

## ODE TO AUTUMN

John Keats

JOHN KEATS (1795- 1821), one of the greatest of English Romantic poets, was born at Moonfields, London. He studied at Clark's School at Enfield. Deeply interested in Cricket and boxing, he grew into a voracious reader especially of Greek mythology. He even started a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. His ambition to become a poet was fired by his first acquaintance with Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. His first poem '*Lines in Imitation of Spenser*' was published in 1814. His first volume of poetry entitled *Poems* was published in 1817. His poem '*Endymion*' was well appreciated by Wordsworth. It was published in 1818. His odes '*On Indolence*', '*On a Grecian Urn*', '*To Psyche*', '*To a Nightingale*', '*On Melancholy*' and '*Ode to Autumn*' made him a great romantic poet of English literature. So did '*Lamia*' and '*Hyperion*'. He died of tuberculosis in 1821 at the age of 26, but within this short span of life he was able to achieve greatness. His poems and letters have depth beneath their beauty and reflect his awareness of the pains and sufferings of life. To him, 'A Thing of beauty is a joy for ever,' and "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." In the poem '*Ode To Autumn*' Keats describes the beauty and characteristic spirit of autumn in a series of memorable pictures, exhibiting the principle of beauty in nature.



### A. Work in small groups and discuss these questions:

1. How do you feel in different seasons? Which is the most enjoyable one?
2. New leaves and fruits grow on trees in a particular season. Which is that?
3. Have you seen a tree bent and loaded with fruits? What feeling does this sight evoke in you?

# ODE TO AUTUMN

Season of mists and **mellow fruitfulness**,  
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
**Conspiring** with him how to load and bless  
 With fruit the **vines** that round the thatch-eaves run;  
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees, 5  
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
 To swell the gourd, and **plump** the **hazel** shells  
 With a sweet **kernel**; to set budding more,  
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
 Until they think warm days will never cease, 10  
 For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
 Thee sitting careless on a **granary** floor,  
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the **winnowing** wind; 15  
 Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
 Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
 Spares the next **swath** and all its twined flowers:  
 And sometimes like a **gleaner** thou dost keep  
 Steady thy laden head across a brook; 20  
 Or by a cider-press, with patient look,  
 Thou watchest the last oozy hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, -  
 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day, 25  
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
 Then in a wailful **choir** the small **gnats** mourn  
 Among the river **sallows**, borne aloft  
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly **bourn**; 30  
**Hedge-cricket**s sing; and now with treble soft  
 The **red-breast** whistles from a garden-croft;  
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.



**B.1. 1. Complete the following sentences on the basis of the poem:**

- a) ..... is the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness.
- b) ..... fill all fruits with ripeness.
- c) ..... sits carelessly on a granary floor.
- d) The 'winnowing wind' softly lifts the hair of ..... .
- e) ..... twitter in the sky.

**B.1. 2. Answer the following questions briefly:**

- 1) Who are depicted as friends in the first two lines?
- 2) What happens in autumn?
- 3) In what sense does the Sun conspire with autumn?
- 4) How do the sun and summer help in ripeness of fruits in autumn?
- 5) How are autumn and summer related to spring?

### GLOSSARY AND NOTES

**mellow** (*adj*): soft and sweet in taste

**fruitfulness** (*n*): abundance

**conspiring** (*v*): scheming

**vines** (*n*): climbing plants whose fruit is the grape

**plump** (*v*): make fleshy or fat

**hazel** (*n*): small trees that produce small nuts

**kernel** (*n*): seed, core

**o'er brimm'd** (*v*): filled so much that some spills over

**granary** (*n*): store-house for grain

**winnowing** (*pp*): blowing a current of air to remove its outer covering

**swath** (*n*): a long strip of land on which crops have been cut

**gleaner** (*n*): one who collects or gathers

**choir** (*n*): chorus

**gnats** (*n*): a small fly with two wings that bite

**sallows** (*adj*): of an unhealthy yellow colour

**born** (*n*): domain, land

**hedge-cricket** (*n*): brown green pink insect which makes shrill noise in the bush

**redbreast** (*n*): a bird called robin

**ripeness** (*n*): ready to be gathered

**C. 1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS**

1. What is the central idea of the poem?
2. What does Keats mean by the following:  
'T was here we loved in  
Summer day and greener.'
3. Does the poet convey his love to Nature through such lines as given above? If yes, give examples
4. Pick out the images related to different aspects of Nature. Write a note on the use of images in the poem.
5. What do autumn and spring symbolise in the poem? Explain.
6. Do you like this poem? Give two reasons.
7. What does the poet say about the music of autumn? Do you like this music?

**C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION**

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

1. No season, in itself, is either pleasant or unpleasant.
2. Perception of life changes with maturity

**C. 3. COMPOSITION**

Write a paragraph in about 100 words on the following:

- a) Autumn
- b) Relation between seasons and human life.

**D. WORD STUDY****D.1. Dictionary Use**

**Ex.1.** Look up a dictionary and write two meanings of the following words – the one in which it is used in the lesson and the other which is more common

fruitfulness

bosom

maturing

conspiring

steady

plains

sinking

swallows

**D.2. Word-formation**

Read the following line carefully:

Season of mists and mellow *fruitfulness*

In the above line, 'fruitfulness' is derived from fruit. When '-ful' is added to fruit, it becomes fruitful. Again, when '-ness' is added to fruitful, it becomes fruitfulness.

Make words by adding '-ful' or '-ness' to the following words;

happy

beauty

kind

bounty

joy

duty

### D.3. Word-meaning

**Ex. 1.** Match the words in **Column A** with their meaning in **Column B**:

#### Column A

mist  
kernel  
granary  
laden  
oozing  
hue

#### Column B

storage for grains  
emission  
colour  
core  
loaded  
fog

### E. GRAMMAR

**Ex. 1.** Read the following sentences carefully:

*'Where are the songs of Spring?*

'Where', in the above sentence is an interrogative substitute of an adverb. Find out such interrogative substitutes of adverbs in the poem.

### F. ACTIVITIES

**Ex.1.** The last word of the first line of the poem 'fruitfulness' rhymes with the third line 'bless'. Point out which words rhyme with 'run', 'shells', 'core' and 'bees'.

**Ex.2.** Is there anything special about these sounds? Do they bind the poem?

**Ex.3.** Do different words bind the meaning of the poem?

