

# SODIUM CHLORIDE

I am sodium  
The 11<sup>th</sup> element on the table  
Soft, silvery-white, highly reactive  
In the free state, I'm unavailable

I am chlorine  
Atomic number- seventeen  
A halogen, the second most abundant  
With the third highest electronegativity

There are many like me they say  
Li, K, Rb, Cs  
Yet we never click with each other  
I can never coexist with them

I have my own family of halogens  
All similar to me in every way  
But even though our properties are  
all alike  
I don't imagine us mingling any day

In this big group of alkali metals  
I find myself alone and unwanted  
Sure, we were ALL born in the earth's  
crust  
Then why do I feel so secluded and  
haunted?

Highly social and reactive we seem to be  
Yet to each other we're mere strangers  
All so lost in this fight for nobility  
No one wants their electron stabilities  
endangered

## (But sometimes)

Sometimes I wonder who is beyond  
my group  
Could there be a possible friend?  
Maybe all there is across that period  
Are elements with their own different  
trend

Sometimes I wander in my gaseous  
state  
Aimlessly stumbling upon possible  
partners  
But they're all so different; nothing  
like me  
So I return home, disheartened

So alone so unstable  
So distant so incapable  
Do I belong here?  
But this is my family  
Says who I ask  
Says Mendeleev's periodicity  
But just because  
Yes, just because  
They all have the same electronic  
configuration as me



Doesn't mean at all  
By any law of chemistry  
That together we're meant to be

(Long pause)

All I want to do  
Is gather enough enthalpy  
To turn myself around  
And glance at what's behind me  
(Sodium slowly turns around during  
this para)

But if I turn, I'm afraid  
They'll see how imperfect I am  
Incomplete is my valence shell  
I'm not as noble as I think I am  
(Chlorine slowly turns around during  
this para)

So I look around anxiously  
Finding someone whose valencies would  
be a match  
Not catching anyone's eye  
Stifling all urges to say a 'Hi'  
(Both try to wave but stop themselves  
mid-way)

But one fine day  
When we both least expected it  
We both left our respective groups  
And went our way  
Lost but not astray  
Hope that chemical kinetics

Its role would soon play  
As it turns out  
All we needed was an accidental collision  
A collision in the correct orientation  
For our energy barriers to be crossed  
For our instability to be lost  
And all that remained  
Was an introduction, two valencies, two  
names  
But I was scared  
She's nothing like me  
I'm electropositive  
I'm electronegative  
Poles apart  
A whole period apart

Can this brief encounter  
This one 'chance meeting'  
Give me a friend?  
Or be my end?  
Our equation seems unbalanced somehow  
Maybe it isn't meant to be  
Should we even bother attaining  
equilibrium now?  
Or would it be a waste of energy?  
A waste of substrate?  
Maybe we should just go our different  
directions now

(They walk separate ways, two seconds  
later sodium looks back)



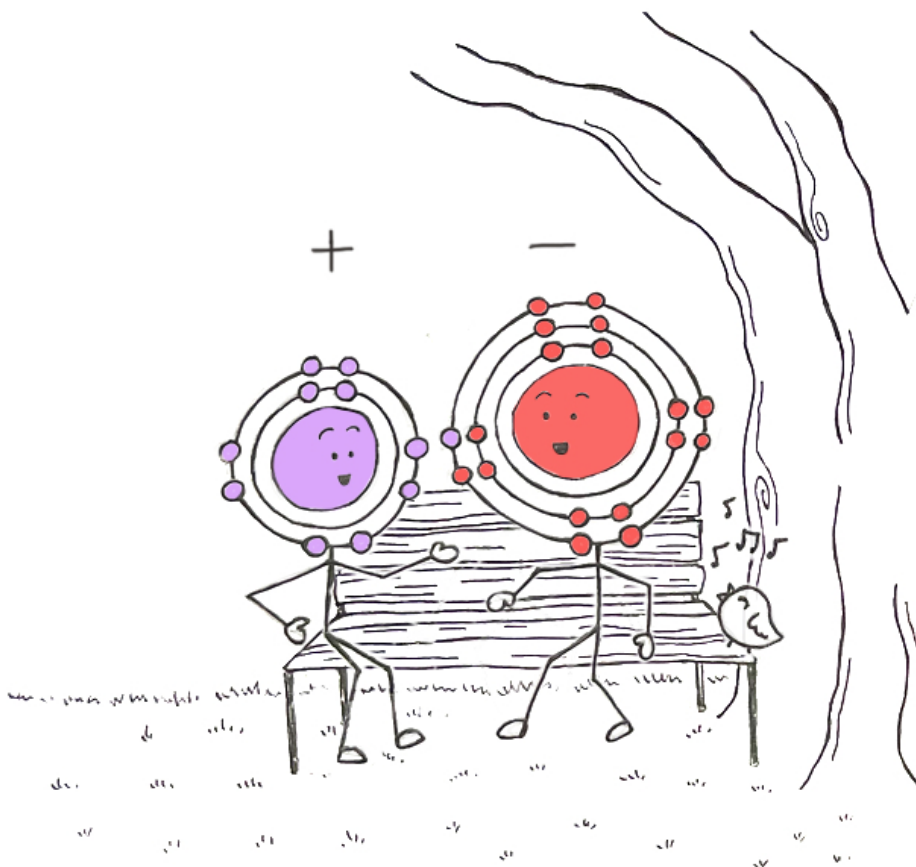
Hey wait!  
 Yeah?  
 I know you're really busy  
 Yeah right! Making people dizzy?  
 But maybe you'd want to  
 Probably meet sometime?  
 Share an electron maybe  
 That sounds fine  
 So I'll meet you there  
 By the shore of the sea?  
 And maybe interact for a while  
 At  $-757.3 \text{ kJ/mol}$  enthalpy  
 You never know  
 How this may turn out for you and me  
 We might even start bonding  
 Bonding a bit ionically.

And that's the story of how a great  
 friendship began  
 Who would have thought two  
 opposites could complete each other's  
 electron band?  
 So much is still said about this  
 legendary pair

Sustaining life both on land and air  
 Who would have thought that beyond  
 yours and my comfort zone?  
 Was present an element in whom we'd  
 find home  
 Someone to share with, someone to  
 interact  
 Someone to dissipate with, someone to  
 hold intact  
 But that does not mean things won't  
 turn exothermic

Sometimes the heat will become too  
 much to take  
 But just because there's an uproar and  
 an effervescence  
 Does not mean our bonds have to break  
 So every time we seem distant  
 I'll ride the Haber's cycle down your lane

Until we both are ready  
 To rebuild our lattices  
 Every single time  
 Again, and again



#### Notes:

1. Sodium and Chlorine, two elements from across the periodic table and with very different properties, come to form one of the most iconic and underrated chemical compounds of all time. Inspired by my bond with my best friend Anshu Saran, this spoken word poem (narrated through the perspective of both elements) explores how the unlikeliest but greatest friendships form only when we dare to venture outside our comfort zones. How to read the poem: The poem is a verse-based skit (written to be performed on stage) with the sections in purple being spoken by 'Sodium', those in red being spoken by 'Chlorine', and sections in black being spoken by both.
2. Source of the image used in the background of the article title: Poem. Credits: Idearriba, Pixabay. URL: <https://pixabay.com/photos/poem-butterfly-literature-tale-1104997/>. License: CC0.
3. The three illustrations for this poem were inspired by sketches of the sodium and chlorine atoms by Dalia Saldanha (the author). They were conceptualised & created by Vidya Kamalesh (Artist, i wonder...) & Chitra Ravi (Editor, i wonder...). To reuse, please include following details: Credits: Dalia Saldanha, i wonder..., Jun 2022 issue. License: CC-BY-NC.



Dalia Saldanha is a PhD candidate in the Department of Chemical Engineering at McGill University, Canada. She works on developing skin sensors from eco-friendly protein-based biomaterials. Outside of the lab, Dalia enjoys writing scientific poetry, swimming, and exploring indie bookstores. Feel free to contact her at: [daliasaldanha96@gmail.com](mailto:daliasaldanha96@gmail.com).