

How many sections are there in the poem “The Waste Land?”

Writer: T. S. Eliot | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

How many sections are there in the poem “The Waste Land?” Write their names in the proper order with brief descriptions. [NU: 2017]

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) published “The Waste Land” in 1922. This long poem is divided into five sections. Each section deals with the barrenness of modern life. Together, they show the spiritual crisis of the post-war world.

The Burial of the Dead: This is the first section. It highlights the contrast between the cruel April and the comforting winter. It speaks of memory, desire, and emptiness. Madame Sosostris appears with her tarot cards. London is often referred to as the “Unreal City” following:

“Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,”

A Game of Chess:

This is the second section. It portrays a broken love and a meaningless life. One part describes the nervous state of a rich woman. Another part shows Lil’s troubled marriage. Both suggest emptiness of human relations. Here is a quotation to support the point.

“My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.

Speak to me. Why do you never speak?”

The Fire Sermon:

This is the third section. Tiresias, the blind prophet, narrates this part. He watches a cheap sexual meeting between a clerk and a typist. About this, the poet says,

"The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights

Her stove, and lays out food in tins."

The Thames River is polluted. This section shows corruption and lust.

Death by Water: This is the fourth section. It is very short. It tells of Phlebas, a drowned sailor. He forgets youth, profit, and loss. His death shows the cycle of decay and rebirth. The following lines describe this point.

"Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,

Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell

And the profit and loss."

What The Thunder Said:

This is the fifth and last section. It presents apocalyptic images of death and destruction. Water is absent, and life is barren. But at the end, thunder speaks the three words: Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata. The poem ends with

"Shantih shantih shantih."

In short, the poem consists of five sections, each depicting different aspects of the wasteland. They reveal sterility, lust, despair, and faint hope. Eliot uses these divisions to portray the broken spirit of the modern age.