

John Keats
Ode to Autumn
Stanza 3: Some 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. "Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too."
 - Why should the poet suddenly think of Spring? (2)
 - The poet speaks in this stanza of the music of Autumn. What hints does he give as to this music? (5)
 - Why does the poet describe the plains as "stubble-plains with rosy hue"? (4)

2. "Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn."
 - What is meant by onomatopoeia? (2)
 - Comment on the poet's use of onomatopoeia in this line. (4)
 - Can you find other examples of onomatopoeia in this stanza? (4)

3. "And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn."
 - What is alliteration? (2)
 - In what way has alliteration been used in this line? (2)

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

4. Each stanza in this poem contains a different theme. Can you identify them? (3)

5. What is an Ode? In what way can this poem be described as an Ode? (4)

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