

Unseen poetry sample answers

Q1 In 'Autumn', how does the poet present the effects of the season of autumn?

Question 1 – 17/24 marks

In the poem 'Autumn' by Alan Bold, the poet presents the season as "like an experienced robber". This simile implies that the season is almost committing a crime by taking away the green leaves from the trees. The adjective "experienced" implies that the season is very adept at stealing. The whole poem is an extended metaphor that presents autumn in a negative way by accusing it of stealing the beauty from the world. The alliterative phrase "cunningly covering his tracks" talks about autumn as if it was conscious about what it is doing and is actually taking away the beauty on purpose. This makes autumn sound selfish as it is presented as stealing the greenery for its own gain.

Another way that the poet presents the effects of autumn is by writing how "The wind is his accomplice". This metaphor implies very strong imagery of the wind sweeping in at the start of autumn and blowing all the dead leaves off their branches and into mini hurricanes. This is one of the main symbols that autumn has arrived so it is easy for the reader or listener to imagine the sight of the autumn leaves. It also conveys that the wind is also conscious of the fact that it is working together with autumn to assist in the theft of green.

At the end of the poem the sky is described as glowing "red with a quiet rage". This is also powerful imagery of an autumn sky with thick clouds. The oxymoron "quiet rage" suggests that autumn acts with silence, almost unnoticed by some but it affects the world in a massive way. The quote "the theft chills the world" is ambiguous because it could mean that the autumn makes the world colder. However, it could have a deeper moral meaning saying that crime actually takes the warmth out of the world. The lack of rhyming pattern presents the evil that the autumn is presented as possessing.

Question 1 – 22/24 marks

In 'Autumn', the poet presents the effects of the season of autumn through an extended simile: "Autumn arrives / Like an experienced robber". The noun "robber" suggests that the poet feels negatively about the season of autumn, and may feel that they lose something by its arrival. This is seen by their attitude towards the leaves changing colour (an event seen by most as beautiful), which they describe as "a deep multitude of colourful distractions". The phrase "deep multitude" appears at first to be complimentary – however, the noun "distractions" gives this part of the poem a cynical tone and suggests that the poet does not feel positive towards this change.

In the middle of the poem, the abstract noun "chaos" is contrasted with the adjective "careful". These both contain harsh sounds, but present different elements of the season. The poet may have contrasted them to highlight the effects of autumn and further enforce the image of a "robber" who is responsible for it.

The extended simile becomes, at some points, metaphorical. "The theft" is described as if it is a real event towards the end of the poem, where it is described as "chang[ing] the temper of the earth". This also personifies the earth by giving it the human quality of being able to feel anger. This metaphor, which leads to the sky "glow[ing] red with a quiet rage", also suggests that the entire physical planet feels the same way as the poet. The abstract noun "rage" may reflect the writer's own feelings towards the effects of autumn. It is also the last word of the poem – which leaves the reader feeling unsatisfied: there is no clear resolution to the negative effects of autumn.

Autumn is also written in free verse. It is composed of three sentences and does not use punctuation conventionally. This makes the poem strange to navigate and reflects the "chaos" described earlier.

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Q2

In both 'Today' and 'Autumn' the speakers describe attitudes towards the seasons. What are the similarities and/or differences between the ways the poets present these attitudes?

Question 2 – 4/8 marks

In 'Autumn' the season autumn is presented as being evil like it is stealing beauty from the world. The writer does this through the use of an extended metaphor. It is presented in a negative way. In the poem 'Today' the poet presents spring very positively. We can see this in the way he uses the adjective "perfect" to describe it. The poem is full of language to do with lights, being free and unity.

Both poems talk about seasons in different ways. Both have no rhyming patters which presents freedom of nature but in 'Autumn' also the evil of nature. 'Autumn' is set out in one full text whereas 'Today' is set out in pairs of lines which could represent the bright and happy nature of the season of spring.

Question 2 – 7/8 marks

Both poems create characters to enhance the narrative they are presenting. For example, 'Autumn' creates "an experienced robber" and 'Today' depicts the "inhabitants" of a "glass paperweight". The effect of this is that the poems each have a surreal atmosphere when the characters are introduced, yet not so much that it is too far-fetched to be understood by the reader.

Where 'Autumn' is negative towards the season it describes (describing "dead leaves" and "quiet rage"), 'Today' is overwhelmingly positive. The latter does not appear to have any hints of negativity except for, perhaps, the destructive behaviour that is described. It speaks of "rip[ping] the little door from its jamb", which suggests that their feelings are so strong that they must be suppressed physically.

'Today' is made up of 9 two-line stanzas, and one convoluted sentence. This may show how the writer's attitude towards spring is very strong, as when the poem is read aloud the reader sounds excited.

The colours described by the poets are different, and evoke different feelings. For example, 'Today' describes a "larger dome of blue and white", whereas 'Autumn' describes the sky which "glows red". The psychological effects of these colour descriptions are very separate: blue and white evoke feelings of heaven, innocence, purity and life whereas red has connotations of hell, death and hatred. These ultimately sum up the attitudes of each poet, and the message they wish to convey through their poems.