

Sarah Mook Poetry Contest 2017, Grades 6-8, Third place, “Fall: End or New Beginning?”

This descriptive poem offers two ways to view the change of seasons between autumn’s end and winter’s beginning—one positive, one negative. The author presents different scenarios to explain how the natural signs of seasonal change can be viewed positively or negatively. Using expressive language, the speaker has no confusion with the change of seasons; but instead, sees the change differently—as forcing summer’s memories to fade.

The first section of the poem describes children at play in the waning days of autumn. The field is “frosty,” the forest edge is “fiery,” the children are “bundled in layers of warmth” protecting them from the “whipping wind.” The speaker watches and wonders “ ‘Why am I not out there?’ ”

Giving no answer, the speaker continues the children’s play in the second and third sections:

The wind tousles their hair
And bites their cherry red noses.
The cold air forms ice crystals
On wool hats and mittens.

This group of children takes the coming winter weather in stride, and according to the speaker, they “don’t care, not one bit.” The children, in fact, are “mesmerized” and like “leaves dancing in mid-air, / they too, float in the path of the wind.” This group of children is described as: “happy to see the flames / of autumn disappear, ready for the snow / to coat the field.” We can celebrate the writer’s diction because of its energy, visual strength, and creativity. Words and phrases such as “mesmerized,” “cold air forms ice crystals,” “float in the path of the wind,” and “ready for snow / to coat the field” demonstrate the energy and specificity of this writer’s language. The third section presents the opposite view; it concludes that other children do not welcome winter and instead “. . . they hold / onto the fraying threads / of autumn”—a terrific metaphor.

The fourth section presents images from the fall season and shows how each side views them.

Trees cry tears of leaves,
as others see fresh buds soon to come.
Beams of autumn light dim,
as others see the shining silver glow of winter.
Nature dies,
but others see the rebirth of spring.

It is this oppositional description that clarifies two ways to view the seasonal change between fall and winter. Through personification, metaphor, and vivid descriptive language, the writer presents these two varying viewpoints well.

The last section of the poem continues to distinguish two ways to view the change of seasons. In September, “some see despair,” as “autumn ends” and others see “hope in December,” as “winter arrives.” However, the speaker informs the reader that he or she sees something else:

All I see is the sweet summer memories
Drifting further and further away
With each and every fallen leaf.

With this abrupt change of mindset, the speaker perhaps explains why he or she is not playing outside with the other children in the opening. For this speaker, the change of seasons most importantly represents leaving behind the summer season and its memories, “drifting further and further away,” and not deciding between which season is better—autumn or winter. This is a surprise to the reader, but it makes clear the distinction between the speaker and children in the poem, and elevates the maturity of the speaker.

With detailed description, precise language, and a firm grasp on tone, this writer offers an engaging look at seasonal change and how it affects us all.

Thank you for the pleasure of reading your work!

Marie Kane
Final Judge
Sarah Mook Poetry Contest, 2017
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