

To Autumn

Where to begin? This is such a rich poem that you could easily spend a couple of weeks on it and still have more to explore.

First of all, it must be heard – so a good recording or a good reading by yourself is important.

Before going into any detail about specific words and meanings, focus on sound. All students should be able to pick out repeated sounds in the first stanza. They could use Word to highlight certain letters. Here we have to make do with bold:

Season of **m**ists and **m**ellow fruitfulness,

Close bos**o**m-friend of the **m**aturing sun;

Conspiring with **h**im how to load and bless

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;

To bend with apples the **m**oss'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; to set budding **m**ore,

And still **m**ore, later flowers for the bees,

Until they think **warm** days will never cease,

For **summer** has o'er-br**imm**'d their clammy cells.

Which other letter sounds do they think help to create a mellow, lazy feeling?

The second and third stanzas might provide more difficulty to begin with. The third stanza is in marked contrast with its short vowels, particularly towards the last few lines. In between, stanza two contains a lot of 'o' sounds and is a bridge between the first and third.

So, although only stanza three draws attention to sound, it's clear that changing word sounds on their own do show a movement through the season from the warm and mellow to a sense of something chillier, sharper.

Now for the words. Some will need glossing but overall, the vocabulary is not complicated. The archaisms of thou and hath etc need to be got over. Try swapping the older forms for modern ones. Does 'Think not of them, you have your music too' work as well as the original? Maybe it does.

Try drawing up a comparative table and see if the language does indicate a change over the three stanzas. For example:

mellow fruitfulness	winnowing wind	soft-dying
maturing	drowsted with the fume of poppies	wailful choir
warm	half reaped	mourn
o'erbrimmed		light wind lives or dies

The purpose of this is to encourage discussion about word choice, not to prove a point. There is a lot in the second stanza which continues the soft dreaminess of the first and it is left to the last stanza to issue a wake-up call with its 'Where are the songs of Spring?' and introduce a chillier note.

Of course you will need to mention personification as it dominates stanza two (and , after all, Autumn itself and the sun, are spoken of as if people) but keep technical terms to a minimum. Draw attention instead to the balance between adjectives, verbs and nouns.

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-eves **run**;*

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; to set **budding** more,*

And still more, later flowers for the bees,

*Until they **think** warm days **will** never **cease**,*

*For summer has **o'er-brimm'd** their clammy cells.*

Even in so descriptive a verse as this, adjectives (underlined> are kept to a minimum and very few would qualify as 'wow' words! The work is done by nouns (21) and verbs (13). Is this the same in the other stanzas? This is a poem of **action** and **specificity** – and not an autumn leaf to be seen! Which prompts the question, 'Is this really about autumn – or the coming of autumn and the end of summer?'

This is perhaps enough to start with. If you want other things to focus on, consider some words in depth (conspiring, for example – check its etymology) and hyphenated words. Punctuation, too, is interesting...