A kenning is a figurative, compound expression used in place of a name or noun, especially in Old English or Old Norse poetry; for example, *storm of swords* is a kenning for *battle*. Early kennings were basically synonyms that scops used so that they could maintain the alliteration of a line of poetry. [Alliteration required that at least two words begin with the same consonant sound.] Kennings became so popular in their early stages that about one-third of the text of *Beowulf* is composed of them. Some kennings became so common that they became clichés, such as *ring-giver* for every prince, but in the best kennings one element of the phrase will create a striking, unexpected comparison. In *Beowulf*, kennings provide imagery that would help the audience focus on the words of the scop telling the story, and allow the scop some variety so that words don’t become overused.

Here are some examples:

- swan-road (the sea)
- helmet bearers (warriors)
- battle sweat (blood)
- giver of gold (king)
- light of battle (sword)
- earth-hall (burial mound)

Another way to think of the definition is this: a kenning is a metaphor which describes everyday objects in colorful language and is made up of compound words or the union of two separate words. Try to figure out the common object all of these kennings describe: arrow aimer, dust terror, antique printer, tickle tool, fowl fashion...it’s a ____________________ !

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.

**Activity #1:** Listed below are some modern kennings. Can you find examples of alliteration and/or imagery among them? Identify the object each represents:

1. gas guzzler ____________________ 6. eye candy ____________________
2. headhunter ____________________ 7. cancer stick ____________________
3. muffin top ____________________ 8. Brown noser ____________________
4. rug rat________________________ 9. couch potato ____________________
5. land line______________________ 10. tramp stamp____________________
Activity #2: Create at least 5 modern kennings of your own. Try to include poetic qualities.

_________________________________ is a __________________________________

_________________________________ is a __________________________________

_________________________________ is a __________________________________

_________________________________ is a __________________________________

_________________________________ is a __________________________________

Activity #3: Develop kennings for each of the following:

1. teacher ______________________ 6. bus driver ______________________
2. firemen _______________________ 7. Television ______________________
3. meatloaf ______________________ 8. Police ______________________
4. pop tarts ______________________ 9. Music ______________________
5. love ______________________ 10. Computer ______________________

Activity #4: Take one of your kenning from the list (or a completely different one) and add more kennings to it to create a 'kenning' poem. For example:

A Mother is...
Nose wiper, bottom swiper,
Peacemaker, morning waker,
Food provider, task collider,
Bedroom tidier, taxi driver...

Sharon Rudd

Write your poem on a separate sheet of paper. Please put your name on the paper with your period and the date. This is to be collected.

Activity #5: Kennings can come in three forms. Look at the examples in the chart below and write down the name or noun represented beside each kenning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compound Words</th>
<th>Prepositional Phrases</th>
<th>Possessives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sky-candle</td>
<td>wolf of wounds</td>
<td>seabird’s bath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whale-road</td>
<td>winters of grief</td>
<td>ocean’s face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ring-giver</td>
<td>shepherd of evil</td>
<td>heaven's joy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>