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pa·thet·ic  (pə-thět ĭk) also **pa·thet·i·cal** (-ĭ-kəl)

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adj.

1. Arousing or deserving of sympathetic sadness and compassion: *"The old, rather shabby room struck her as extraordinarily pathetic" (John Galsworthy).*
2. Arousing or deserving of scornful pity.

[French *pathétique*, from Late Latin *pathēticus*, from Greek *pathētikos*, sensitive, from *pathētos*, liable to suffer, from *pathos*, suffering; see **k^went(h)-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

pa·thet i·cal·ly adv.

Synonyms: pathetic, pitiful, pitiable, piteous, lamentable

These adjectives describe what inspires or deserves pity. Something *pathetic* elicits sympathetic sadness and compassion: *"a most earnest ... entreaty, addressed to you in the most pathetic tones of the voice so dear to you" (Charles Dickens).*

Both *pitiful* and *pitiable* apply to what is touchingly sad: *"She told a most pitiful story" (Samuel Butler).* *"The emperor had been in a state of pitiable vacillation" (William Hickling Prescott).*

Sometimes these three terms connote contemptuous pity, as for what is hopelessly inept or inadequate: *a school with pathetic academic standards.* *"To be guided by second-hand conjecture is pitiful" (Jane Austen).* *"That cold accretion called the world, which, so terrible in the mass, is so unformidable, even pitiable, in its units" (Thomas Hardy).*

Piteous applies to what cries out for pity: *"They ... made piteous lamentation to us to save them" (Daniel Defoe).* *Lamentable* suggests the evocation of pity mixed with sorrow: *"Tell thou the lamentable tale of me, / And send the hearers weeping to their beds" (Shakespeare).*

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