

COMMON CORE

RL 4 Analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is fresh, engaging, or beautiful. **RL 10** Read and comprehend literature, including poems. **L 4** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases. **L 4b** Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech. **L 5b** Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

DID YOU KNOW?

The *Exeter Book* . . .

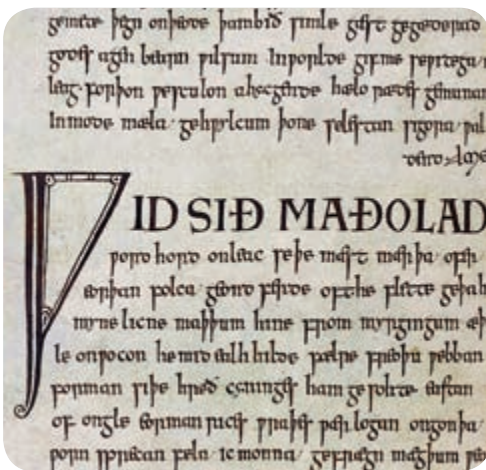
- consists of 131 leaves of parchment, each slightly bigger than a standard sheet of paper.
- has knife cuts on some of its pages, which suggests that at one point it was used as a cutting board.
- inspired the building of a 19-foot-high stainless-steel statue imprinted with riddles in the city of Exeter.

The Seafarer The Wanderer The Wife's Lament

Poetry from the *Exeter Book*

Meet the Author

The Exeter Book c. 950



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

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.

● TEXT 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
• single robed traveler, trudging across the Sahara Desert
• endless sand dunes

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 mewing of gulls instead of mead.
Storms beat on the rocky cliffs and were echoed

COMMON CORE L 5b

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-nĕl), **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”?

Text 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

COMMON CORE L 4b

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.



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** (kăl’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** (sûr’pən-tên’): 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?

Text 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.

COMMON CORE L 4

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?

Text 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?

Text 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?

COMMON CORE

RL 2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account. **RL 4** Analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is fresh, engaging, or beautiful. **RL 9** Demonstrate knowledge of how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics. **RL 10** Read and comprehend literature, including poems.