

## Poems about Seasons

Adrian Henri and John Updike were both born in 1932. Henri was a British poet and painter, while Updike was an American poet and writer. They are both known for writing poems that describe familiar scenes. In these poems, they use vivid language to bring the seasons to life.

### Autumn

- Season of conkers and fireworks  
and mellow fruitfulness. New shoes,  
and a coat that's a bit too big,  
to grow into next year. Blackberries  
5 along the canal, white jungles  
of frost on the window. Leaves  
to kick all the way home,  
the smell of bonfires,  
stamping the ice on puddles  
10 into crazy paving. The nights come in  
early, and you can't play out  
after school. Soon  
there'll be tangerines in the shops,  
in shiny paper like Christmas lights.
- 15 The little ones write letters to Santa Claus.  
The big ones laugh under the streetlights.

Adrian Henri



### January

- The days are short,  
The sun a spark,  
Hung thin between  
The dark and dark.
- 5 Fat snowy footsteps  
Track the floor.  
Milk bottles burst  
Outside the door.
- The river is  
10 A frozen place  
Held still beneath  
The trees of lace.
- The sky is low.  
The wind is gray.  
15 The radiator  
Purrs all day.

John Updike



1 In *January*, the poet says in line 1 that the "days are short". Which phrase from *Autumn* describes short days?

1 mark

2 Find and copy a simile from lines 1-14 of *Autumn*.

1 mark

3 What does the poet mean by "trees of lace" in line 12 of *January*?

1 mark

4 Why do you think the poet chose the verb "purrs" to describe the sound of the radiator in line 16 of *January*?

2 marks

5 Which poem is written in free verse?

1 mark

6 Which poem do you think is more positive about the season it describes? Explain your answer.

2 marks

7 Which poem do you prefer? Explain your answer.

2 marks

Total  
out of 10



**Question Book:**  
Year 6, pages 14-15

**Author / Source:**  
Adrian Henri  
John Updike

**Genre:**  
Poetry

**Cross-curricular links:**

- Geography (comparing climates)

## Introduction

Adrian Henri was a British poet and painter. One of the influential Liverpool Poets of the 1960s, he is credited with helping to increase the popularity of poetry among young people by writing poems about popular culture. Henri's contemporary, the American writer John Updike, is best known for his novels, but he also published several poetry collections. Like Henri, Updike is known for depicting familiar topics in his poems. This contrasting pair of poems gives pupils the opportunity to compare different forms of poetry, and to explore the use of vivid imagery to describe the world around them.

## Answers

1. "The nights come in / early"
2. "there'll be tangerines in the shops, / in shiny paper like Christmas lights"
3. E.g. He means bare trees that are covered in white frost so they look like they're made of lace.
4. E.g. Maybe because the verb "purrs" sounds like the noise that the radiator makes. Also, cats purr when they're happy, so the word "purrs" makes the radiator sound happy.
5. *Autumn*
6. E.g. *Autumn*. It mentions things like fireworks, which are exciting, and it describes enjoyable autumn activities like kicking leaves. *January* describes the cold and dark, which are things most people don't enjoy.
7. Any appropriate answer. E.g. I prefer *January* because I think it describes winter really effectively. For example, the phrase "The sun a spark" helps you imagine how small and distant the sun seems in winter. OR E.g. I prefer *Autumn*, because it mentions lots of my favourite things, like conkers and blackberries. I also like the way it uses different senses, such as smell, to bring the season to life.

## Extra Activities

- As a class, compare the form of the two poems. Ask pupils to identify the rhyme scheme and number of syllables per line in *January* and discuss how these features affect the rhythm and tone of the poem. What is different about the form of *Autumn*? How does this affect the poem's rhythm and tone?
- Ask pupils to identify examples of figurative language from the two poems and explain their meaning and effect. Why do they think the poets chose these phrases? Do pupils find them effective?
- Get pupils to write and illustrate their own 16-line poem about their favourite season or month. Their poem should either start "Season of..." and be written in free verse, or follow the same rhyme scheme as *January*.
- *January* was first published while John Updike was living in Massachusetts. Challenge pupils to find Massachusetts on a map and then ask them to research its climate. They should use their findings to write a short text describing what winters are like in Massachusetts and comparing them to winters in the UK. As a class, discuss how Updike's poem might have been different if he had lived in Britain.