

- The mysterious laugh creates tension and suggests supernatural elements without being obvious.
- Your description of the swings' "hollow rhythm echoing in the emptiness" reinforces the loneliness of the scene.

Incomplete Sentence Structure: → The phrase "brief as a spark and was swallowed" contains a grammatical misstep where the construction changes midway. You begin with a simile ("brief as a spark") but then switch to a different verb structure ("was swallowed"), creating an awkward junction. This breaks the flow of an otherwise atmospheric moment and makes the sentence feel unfinished or hastily constructed.

Exemplar: *A sudden laugh rose from the hill below, **brief as a spark, then swallowed by the stillness.** Ella looked up, expecting shapes to form out of the dark.*

■ Your piece demonstrates strong atmospheric writing with evocative imagery that captures the melancholy of a forgotten playground. The emotional core—Ella's memories of her brother and the hint of something supernatural—comes through effectively. To strengthen the substance, you could develop Ella's internal thoughts more fully so readers understand what brings her back and what she's feeling beyond the physical descriptions. Additionally, the ending's revelation about her brother feels slightly rushed; consider adding one or two more moments earlier in the piece that hint at loss or grief, so the conclusion feels more earned. Also, your fifth paragraph about the slide could be expanded to show us a specific memory rather than just telling us she "almost smiled" at remembering, which would deepen the emotional impact of your writing.

Overall Score: 43/50

Section 2:

The swings creaked in the wind, slow and uneven, like a breath half-remembered. Rust clung to the chains, flaking off in thin curls that shimmered faintly before the light swallowed them. The sun was already low, caught in the tangled branches beyond the fence, its orange glow slipping across the cracked rubber tiles and dying there, thin and tired.

#1 Ella stood at the gate, her hand resting on the cool metal bar. The sign above her—[,] "Maplewood Community Park"—[,] had lost half its letters. They dangled from one screw, twisting back and forth. She pushed the gate open; it groaned the same way it used to when she and her brother had raced through it, years ago, their shoes kicking up dust.

Now, only her footsteps sounded.

#2 The sandbox was still there, but someone had forgotten to cover it. The wind had smoothed it flat,[—] no mountains, no trenches, no plastic soldiers buried mid-battle. A single shovel stuck up from the sand, tilted slightly as if waiting for a hand that would never come back. She crouched beside it and brushed the grains from its handle. The red paint had faded to pink.

#3 ~~A sudden laugh rose from the hill below, brief as a spark and was swallowed by the stillness.~~[A sudden laugh rose from the hill below, brief as a spark, then swallowed by the stillness.] Ella looked up, expecting shapes to form out of the dark. But nothing stirred. Only the paired swings rocked in the wind, their hollow rhythm echoing in the emptiness.

The slide, once a bright blue ribbon, had dulled to the ~~color~~[colour] of steel. She ran her fingers down the side, tracing a faint scratch shaped like a lightning bolt,[—] her brother's old mark of victory. She almost smiled as she remembered the way he used to climb to the top, daring her to follow, shouting her name into the twilight. She could still hear the echo, somewhere between the trees and the sky.

The air grew colder. Streetlights blinked on, one by one, until the whole playground glowed in patches of gold and shadow. Ella sat on the bottom step of the climbing frame. The metal was cold beneath her palms. She stayed there, listening,[—] to the slow swing chains, to the whisper of leaves, to the space between sounds that felt like waiting.

The gate moved again behind her, just a breath of wind, just enough to make it sigh.

She didn't look back because she could feel him waiting there, in the spaces between the swings, and some presences are not meant to be seen. Not until they forgive.