**Name:**

**Kennings**

A **kenning** is a literary device in which a poetic phrase substitutes for a noun. In the best kennings, one element of the phrase will create a striking, unexpected comparison. Often used in Anglo-Saxon poetry and especially in *Beowulf*, a kenning provides powerful imagery that would help the audience focus on the words of the *scop* or poet telling the story. A kenning also allows the *scop* some variety, so words don’t become overused. Finally, Anglo-Saxon poetry depended heavily on alliteration, and some kennings provided additional alliteration. Here are examples:

*sky-candle* (the sun)

*swan-road* (the sea)

*stout-hearted* (brave)

*battle sweat* (blood)

*light-of-battle* (sword)

*helmet bearers* (warriors)

*giver of gold* (king)

*earth-hall* (burial mound, barrow)

*dwelling place* (home)

When we translate these kennings from Anglo-Saxon, they lose some of their poetic quality. Listed below are some modern kennings. Can you find examples of striking imagery, alliteration,

consonance, rhyme, and assonance among them? Identify the concept each kenning represents.

1. gas guzzler -

2. headhunter -

3. web surver -

4. rug rat -

5. land line -

6. eye candy -

7. cancer stick -

8. boob tube -

9. couch potato -

10. tramp stamp –

*Replica helmet from Sutton Hoo: http://commons.wikimedia.org*

**Three types of Kennings**

**Open (or open compound) kenning – a two word phrase consisting of an adjective and noun**

* **wakeful sleeper (line 429)**

**Hyphenated compound – two adjectives or an adjective and a noun joined by a hyphen**

* **gold-shining (line 398)**

**Possessive kenning – two nouns put together with an apostrophe to show possession**

* **hell’s captive (line 470)**

**Prepositional phrase kenning – a noun followed by a prepositional phrase to describe it (sometimes hyphens are placed between each word)**

* **shepherd of evil (line 423)**

**Kennings in *Beowulf***

Skim several sections of Beowulf and record examples of open, compound and possessive kennings in the chart below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type | Example | Line # | Meaning |
| Open kennings | 1.  2. |  |  |
| Hyphenated  kennings | 3.  4. |  |  |
| Possessive  kenning | 5. |  |  |

**Creating your ownKennings**

Create a likely kenning for each of the following items:

1. star –
2. ship –
3. sword –
4. river –
5. poem –
6. hero –

**Kennings**

Answer Key

1. gas guzzler – a vehicle that has poor gas mileage, alliteration, striking imagery

2. headhunter – a person who finds executive positions for job seekers, consonance (“h”),

striking imagery

3. web surfer – a person who spends time online, striking imagery

4. rug rat – a mischievous child, alliteration, striking imagery

5. land line – a traditional telephone, alliteration

6. eye candy – a person or thing with visual appeal, striking imagery

7. cancer stick – a cigarette, striking imagery

8. boob tube – television, rhyme, striking imagery

9. couch potato – a person who gets little exercise, assonance and striking imagery

10. tramp stamp – a tattoo on the lower back, rhyme, striking imagery