

Today

If ever there were a spring day so perfect,
so uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze

that it made you want to throw
open all the windows in the house

5 and unlatch the door to the canary's cage,
indeed, rip the little door from its jamb*,

a day when the cool brick paths
and the garden bursting with peonies**

10 seemed so etched in sunlight
that you felt like taking

a hammer to the glass paperweight
on the living room end table,

releasing the inhabitants
from their snow-covered cottage

15 so they could walk out,
holding hands and squinting

into this larger dome of blue and white,
well, today is just that kind of day.

Billy Collins

* jamb – the sides of a doorway or opening

** peonies – flowers

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?

[8 marks]

Mark	AO	Typical features of response
Level 4 7–8 marks	A02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploratory comparison of writers' use of language, structure and form with subject terminology used judiciously • Convincing comparison of effects of writers' methods on reader
Level 3 5–6 marks	A02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful comparison of writers' use of language and/or structure and/or form with subject terminology used effectively to support consideration of methods • Comparative examination of effects of writers' methods on reader
Level 2 3–4 marks	A02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant comparison of writers' use of language and/or structure and/or form with some relevant use of subject terminology • Some comparison of effects of writers' methods on reader
Level 1 1–2 marks	A02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some links between writers' use of language or structure or form • Some links between effects of writers' methods on reader
0 marks	Nothing worthy of credit/nothing written	

Indicative content

Examiners are encouraged to reward any valid interpretations. Answers might, however, include some of the following:

- Any valid comparisons conversational voice, architectural metaphor, loosely iambic, couplets-compared to love poetry-Today-one compact stanza-Autumn
- Any valid comparisons between the alliteration used in 'Today' – 'canary's cage' with the negative alliteration of 'cunningly covering' in Autumn
- Any valid comparisons between the description of the garden 'bursting' with peonies and the newness of spring with the descriptions in 'Autumn' of shaking branches and 'dead leaves'
- Any valid comparisons between the positive and/or negative connotations of the language used - the 'perfect' spring day which is echoed the freeing of the canary from its cage, compared with the oxymoronic 'quiet rage' of the normally placid sky in 'Autumn'
- Any valid comparisons between metaphor used to present the effects of nature - autumn is viewed as entrapping and spring is viewed as a release

Response 1

In both 'Today' and 'autumn' the poets present different attitudes as in 'Today' it questions about what it would be like and remembering the feels of spring and how it had "open all the windows in the house" this could suggest that they would only wish spring to happen again. However in Autumn, it talks about how the season effects the nature and how it makes trees look dull and dismal, it talks about how horrible autumn is and how it changes the 'temper of the earth', the leaves are described to blow into 'inquisitive strangers' and this poem is made to feel very low as it isnt positive or it doesnt make the reader feel much joy.

In the poet 'today' it shows that the anger as 'they could have taken a hammer to the glass paperweight' this is a similarity to autumn because they both show a little anger and upset as in autumn it describes 'temper'

[COMMENT] [MARK]

Response 2

A difference between the two poems is that in Today the poet says

"if ever there were a spring day so perfect." where as in autumn the poet says "Autumn arrives like an experianced robber."

These are both of the opening lines to each poem in Today the poet makes us feel happy and puts a picture of a warm day with flowers and no clouds in the sky where as in Autumn the poet makes us think of a gloomy day where a man with a large sack runs around stealing the Green from the world making forests look Gloomy and kind of evil.

A similarity with these two poems is that the poets both talk about the sky. This is also a difference because in Today the poet describes the sky as

“a dome of blue and white.”

Where as in Autumn the poet describes the sky as

“Glowing red with a quite rage.”

they are almost opposites of one another.

[COMMENT] **[MARK]**

Response 3

The poets present both ‘Today’ and ‘Autumn’ as times of the year where everything feels so nice to the point your mood changes and you feel free. In both poems everyone likes the breeze, it makes the day so fine. In Today’s poem it is presented as a happy and grateful season to have and Autumn is presented as a beautiful season but a very experience one that comes every year but covers it’s tracks. In both poems it shows that the seasons change everyone’s mood and is a much more child season where everyone is relaxed.

[COMMENT] **[MARK]**

Response 4

Both poets describe a different season and what their attitudes towards them are. In ‘Autumn’, the poet describes the season being cold and the wind “putting an air of chaos”. This means that the season of autumn is chaotic and full of coldness which will make the reader feel down and drowsy for a couple of months. Whereas, in ‘Today’, the poet describes spring as giving out a “warm... breeze” which contradicts Bold’s poem. In ‘Spring’, the readers can imagine a warm breeze coming towards them making them feel nice and warm.

In addition, the poems both express the colours of the season. In ‘Spring’, the colours are “white and blue” which are light and gives a really good vibe, whereas, in ‘Autumn’, there are colours like ‘red’ which is dark and gives a really angry vibe. This makes the readers aware of the two polar opposite attitudes towards the seasons they poets, Bold and Collins, are discussing.

Finally, both poems have references to nature and they are completely different. In ‘Autumn’, Bold describes the leaves as “dead” which shows the readers that the nature is not alive. However, in ‘Today’, Collins states that “the garden (is) bursting with peonies” emphasising that nature is alive and blooming as the “peonies” (flowers) have sunlight and can be watered. This makes the reader visualize the differences between the two seasons and wonder what they have in common.

[COMMENT] **[MARK]**

Response 5

In ‘Today’ and ‘Autumn’ the poets present opposite opinions of their chosen seasons. Today’s poet uses a metaphor to show the joy and pleasure of spring. The narrator says that the garden was “bursting with peonies”. “Bursting” could be metaphorical for the speaker’s excitement of this ‘nice’ weather/season. Flowers have connotations of happiness and life, which could represent the positivity of this season. The poet purposely exaggerates (hyperbole) the flower garden to excentuate the positivity of this season. The reader then understands that spring is presented as a joyful and beautiful season which should be celebrated.

Similarly in ‘Autumn’ metaphors are used, but to show the negativity of the season. “The theft chills the world” shows how Autumn is viewed by the poet to be a ‘criminal’. He believes that Autumn is stealing summers warm, joyful climate and is replacing it with cold, “chilly” weather. The writer does this to present his dislike for Autumn, and the reader is affected by this as they are shown that Autumn is a ‘criminal’.

However, both poets use alliteration to present different opinions of Autumn and spring. In ‘Autumn’ the weather “cunningly covered” his tracks. ‘C’ has a very harsh sound, this mimicks the poet’s hate and how he dispises Autumn. It also makes the speaker sound quite bitter and aggressive about the season. The poet may have done this to show how he dislikes the season, this affects the reader by showing them his dislike for Autumn.

In ‘Today’, the writer also uses alliteration to portray his feelings about the season, however in a positive light. “Holding hands” has a very soft and gentle sound which mimicks how spring is a good, positive season. The poet may have done this to present spring in a positive light. The reader is shown the poet’s passion for the season.

[COMMENT] **[MARK]**

Response 6

One similarity between the ways the speakers described attitudes towards the seasons is through the use of light imagery to show that they perceive it as a positive thing. In 'Today' the poet portrays how the garden 'seemed so etched in sunlight.' This illustrates how beautiful the different seasons make the natural world look. The noun 'sunlight' infers to the reader that the seasons bring joy and happiness and it creates an image in their mind of a perfect, idyllic scene. Likewise, in 'Autumn,' the poet describes the sky that 'glows red.' This also shows the reader that autumn brings out positivity and the beauty of nature. 'Red' is sometimes associated with love or passion, which alludes to the fact that the speaker really enjoys autumn because of the colour and liveliness it brings with it.

Furthermore, in 'Today', Billy Collins seems to perceive the season as completely enjoyable and good. Even the inhabitants of the 'snow-covered cottage' would want to 'walk out, holding hands and squinting.' This creates the impression that the speaker is almost in love with the season as he feels as though no one would miss out on seeing it. The phrase 'holding hands' adds a slight sense of unity and passion which further reinforces the way the speaker believes that the season brings joy and happiness. In comparison, in 'Autumn' the speaker also includes the inconvenience caused by the season which blows leaves 'in the faces of inquisitive strangers.' This demonstrates the trouble caused by the season and hints to the reader that although the poet enjoys the appearance of nature when it is autumn, he dislikes the trouble it causes people. Whilst 'Today' only depicts the season in a perfect light. Alan Bold also shows the negative side of the season in 'Autumn'.

[COMMENT] [MARK]

Response 7

The speakers describe the weather is yelling or shouting at the people because of the breeze. "If ever there were a spring day so perfect" the people wish that the weather was good for people to enjoy.

[COMMENT] [MARK]

Response 8

In both poems 'Autumn' and 'Today' the speakers describe attitudes towards seasons as negative. In 'Today' Collins tells us weather can ruin emotions. This is seen from 'So etched in sunlight that you felt like taking.' From this you can infer someone enjoying the weather but the weather wants to change. In 'Autumn' weather goes against people which is seen from the fact that 'the wind is his accomplice'. From this you can infer the weather is going against people.

[COMMENT] [MARK]

Response 9

The similarities between 'Today' and 'Autumn' is that they both use similes to describe the season in a bad way. Also that they both use nature to describe their attitudes towards the season. They describe the change from something that is supposed to be great to ending in silence. Both an enjambment.

The difference is that 'Autumn' is about the hatred and disadvantages of autumn whereas 'Today' is happiness. Also, 'Autumn' is talking about the season autumn, and 'Today' is talking about spring. 'Autumn' uses personification whereas 'Today' doesn't.

[COMMENT] [MARK]

Response 10

In Today by Billy Collins, nearly all of the poem is positive about the season of spring. In contrast, Autumn is about the scene of autumn and includes both positive and negative aspects of it. In Today, the poet states that spring causes "a warm intermittent breeze that it made you want to throw open all the window". Here the poet is positively describing spring saying that it has hot weather and makes everyone feel happy. The poet uses direct address to engage the reader, which is not done in 'Autumn'. Also, the description of the breeze using the pre modifying adjectives "warm" and "intermittent" contrasts violently to the power and force of autumn in 'Autumn'. The poet has used an imperative 'throw' in her but it is used to convey a more joyful action that the imperatives used in 'Autumn' to convey to force of the season.

Today also uses enjambment and also has few endstopped lines to continue to bright and lovely idea of spring throughout the poem. These structural features are both also present in 'Autumn' as well. Spring is also presented as life saving in oppose to life destroying as autumn is presented in the quote "releasing the habitants from their snow-covered cottage". This shows spring in a brighter light and suggests that it is better than autumn.

I think that the poet wrote Today to express the positive feelings he has of spring and that the poet of Autumn similarly wrote the poem to express his positive views on the season of autumn. Therefore, these poems are different interpretations of two different seasons in a year.

[COMMENT] [MARK]

Response 11

Both Bold and Collins present their strong feelings about seasons however, Bold presents Autumn to be conflicting whereas Collins presents Spring as beautiful and liberating. Collins uses a semantic field of freedom and nature – ‘breeze’ ‘canary’s’ ‘peonies’ ‘sunlight’ – suggesting that Spring allows the release of nature and happiness. Bold uses a semantic field of chaos and destruction – ‘shake’ ‘blown’ ‘chills’ ‘rage’ – to suggest that Autumn causes turmoil and confusion. Bold uses one long stanza with lots of enjambment to show the lack of control and order caused by Autumn, whereas Collins uses regular stanzas with enjambment to show the freedom and liberation that Spring allows.

[COMMENT] [MARK]