

John Keats
Ode to Autumn
Stanza 1: More challenging questions!

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John Keats was born in London in 1795, the son of a hostler. Both his parents died while he was still young -- his mother of tuberculosis. He was thereafter brought up by his grandmother who quickly made him an apprentice physician. He was still only in his late teens when he discovered that he too had caught TB and his younger brother who was in his care soon died of it. In order to escape the disease, Keats moved to the sunnier and drier climate of Italy.

There was no escape for him, however, and the poet died in 1821. He was then just 25 years of age. He nevertheless bequeathed us a gargantuan amount of poetry written with an amazing maturity for one so young. Keats wrote this Ode one autumn evening in 1819. It has been said that he could not focus on his writing because somebody nearby was disturbing his thoughts by practising on the violin. The poet went out for a walk and, inspired by the autumn atmosphere, returned to write this poem.

1. "SEASON of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun."
 - In what way can the sun be referred to as the "maturing sun"? (5)
 - Explain how the poet's use of imagery enhances the emotive value of these lines. (4)

2. "Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run."
 - What image does the word "conspiring" evoke? (4)
 - Who is conspiring with whom? What they are conspiring to do? (4)
 - What image is evoked with the words "load and bless"? (4)

3. "To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel."
 - What image of autumn is the poet attempting to portray? What words suggest that image? (4)
 - Some transcriptions of this poem use the words "mossed cottage-trees" rather than "moss'd". Is there any difference between the word "mossed" and "moss'd"? (4)

4. "To set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees."
 - Parenthesis is used in these two line. Identify it and explain the poet's purpose in using it. (4)

5. "For Summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells."
 - What is the implication of the word "o'erbrimm'd" in the context of this stanza? (2)
 - Explain the use of the apostrophe in the word "o'erbrimm'd". (4)

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