

## The Kenning – Critical Thinking

### Beowulf

A distinctive feature of Anglo-Saxon Old English poetry, the *kenning*\* is a miniature riddle, an implied comparison usually with two parts and often hyphenated. Kennings can also appear as possessives, using both apostrophes and 'of.' For example, God's "dread-loom" means God's plan. The comparison between planning and weaving and the awe inspired by the plan are communicated in the hyphenated compound "dread-loom."

Let's look at other examples:

- a) shepherd of evil
  
  - b) waveramer
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- c) Heaven's/Own candle
  
  - d) ring-giver
  
  - e) battle-light
  
  - f) peace-weaver
  
  - g) helmet of night

In the space provided above, note down what these kennings suggest inferentially about Anglo-Saxon society.

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\*Based on Old English 'cennan' – to cause to know, to acquaint; hence a "teaching" or "an illustration" or something related to that idea.

One of the literary devices popular in the Anglo-Saxon Old English poetry tradition is the kenning. Read the definition below and ready yourself to take a stab at this delightfully metaphorical way of speaking, writing, and thinking.

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kenning - a literary device in which a noun is renamed in a creative way using a compound word or union of two separate words to combine ideas

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If you call "school" a "scholar's home" then you have created a kenning.

If you tell your friends that your parents are the "car loaners" then you have created a kenning.

The folks at Coca-Cola might agree that a cold Coke is "humanity's beverage."

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Assignment : Consider carefully how you could creatively rename each of the following through the use of the kenning technique.

1. a teacher
2. a bus driver
3. firemen
4. television
5. meatloaf
6. police
7. pop tarts
8. music
9. love
10. computer

Search *Beowulf* and find 15 kennings. Make two columns on the back and list the kenning and what it is describing.