- How does Keats present such a rich and vivid portrayal of 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-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.

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;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
  Drows'd 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;
  Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
    Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

From To Autumn by John Keats (1819)

Sample answer

In the given extract, John Keats creates a rich and vivid portrayal of the autumn season through imagery, personification, and sound. Rather than presenting autumn as the end of summer and the beginning of the year's decline, he depicts it as a period of great abundance, human fulfilment, and deep contentment. Through his celebration of harvest, images of restful ease, and the poem's sensory richness, Keats encourages readers to appreciate a time of year that seems resplendent in a fully developed stage of abundance and even surfeit.

Keats uses rich and vivid imagery to portray autumn as a season of abundance. In the opening lines, he describes autumn as a *"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun"*. The phrase *"mellow fruitfulness"* evokes warmth, richness, and fulfilment, presenting the natural world as having reached its most productive stage. The noun *"fruitfulness"* suggests fertility and plenty, while the adjective *"mellow"* suggests a soft, laid-back atmosphere of ease and freedom from worry. Similarly, the description of the sun as *"maturing"* presents autumn as the culmination of a natural process where something has achieved its full growth and potential. The sense of abundance is developed through Keats' repeated use of dynamic verbs as Autumn conspires to *"load and bless"* the vines, *"fill"* fruit *"to the core"*, *"swell"* the gourds and *"plump"* the hazel shells. The accumulation of these verbs creates the impression that growth is occurring everywhere at once, as though the landscape is continuously producing and nourishing life. In this way the language itself begins to feel abundant as the density of vocabulary mirrors the surplus being described, immersing the reader in a world overflowing with produce. Readers may therefore find themselves viewing autumn differently from its conventional association with decline, instead appreciating it as a season of achievement, reward, and full nourishment. Through this celebration of nature's abundance, Keats presents autumn as a period in which life has reached its fullest expression.

Through personification, Keats further develops the portrayal autumn as a season of relaxation and fulfilment as well as a co-operation between humans and the natural world. In the second stanza, Autumn is presented as a human farmer, *"sitting careless on a granary floor… Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep"*. The adjective *"careless"* and the image of Autumn sleeping on a *"half-reap'd furrow"* both suggest a lack of urgency. Although the harvest remains unfinished, there is no sense of anxiety or pressure. Instead, Keats presents a forgiving and generous world in which abundance allows work to be paused freely. This impression is reinforced by the image of Autumn's hair being *"soft-lifted"* by the wind, creating a gentle interaction between the personified figure and the natural world suggesting how Autumn exists in harmony with humanity. It's by working together that such abundance and surfeit is provided. As a result, readers are encouraged to view autumn as a period of rest and satisfaction, when the rewards of labour can finally be enjoyed, rather than a time of hectic preparation against the coming winter. The sense of autumn being a season of cooperation between natural forces has persisted throughout the extract. Just as Autumn is described in the first stanza as

"conspiring" with the sun to produce abundance, the second stanza presents the fulfilment that results from such a partnership, creating an atmosphere of gentle ease and contentment.

Finally, Keats uses sound techniques such as assonance, rhyme, and euphony to portray autumn as a rich and sensuous season. Throughout the second stanza, long vowel sounds recur in words such as *"furrow", "drows'd"*, and *"winnowing"*. This repeated long o sound creates a lingering and dreamlike quality that evokes Autumn's restful ease, so the poem seems to drift from line to line slowly, gently, and even sleepily. Keats develops this effect through his use of rhyme, particularly in rhyming pairs such as *"floor/store"* and *"flowers/hours"* where the same long vowel sounds reinforce the atmosphere of ease and contentment established through the poem's imagery. In addition, when assonance combines with soft consonance and alliteration in words such as *"furrow", "fume",* and *"flowers"* Keats creates euphony, a pleasing and harmonious sound. As a result, the language itself brings to life the feeling of ease and relaxation it describes. Readers may feel lulled into the same tranquil and almost sleepy world inhabited by the personified Autumn. More broadly, Keats combines sound and imagery to create a rich sensory experience of the season, allowing readers not only to picture autumn's abundance but also to hear and feel its atmosphere of fulfilment, repose, and plenty.

In conclusion, through imagery, personification, and sound, Keats presents autumn as a season of over-abundance, fulfilment, and sensory richness. His vivid descriptions of overflowing harvests, his portrayal of Autumn as a relaxed and contented figure, and his use of gentle, musical sounds all contribute to a celebration of nature at its most productive. Rather than focusing on traditional images of summer’s decline or preparation for winter, Keats encourages readers to appreciate maturity and completeness, suggesting the rich rewards that come in the full flush of autumn.

- *How does the writer make melancholy so powerful in this extract?*

No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
    Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd
    By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine[1];
        Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
    Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
        Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
    For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
        And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
    Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
    And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
    Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
        Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
    Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
        And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

From Ode on Melancholy by John Keats (1819)

[1] Mythological wife of Pluto and Goddess of the Underworld, sometimes known as "Queen of Hell"

- *How does Keats present beauty as a sustaining force in this extract?*

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; the mid forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
All lovely tales that we have heard or read:
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.

Nor do we merely feel these essences
For one short hour; no, even as the trees
That whisper round a temple become soon
Dear as the temple's self, so does the moon,
The passion poesy, glories infinite,
Haunt us till they become a cheering light
Unto our souls, and bound to us so fast,
That, whether there be shine, or gloom o'ercast;
They always must be with us, or we die.

From Endymion by John Keats (1818)

The narrator's cat has been missing for two days. His wife calls and asks him to go out looking for the lost cat.

- How and to what effect does the writer use setting in this extract?

A little before two o'clock, I climb from my backyard over the cinder-block wall into the passage. Actually, it's not the corridor you'd expect a passage to b; that's only what we call it for lack of a better name. Strictly speaking, it isn't a corridor at all. A corridor has an entrance and an exit, forming a route from one place to another.

But this passage has neither entrance nor exit, and leads smack int a cinder-block wall at one end and a chain link fence at the other. It's not even an alleyway. For starters, an alley has to at least have an entrance. The neighbours call it "the passage" for convenience sake.

The passage meanders between everyone's backyards for about six hundred feet. Three-foot-something in width for the most part, but what with all the junk lying around and the occasional hedge cropping in, there are places you can barely squeeze through sideways.

From what I've heard – this is from a kindly uncle of mine who rents us our house ridiculously cheap – the passage used to have an entrance and an exit, offering a shortcut across the block, street-to-street. But then, with the postwar boom years, new homes were built in any available space, hemming in the common ground to a narrow path. Which ushered in the none-too-inviting prospect of having strangers walking through backyards, practically under the eaves, so the residents surreptitiously[2] covered the entrance. At first an innocent little bush barely disguised the opening, but eventually one resident expanded his yard and extended his cinder-block wall to completely seal it over. While the corresponding other aperture was screened off with a chain-link fence to keep the dogs out. It hadn't been the residents who made use of the passage to begin with, so no one complained about it being close at both ends. And anyway, closing it wouldn't hurt as a crime-prevention measure. Thus, the path went neglected and untrafficked, like some abandoned canal, merely serving as a kind of buffer zone between the houses, the ground overgrown with weeds, sticky spiderwebs strung everywhere a bug could possibly alight.

Yet when I try to think, my head's filled to bursting with some gaseous substance. I didn't sleep well last night, plus the weather's too hot for the beginning of May.

Oh well, I think, might as well look for that cat. Leave later developments for later. Anyway, it's a damn sight better to be out and about than to be copped up indoors waiting for the telephone to ring.

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[2] Surreptitiously: in a way that avoids attention, secretly

The spring sun cuts clean and crisp through the ceiling of overhanging branches, scattering patches of shadow across the ground. With no wind, the shadows stay glued in place like fateful stains. Telltale signs sure to cling to the earth as it goes around and around the sun for millennia to come.

Shadows flit over my shirt as I pass under the branches, then return to the ground. All is still. You can almost hear each blade of grass respiring in the sunlight. A few small clouds float in the sky, vivid and well formed, straight out of a medieval engraving. Everything stands out with such clarity that I feel buoyant, as if somehow my body went on forever. That, and it's terribly hot.

I'm in a T-shirt, thin cotton slacks[3], and tennis shoes, but already, just walking around, my armpits and the cleft of my chest are drenched with sweat. I'd only just this morning pulled the T-shirt and slacks out of storage, so every time I take a deep breath there's this sharp mothball smell, as if some tiny bug had flown up my nose.

[3] Slacks: smart trousers