



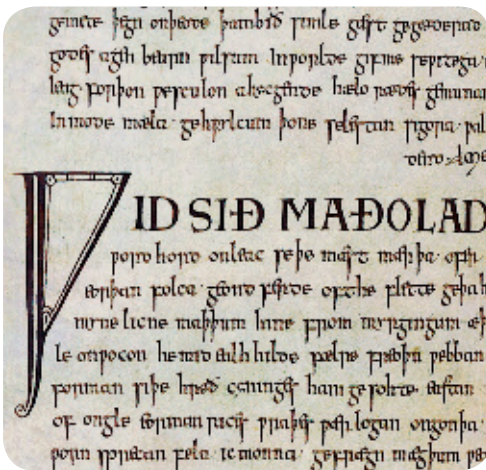
READING 3 Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods. 7 Analyze how patterns of imagery reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning. RC-12(A) Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

# The Seafarer The Wanderer The Wife’s Lament

Poetry from the *Exeter Book*

## Meet the Author

### The Exeter Book c. 950



### DID YOU KNOW?

The *Exeter Book* ...

- consists of 131 leaves of parchment, each slightly bigger than a standard sheet of paper.
- has knife cuts on some of its pages, which suggests that at one point it was used as a cutting board.
- inspired the building of a 19-foot-high stainless-steel statue imprinted with riddles in the city of Exeter.

first bishop of Exeter. He donated it to the Exeter Cathedral library sometime between 1050 and 1072. For several centuries the book was neglected and abused; few people were able to read the Old English language in which it was written and thus had little use for it. Some pages are badly stained or scorched. The original binding and an unknown number of pages are lost.

**Rediscovery** With the rise of Anglo-Saxon studies in the 19th century, scholars began to take an interest in the *Exeter Book*. Benjamin Thorpe published the first complete translation in 1842. He assigned titles to “The Seafarer” and “The Wanderer,” as none of the poems in the manuscript had titles. A photographic facsimile was published in 1933; it became the basis for later scholarly editions. A CD version, with facsimile pages and audio readings, was released in 2006.

The original manuscript still resides at the library at Exeter Cathedral, where it is cherished as one of the few surviving collections of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Nothing is known about the authors of “The Seafarer,” “The Wanderer,” and “The Wife’s Lament.” All three poems survive in the *Exeter Book*, a manuscript of Anglo-Saxon poems produced by a single scribe around A.D. 950. In addition to these and other secular poems, the *Exeter Book* contains religious verse, nearly 100 riddles, and a heroic narrative. It is the largest collection of Old English poetry in existence.

**Neglected Treasure** Originally, the *Exeter Book* belonged to Leofric (lə’ə-frīk), the

## LITERARY ANALYSIS: IMAGERY

Poets communicate through **imagery**, words and phrases that re-create sensory experiences for the reader by appealing to one or more of the five senses. Notice how the imagery in this passage from “The Seafarer” appeals to the senses of sight, touch, and hearing:

*My feet were cast  
In icy bands, bound with frost,  
With frozen chains, and hardship groaned  
Around my heart.*

The images bring to mind coldness and confinement and suggest the speaker’s lonely, painful emotional state. As you read the following three poems, pay attention to the imagery, allowing it to evoke ideas and feelings in you.

**Review: Old English Poetry**

## READING STRATEGY: MONITOR YOUR UNDERSTANDING

These poems have been translated from Old English into Modern English, but sections of the texts may still be hard to understand. Use the following strategies to understand them:

- **Visualize** the many images layered in the poems.
- **Question** as you read. Ask who the speaker is, for example.
- **Reread** passages that are confusing.
- **Paraphrase** difficult lines, restating them in your own words.
- **Clarify** events. The speakers remember past experiences and reflect on their present experiences. Let indentations and stanza breaks alert you that the speaker is turning to a new thought.

For each poem, create a chart to record what the speaker remembers or ponders in each section of the poem to help clarify events the speaker describes.

| “The Seafarer”         |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Section                | Speaker Remembers or Ponders              |
| Section 1 (lines 1–26) | being cold, hungry, and lonely on the sea |
| Section 2              |   |



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

## When are people most ALONE?

When people find themselves cut off from contact with others, the sense of isolation can be all consuming. It is not surprising that loneliness is a frequent topic in poetry written during the Anglo-Saxon era—an era during which disease, war, and other perils often wrenched people away from their loved ones. In many Anglo-Saxon poems, images of freezing seas and jagged cliffs mirror this sense of isolation and the challenge of living in a harsh, unpredictable world.

**QUICKWRITE** Imagine that you are making a five-minute silent film about isolation and loneliness. What would you show onscreen? Where would you set the film? Who would the main character be, and what would he or she be doing? List some visual images that come to mind.

| Film Images   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• single robed traveler, trudging across the Sahara Desert</li><li>• endless sand dunes</li></ul> |

# The Seafarer

**BACKGROUND** The poems in the *Exeter Book* reflect the hardship and uncertainty of life in Anglo-Saxon times. Men who made their living on the sea had to leave behind their families and sail long distances in primitive, poorly equipped boats. The women and children left behind endured months and even years without knowing whether their menfolk would return. In addition, frequent outbreaks of disease and war scattered communities and brought untimely death to many people.

This tale is true, and mine. It tells  
How the sea took me, swept me back  
And forth in sorrow and fear and pain,  
Showed me suffering in a hundred ships,  
5 In a thousand ports, and in me. It tells  
Of smashing surf when I sweated in the cold  
Of an anxious watch, perched in the bow  
As it dashed under cliffs. My feet were cast  
In icy bands, bound with frost,  
10 With frozen chains, and hardship groaned  
Around my heart. Hunger tore  
At my sea-weary soul. No man sheltered  
On the quiet fairness of earth can feel  
How wretched I was, drifting through winter  
15 On an ice-cold sea, whirled in sorrow,  
Alone in a world blown clear of love,  
Hung with icicles. The hailstorms flew.  
The only sound was the roaring sea,  
The freezing waves. The song of the swan  
20 Might serve for pleasure, the cry of the sea-fowl,  
The death-noise of birds instead of laughter,  
The mewwing of gulls instead of mead.  
Storms beat on the rocky cliffs and were echoed

## Language Coach

**Etymology** A word's **etymology**, or origin, can help you understand its **connotations**—the images or feelings connected with a word. *Wretched*, which comes from the Old English *wrecca* ("outcast or exile"), means "miserable." Why is *wretched* a better word than *miserable* in lines 12–17?

22 **mead** (mēd): an alcoholic beverage drunk at Anglo-Saxon gatherings.



### ◀ Analyze Visuals

Describe the **mood** of this photograph as well as those on pages 109 and 113. What features of each landscape determine its mood?

By icy-feathered terns and the eagle's screams;  
25 No kinsman could offer comfort there,  
To a soul left drowning in desolation. **A**  
And who could believe, knowing but  
The passion of cities, swelled proud with wine  
And no taste of misfortune, how often, how wearily,  
30 I put myself back on the paths of the sea.  
Night would blacken; it would snow from the north;  
Frost bound the earth and hail would fall,  
The coldest seeds. And how my heart  
Would begin to beat, knowing once more  
35 The salt waves tossing and the towering sea!  
The time for journeys would come and my soul  
Called me eagerly out, sent me over  
The horizon, seeking foreigners' homes.  
But there isn't a man on earth so proud,  
40 So born to greatness, so bold with his youth,  
Grown so brave, or so graced by God,  
That he feels no fear as the sails unfurl,  
Wondering what Fate has willed and will do.  
No harps ring in his heart, no rewards,

24 terns: sea birds similar to gulls.

### **A** IMAGERY

In lines 12–26, what senses does the imagery appeal to? Describe the **mood** created by the imagery.

45 No passion for women, no worldly pleasures,  
Nothing, only the ocean's heave;  
But longing wraps itself around him.  
Orchards blossom, the towns bloom,  
Fields grow lovely as the world springs fresh,  
50 And all these admonish that willing mind  
Leaping to journeys, always set  
In thoughts traveling on a quickening tide.  
So summer's sentinel, the cuckoo, sings  
In his murmuring voice, and our hearts mourn  
55 As he urges. Who could understand,  
In ignorant ease, what we others suffer  
As the paths of exile stretch endlessly on? **B**  
    And yet my heart wanders away,  
My soul roams with the sea, the whales'  
60 Home, wandering to the widest corners  
Of the world, returning ravenous with desire,  
Flying solitary, screaming, exciting me  
To the open ocean, breaking oaths  
On the curve of a wave.

    Thus the joys of God **C**

65 Are fervent with life, where life itself  
Fades quickly into the earth. The wealth  
Of the world neither reaches to Heaven nor remains.  
No man has ever faced the dawn  
Certain which of Fate's three threats  
70 Would fall: illness, or age, or an enemy's  
Sword, snatching the life from his soul.  
The praise the living pour on the dead  
Flowers from reputation: plant  
An earthly life of profit reaped  
75 Even from hatred and rancor, of bravery  
Flung in the devil's face, and death  
Can only bring you earthly praise  
And a song to celebrate a place  
With the angels, life eternally blessed  
80 In the hosts of Heaven.

    The days are gone  
When the kingdoms of earth flourished in glory;  
Now there are no rulers, no emperors,  
No givers of gold, as once there were,  
When wonderful things were worked among them  
85 And they lived in lordly magnificence.  
Those powers have vanished, those pleasures are dead,  
The weakest survives and the world continues,  
Kept spinning by toil. All glory is tarnished,

**50 admonish** (ăd-mŏn'ĭsh): criticize or caution.

**53 summer's sentinel** (sĕn'tĕ-nəl), **the cuckoo**: summer's guard or watchman. The cries of cuckoos are common in Europe in summer, but in autumn the birds migrate south.

**B IMAGERY**

Note how the images in lines 44–57 contrast with the images of the sea. How is the speaker affected by thoughts of life on land?

**C MONITOR**

Notice the break at line 64. Here the speaker turns to a new idea. How do you interpret the sentence beginning "Thus the joys of God . . ."?

**80 hosts of Heaven**: bands of angels.

The world's honor ages and shrinks,  
 90 Bent like the men who mold it. Their faces  
 Blanch as time advances, their beards  
 Wither and they mourn the memory of friends,  
 The sons of princes, sown in the dust.  
 The soul stripped of its flesh knows nothing  
 95 Of sweetness or sour, feels no pain,  
 Bends neither its hand nor its brain. A brother  
 Opens his palms and pours down gold  
 On his kinsman's grave, strewing his coffin  
 With treasures intended for Heaven, but nothing  
 100 Golden shakes the wrath of God  
 For a soul overflowing with sin, and nothing  
 Hidden on earth rises to Heaven. **D**  
 We all fear God. He turns the earth,  
 He set it swinging firmly in space,  
 105 Gave life to the world and light to the sky.  
 Death leaps at the fools who forget their God.  
 He who lives humbly has angels from Heaven  
 To carry him courage and strength and belief.  
 A man must conquer pride, not kill it,  
 110 Be firm with his fellows, chaste for himself,  
 Treat all the world as the world deserves,  
 With love or with hate but never with harm,  
 Though an enemy seek to scorch him in hell,  
 Or set the flames of a funeral pyre  
 115 Under his lord. Fate is stronger  
 And God mightier than any man's mind.  
 Our thoughts should turn to where our home is,  
 Consider the ways of coming there,  
 Then strive for sure permission for us  
 120 To rise to that eternal joy,  
 That life born in the love of God  
 And the hope of Heaven. Praise the Holy **E**  
 Grace of Him who honored us,  
 Eternal, unchanging creator of earth. Amen.

*Translated by Burton Raffel*

**D MONITOR**

**Visualize** the images of the world in lines 80–102. What main idea do they convey?

**110 chaste** (chāst): pure in thought and deed.

**114 funeral pyre** (pīr): a bonfire for burning a corpse.

**E MONITOR**

**Paraphrase** the advice the speaker gives in lines 117–122. Where is “our home”?

## Literary Analysis

- 1. Paraphrase** What views does the speaker express about earthly life and God in lines 64–124 ?
- 2. Compare** How does the last half of the poem (from line 64 on) relate to the first half of the poem?

# The Wanderer

This lonely traveler longs for grace,  
For the mercy of God; grief hangs on  
His heart and follows the frost-cold foam  
He cuts in the sea, sailing endlessly,  
5 Aimlessly, in exile. Fate has opened  
A single port: memory. He sees  
His kinsmen slaughtered again, and cries:  
    “I’ve drunk too many lonely dawns,  
Grey with mourning. Once there were men  
10 To whom my heart could hurry, hot  
With open longing. They’re long since dead.  
My heart has closed on itself, quietly  
Learning that silence is noble and sorrow  
Nothing that speech can cure. Sadness  
15 Has never driven sadness off;  
Fate blows hardest on a bleeding heart.  
So those who thirst for glory smother  
Secret weakness and longing, neither  
Weep nor sigh nor listen to the sickness  
20 In their souls. So I, lost and homeless,  
Forced to flee the darkness that fell  
On the earth and my lord. **F**  
    Leaving everything,  
Weary with winter I wandered out  
On the frozen waves, hoping to find  
25 A place, a people, a lord to replace  
My lost ones. No one knew me, now,  
No one offered comfort, allowed  
Me feasting or joy. How cruel a journey  
I’ve traveled, sharing my bread with sorrow  
30 Alone, an exile in every land,  
Could only be told by telling my footsteps.  
For who can hear: “friendless and poor,”  
And know what I’ve known since the long cheerful nights  
When, young and yearning, with my lord I yet feasted  
35 Most welcome of all. That warmth is dead.  
He only knows who needs his lord  
As I do, eager for long-missing aid;  
He only knows who never sleeps

## Language Coach

**Roots and Affixes** Added to an adjective, the suffix *-ly* forms an adverb (like *endlessly* or *aimlessly*, lines 4–5). Added to a noun, *-ly* means “relating to” and forms an adjective. How is the suffix used in *ghostly* and *worldly* (lines 71–72)?

## **F** MONITOR

What has happened to the speaker, and what is his state of mind?

31 **telling:** counting.





Without the deepest dreams of longing.  
 40 Sometimes it seems I see my lord,  
 Kiss and embrace him, bend my hands  
 And head to his knee, kneeling as though  
 He still sat enthroned, ruling his thanes.  
 And I open my eyes, embracing the air,  
 45 And see the brown sea-billows heave,  
 See the sea-birds bathe, spreading  
 Their white-feathered wings, watch the frost  
 And the hail and the snow. And heavy in heart  
 I long for my lord, alone and unloved.  
 50 Sometimes it seems I see my kin  
 And greet them gladly, give them welcome,  
 The best of friends. They fade away,  
 Swimming soundlessly out of sight,  
 Leaving nothing. **G**

How loathsome become

55 The frozen waves to a weary heart.  
 In this brief world I cannot wonder  
 That my mind is set on melancholy,  
 Because I never forget the fate  
 Of men, robbed of their riches, suddenly  
 60 Looted by death—the doom of earth,  
 Sent to us all by every rising  
 Sun. Wisdom is slow, and comes  
 But late. He who has it is patient;  
 He cannot be hasty to hate or speak,  
 65 He must be bold and yet not blind,  
 Nor ever too craven, complacent, or covetous,  
 Nor ready to gloat before he wins glory.  
 The man's a fool who flings his boasts  
 Hotly to the heavens, heeding his spleen  
 70 And not the better boldness of knowledge.  
 What knowing man knows not the ghostly,  
 Waste-like end of worldly wealth:  
 See, already the wreckage is there,  
 The wind-swept walls stand far and wide,  
 75 The storm-beaten blocks besmeared with frost,  
 The mead-halls crumbled, the monarchs thrown down  
 And stripped of their pleasures. The proudest of warriors  
 Now lie by the wall: some of them war  
 Destroyed; some the monstrous sea-bird  
 80 Bore over the ocean; to some the old wolf  
 Dealt out death; and for some dejected  
 Followers fashioned an earth-cave coffin.  
 Thus the Maker of men lays waste

**43 thanes** (thānz): followers of a lord.

**G IMAGERY**

In what way do the images from the speaker's past contrast with the images of the present?

**69 spleen**: bad temper. The spleen is a body organ that was formerly thought to be the seat of strong emotions.

This earth, crushing our callow mirth.  
85 And the work of old giants stands withered and still.” **H**

He who these ruins rightly sees,  
And deeply considers this dark twisted life,  
Who sagely remembers the endless slaughters  
Of a bloody past, is bound to proclaim:  
90 “Where is the war-steed? Where is the warrior?  
Where is his war-lord?  
Where now the feasting-places? Where now the mead-hall  
pleasures?  
Alas, bright cup! Alas, brave knight!  
Alas, you glorious princes! All gone,  
Lost in the night, as you never had lived.  
95 And all that survives you a serpentine wall,  
Wondrously high, worked in strange ways.  
Mighty spears have slain these men,  
Greedy weapons have framed their fate.  
These rocky slopes are beaten by storms,  
100 This earth pinned down by driving snow,  
By the horror of winter, smothering warmth  
In the shadows of night. And the north angrily  
Hurls its hailstorms at our helpless heads.  
Everything earthly is evilly born,  
105 Firmly clutched by a fickle Fate.  
Fortune vanishes, friendship vanishes,  
Man is fleeting, woman is fleeting,  
And all this earth rolls into emptiness.”

So says the sage in his heart, sitting alone with His  
thought.  
110 It’s good to guard your faith, nor let your grief come forth  
Until it cannot call for help, nor help but heed  
The path you’ve placed before it. It’s good to find your grace  
In God, the heavenly rock where rests our every hope. **I**

*Translated by Burton Raffel*

**84 callow** (käl’ō) **mirth**: childish joy.

**H IMAGERY**

What ideas about earthly life do you get from the images in lines 74–85? Note that “work of old giants” refers to old ruins and burial mounds.

**95 serpentine** (sūr’pən-tēn’): winding or twisting, like a snake.

**I MONITOR**

Reread lines 110–113. Is the wanderer speaking, or is someone else? What advice is offered in these lines?

## Literary Analysis

- 1. Compare** How does the wanderer’s present life compare with his former life?
- 2. Summarize** What does a wise man understand, according to the wanderer?

# The Wife's Lament

I make this song about me full sadly **J**  
my own wayfaring. I a woman tell  
what griefs I had since I grew up  
new or old never more than now.  
5 Ever I know the dark of my exile.

First my lord went out away from his people  
over the wave-tumult. I grieved each dawn  
wondered where my lord my first on earth might be.  
Then I went forth a friendless exile  
10 to seek service in my sorrow's need.  
My man's kinsmen began to plot  
by darkened thought to divide us two  
so we most widely in the world's kingdom  
lived wretchedly and I suffered longing.

15 My lord commanded me to move my dwelling here.  
I had few loved ones in this land  
or faithful friends. For this my heart grieves:  
that I should find the man well matched to me  
hard of fortune mournful of mind  
20 hiding his mood thinking of murder. **K**

Blithe was our bearing often we vowed  
that but death alone would part us two  
naught else. But this is turned round  
now . . . as if it never were  
25 our friendship. I must far and near  
bear the anger of my beloved.  
The man sent me out to live in the woods

## **J** OLD ENGLISH POETRY

The translator has divided each line with a **caesura**, or pause, which helps maintain the rhythm of the line. What do the pauses emphasize?

6 **my lord**: the speaker's husband.

7 **wave-tumult**: a kenning, or compound metaphoric expression, for the sea.

## Language Coach

**Multiple Meanings** *Service* (line 10) can mean "help" or "the job of a servant," among other things. One obsolete meaning is "a pledge of love." How do these different meanings affect your interpretation of the events in lines 11–14?

## **K** MONITOR

Why is the wife in exile?



under an oak tree in this den in the earth.  
Ancient this earth hall. I am all longing.

30 The valleys are dark the hills high  
the yard overgrown bitter with briars  
a joyless dwelling. Full oft the lack of my lord  
seizes me cruelly here. Friends there are on earth  
living beloved lying in bed  
35 while I at dawn am walking alone  
under the oak tree through these earth halls.  
There I may sit the summerlong day  
there I can weep over my exile  
my many hardships. Hence I may not rest  
40 from this care of heart which belongs to me ever  
nor all this longing that has caught me in this life. **L**

May that young man be sad-minded always  
hard his heart's thought while he must wear  
a blithe bearing with care in the breast  
45 a crowd of sorrows. May on himself depend  
all his world's joy. Be he outlawed far  
in a strange folk-land— that my beloved sits  
under a rocky cliff rimed with frost  
a lord dreary in spirit drenched with water  
50 in a ruined hall. My lord endures  
much care of mind. He remembers too often  
a happier dwelling. Woe be to them  
that for a loved one must wait in longing. **M**

*Translated by Ann Stanford*

**28–29 den . . . earth hall:** In describing her living quarters, the speaker uses an expression something like the modern “hole in the ground.”

**L IMAGERY**

What does the speaker's description of her surroundings express about her emotional state?

**42 that young man:** the speaker's husband. In these final lines, the speaker seems to wish for her husband to lead the same sort of life that he has forced her to endure.

**M IMAGERY**

What sad images does the speaker imagine in lines 42–50?

## Comprehension

1. **Recall** How does the speaker in “The Seafarer” feel about life at sea?
2. **Clarify** Why is the title character in “The Wanderer” in exile?
3. **Clarify** In “The Wife’s Lament,” what does the wife wish for her husband?

## Literary Analysis

4. **Monitor Understanding** Review the charts you made as you read. What is the speaker remembering or pondering in each poem? What elements in each poem helped you reach these conclusions?
5. **Compare Texts** Compare these three poems, noting similarities you see in each of the following elements:
  - subject
  - mood
  - imagery
  - theme
6. **Synthesize Ideas** What ideas about Anglo-Saxon life and religious attitudes do you get from the poems?
7. **Evaluate Imagery** How does the imagery in these poems reflect the passage of time? Support your answer with details from the poems.
8. **Apply Themes** What advice might the speakers of “The Seafarer” and “The Wanderer” give the speaker of “The Wife’s Lament”? In what circumstances could modern people benefit from this advice?

## Literary Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations** There has been much debate over the number of speakers in “The Seafarer.” Some critics believe that a second person begins to speak at line 64, and others believe that there is only one speaker throughout the poem. Which interpretation do you believe is more accurate, and why?

### *When are people most **ALONE**?*

A cold, stony landscape mirrors the harsh, unpredictable lives of the Anglo-Saxons. What other kinds of landscapes might evoke a feeling of isolation or loneliness?



**READING 3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods. **7** Analyze how patterns of imagery reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.