

## Section 1

#1: "This was my place to hide - where I once came with my best friend to let our thoughts run free, away from the world's vibrance. It was simple, yet still felt like home."

**Strengths:** Your piece establishes an intimate, nostalgic tone right from the start. The contrast between simplicity and homely feeling creates emotional resonance that draws the reader in. Additionally, the phrase "away from the world's vibrance" effectively conveys the sanctuary nature of this space.

→ **Unclear spatial grounding:** Whilst your opening captures emotion beautifully, the reader doesn't know where "this place" actually is until the playground is revealed later. The vagueness works for atmosphere, but it leaves your piece feeling slightly disconnected from its physical setting early on.

*Exemplar: "This park was my place to hide—where I once came with my best friend to escape the world's noise and let our thoughts run free."*

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#2: "It was dusk, the afternoon sun slowly dipping below the horizon. The sky was painted in colours of red, pink, yellow, and a dirty orange. It was always the same. I sat at the top of the slide, listening to the steady beat of worker ants slowly retiring into their burrow after a long day of work."

**Strengths:** Your sensory details are vivid and specific—the observation of ants retiring into their burrow is a lovely, grounding touch that suggests mindfulness and calm. The repetition of "It was always the same" emphasises the routine and comfort of this space.

→ **Unbalanced focus between description and action:** Your piece spends considerable time on environmental details, yet the emotional shift when Ben arrives feels rushed. The weight you build through nature observation deserves a matching emotional payoff, but the reunion dialogue moves too quickly.

*Exemplar: "I sat at the top of the slide, lost in thought as the worker ants slowly retired into their burrow. The sky had painted itself in the same familiar colours—red, pink, yellow, and dirty orange—just as it always did. But today, something felt different."*

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#3: "Walking towards me, I saw a large, male silhouette. I remembered his brown, mysterious eyes, his dark, scruffy hair. 'Ben?' I whispered. 'Sarah,' he said softly, smiling. 'It's been a long time.'"

**Strengths:** The dialogue feels natural and understated, which works beautifully for a moment of emotional reunion. The use of physical description before revealing his name creates effective anticipation.

→ **Dialogue punctuation error and emotional clarity:** Your piece contains a punctuation error in the dialogue exchange, and more importantly, the emotional weight of recognition could be stronger. When Sarah recognises Ben, your piece tells us she's uncertain ("unsure if the light was playing tricks on me"), but this doubt isn't carried through the dialogue convincingly.

*Exemplar: "Ben?" I whispered, my voice uncertain. He turned, and for a moment I couldn't tell if it was truly him or just the failing light playing tricks on my eyes."*

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■ Your piece captures something genuinely moving—two people reconnecting at a place that mattered to them both. The writing shows real promise in building atmosphere and emotion. However, your piece could be stronger by giving equal weight to both the environmental setup and the human connection. Right now, you spend a lot of time describing the park, but when Ben arrives, everything happens quite quickly. Also, some of your dialogue could be clearer about what each person is feeling. Additionally, think about whether every detail you include helps tell the story—sometimes less description can make moments feel more powerful. Finally, check that your piece flows smoothly from one moment to the next, so the reader understands how the characters are moving and reacting.

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**Score: 40/50**

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## Section 2

This was my place to hide - where I once came with my best friend to let our thoughts run free, away from the world's vibrance. It was simple, yet still felt like home. Years have passed since then, but the memories still linger between the old swings and crackling paint. Behind it all is a story much deeper than just playground equipment.

It was dusk, the afternoon sun slowly dipping below the horizon. The sky was painted in colours of red, pink, yellow, and a dirty orange. It was always the same. I sat at the top of the slide, listening to the steady beat of worker ants slowly retiring into their burrow after a long day of work. I let my thoughts free until the weight in my stomach eased and I could finally breathe again. The air was fresh, the trees were green, and the bees were buzzing. My shoulders untensed and I closed my eyes.

But then I heard something strange - footsteps. Not soft, padding animal feet, but loud, clunky boots and leather. My brain immediately jumped.

Walking towards me, I saw a large, male silhouette. I remembered his brown, mysterious eyes, his dark, scruffy hair.

"Ben?" I whispered.

"Sarah," he said softly, smiling. "It's been a long time."

I blinked, unsure if the light was playing tricks on me. For a moment, he looked just like the boy who used to race me to the top of the climbing wall, the one who promised we'd never lose touch. I smiled faintly.

"I didn't think anyone remembered this place."

He glanced around, hands in his pockets.

"How could I forget? This place was ours... well, it used to be."

The air grew silent, full of unspoken words and stories. The park seemed to cling to us like a memory neither of us wanted to truly let go.

"I'm sorry," he said, his voice impossibly soft, "I just—"

~~"No. I'm sorry it took so long," he admitted.~~ ["No. I should be the one apologising. I'm sorry it took so long," I said.]

We half-cried and laughed in unison, this time true and together. I felt a spark.