

Section 1

#1: "Only moments before, the sky began to bleed crimson as I stepped through the heavy iron gates that were once simple oak fences. The gate gave a metallic shriek, as it let go a cascade of childhood summers."

Strengths: Your piece uses vivid sensory language—"metallic shriek" and "bleed crimson"—that creates a haunting atmosphere. The juxtaposition of the iron gates replacing oak fences effectively signals time's passage and environmental change.

→ **Temporal clarity and narrative grounding** Your writing moves backwards in time ("Only moments before") but doesn't clearly establish when "now" is. This makes it difficult for your reader to follow what's happening. The opening line suggests the narrator is present-tense looking at the balloon, yet the second sentence jumps to a recent past event. This creates confusion about the narrative's timeline.

Exemplar: "Moments earlier, I had stepped through the heavy iron gates—once simple oak fences—as the sky began to bleed crimson."

#2: "I started to play on the swing, the feeling was just as I remembered from years ago, closing my eyes and getting butterflies in my stomach while imagining streaking through the fiery hues of orange and gold."

Strengths: Your piece captures genuine emotional resonance through concrete physical sensations like "butterflies in my stomach." The imagery of "fiery hues of orange and gold" adds warmth to what becomes an increasingly unsettling piece.

→ **Sentence construction and flow** This sentence is actually two independent clauses joined only by a comma—this is called a comma splice. Additionally, the phrase "streaking through the fiery hues" is unclear; your reader doesn't understand whether you're imagining yourself moving through the sky or visualising the sunset.

Exemplar: "I started to play on the swing, and the feeling was just as I remembered from years ago. Closing my eyes, I felt butterflies in my stomach as I imagined soaring through the fiery hues of orange and gold."

#3: "The old playground stood as a ruined cage, once a beacon of children's bliss was now a wrecked dusty confinement. It was like peeling paint to reveal something far worse."

Strengths: Your piece employs strong metaphors—the playground as both "beacon" and "cage"—to convey the transition from nostalgia to dread. The final image suggests layers beneath the surface.

→ **Structural coherence and logical connection** The shift from peaceful reminiscence to horror happens abruptly. Your writing doesn't adequately build tension or explain why the playground suddenly transforms in the narrator's perception. The reader needs more scaffolding to understand this emotional pivot.

Exemplar: "The old playground, once a beacon of children's bliss, now stood as a ruined cage—wrecked and dusty. The transformation felt deliberate, as though peeling paint had revealed something far worse beneath."

■ Your piece has strong atmospheric foundations and compelling imagery, particularly in its supernatural elements. However, your writing would benefit from clearer narrative progression. The timeline jumps confuse your reader early on, and the emotional shift from comfort to terror needs more gradual development so your reader understands what's triggering the narrator's fear. Additionally, strengthen the logical connections between paragraphs by explaining *why* things feel wrong rather than simply stating they do. Consider also revising your opening and closing paragraphs so they create a satisfying circle—right now, the repeated balloon description feels slightly repetitive rather than intentionally circular. Your piece has real potential; with careful restructuring of sequence and pacing, it could be genuinely unsettling.

Score: 38/50

Section 2

A single red balloon hung in the air, lashed to the gate, but there was no one there. Only moments before, the sky began to bleed crimson as I stepped through the heavy iron gates that were once simple oak fences. The gate gave a metallic shriek, as ~~it let go~~ [it released] a cascade of childhood summers. The sight of the small maple bench brought a genuine smile to my lips—the first I've had in years. Worries seemed to fly by as I ventured deeper into the park. I started to play on the swing, ~~the feeling was just as I remembered from years ago, closing my eyes and getting butterflies in my stomach while imagining streaking through the fiery hues of orange and gold.~~ [and the feeling matched my memories from years ago; closing my eyes, I felt butterflies in my stomach as I imagined soaring through the fiery hues of orange and gold.] The first distant, flickering sparks from angel fire freckled the ink black ~~empyrean~~ [night sky] as I leaped off the ~~sky chair~~ [swing], then landing softly on the wet grass. The dirt squelched as I made my way across the park. I took one last look at the domain of dreams then approached the gate. I stopped. A single red balloon hung in the air, lashed to the gate, but there was no one there. It wasn't there before, nor had anyone come into the park while I was here. My breath hitched. I looked around, no one was there. ~~The merry-go-round groaned then started to spin, drifting into a phantom rotation.~~ [The merry-go-round groaned, then began to spin in a phantom rotation.] The swing followed suit, rising and falling in an unbidden rhythm. Playground equipment creaked, the wind howled into the dark suffocating abyss. Something was wrong. The old playground stood as a ruined cage, ~~once a beacon of children's bliss~~

~~was now~~ [and once a beacon of children's bliss, now stood as] a wrecked dusty confinement. It was like peeling paint to reveal something far worse. My blood ran cold. A twig snapped.