



Date: September 20, 2022
Writer's Name: Marty Oliver
Submission Title: SOPHOMORE SLUMP
Institute For Writers Critiquer: Victoria Sherrow

Dear Marty,

Thank you for the chance to read and comment on your novel. Completing a book manuscript is a big achievement! This story shows that you can develop a dramatic plot and appealing teen characters. The plot suits your target YA audience by exploring issues that matter to teens—friendships, coping with changes, and growing more independent.

In this critique, I looked at the content (what you wrote), writing style (how you wrote it), and mechanics (e. g. grammar, spelling, punctuation). Let's consider several major fiction elements, including settings (time and place), viewpoint, characterization, plotting, dialogue, pacing, chapter development, and themes, followed by style and mechanics.

Setting: Your story begins with a clear time and place. We see Kim near a bus stop shortly after 10 a.m. on a Saturday in late September. You also 'set up' the situation—Kim is waiting for Shalya so they can go shopping together.

Introduction to Plot and Conflict: Background information reveals the girls' grade level and their long, close friendship. We see that Kim prefers doing things with Shalya, not alone. She's eager to talk to Shalya and wishes she'd hurry so they can enjoy the day. Trouble looms when Shalya arrives, not alone, but with a guy she invited on her own. This adds conflict early in the plot and gives readers something to wonder/worry about. A strong tool, conflict can 'hook' readers and keep their interest. I've made notes about conflict throughout the story.

"Show; Don't Tell" (SDT): You can improve your opening scene and other scenes in your novel by using more SDT. Avoid making bland "fact" statements. Use words that help readers share the character's experience. Here are two examples from p. 1: Instead of writing "it was cold," in Paragraph #1, try something like this: "Brrr—what a chilly day for late September. Shivering, Kim zipped up her hoodie, wishing she'd worn a coat." And in Paragraph #5, instead of "Kim was confused," try: "Kim opened her mouth to speak, then bit her lip, trying to hide her confusion and disappointment."

Viewpoint: Your story has a clear main character (MC) in Kim—good job. We can see this is her story, and events unfold from her inside point of view (POV) most of the time. I marked places that go outside her POV. For example, on p. 1, Paragraph #4, Kim would not be noticing her own eye color or the color of her cheeks. Those are outside observations. You can also phrase things in ways that show an even stronger inside POV so readers feel like they are experiencing events along with Kim. We want readers to identify closely with the POV character by showing their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. On p. 1, you could replace the last sentence in Paragraph #4 with something like this: "Just why was *he* here today with Shalya?" This shows Kim's thoughts and emotions in a more vivid, natural manner. Internal dialogue is another tool we use to intensify the MC's POV by showing her direct thoughts 'in the moment.' Here's one way to revise Sentence #4 in Paragraph #1: "*Come on, Shalya—hurry!*" Sprinkling italicized internal dialogue with care throughout your story can add variety and emotion. I marked other places where you can fine-tune the POV.