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Examples of kennings

illustration of dog in snow with kenning meaning and examples Olha Khorimarko / iStock / Getty Images Plus / via Getty created by YourDictionary Used under Getty Images license The Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse traditions have a word for a compound expression with a metaphorical meaning; kenning. Simply put, in poetry, a kenning is when you take two words and combine them as a mild translation or metaphor for something else. So, as you're sitting by the fire one night, enjoying an anthology of Scandinavian poetry, you might come across poem about five brave men aboard a wave-floater (a ship). Kennings were often used to describe everyday people, animals, and objects. To no surprise, they were used to brighten up an author's prose. Why say "a ship" when you can use something more illustrious like "wave floater"? Let's enjoy further examples of kenning. Similar to how we incorporate similes and metaphors in our prose, kennings can provide an added layer of intrigue and beauty. Let's take a look at some modern expressions that have their roots in kennings. Ankle biter = a very young childBean counter = a bookkeeper or accountantBookworm = someone who does anything to gain approvalFender bender = a car accidentFirst Lady - the wife of the presidentFour-eyes = someone who wears glassesHead twister = an owlHot potato = something no one wantsMind reader = a person who knows what you are thinkingMotor mouth = a person who talks a lot and/or quicklyPencil pusher = a dogRugrat = a toddler or crawling babyShowstopper = a person who knows what you are thinkingMotor mouth = a person who talks a lot and/or quicklyPencil pusher = a person who talks a lot and/or q environmentalistTree swinger = a monkeyTummy slider = a penguin The next time you're calling your little niece or nephew an "ankle biter," know you have something in common with the Vikings of long ago. Given its origins in poetry, let's take a look at two poetic samples of kennings in action. Anytime we create a two-word construct for a singular noun, we're approaching kenning territory. Take a look at this sample children's poem from Bic Kids, made almost entirely of kennings: a worm-eatera nest-makera cushion-fillera seed-munchera fish-guzzlera fast-fliera cat-escapera tree-liveran acrobatic-glideran adventurous-swoopera tweeting-singerPut these together, I'm a bird! Now, onto the classics. The epic poem Beowulf is chock full of kennings. It's penned by an unknown author, although we do know it has its origins in Anglo-Saxon literature. One of the most prominent scenes details Beowulf's fight against the monster Grendel. Perhaps to fully illuminate it, the author leaned heavily on kennings to paint a graphic picture. Here are some kennings pulled from that fight scene, as well as the rest of the epic poem: Battle-adorned and armored (for battle) "Go to the bench now, battle-adorned for battle-gear = armor" Mid the battle-gear he saw a blade triumphant, old-sword of Eotens, with edge of proof, warriors' heirloom, weapon unmatched. "Battle-sweat = blood "That warsword then all burned, bright blade, when the blood gushes o'er it, battle-sweat hot; but the hilt I brought back from my foes." Giver-of-rings!" Light-of-battle = sword "But the warrior found the light-of-battle was loath to bite, to hard the heart." Shepherd-ofevils = Grendel "Soon then saw that shepherd-of-evils that never he met in this middle-world, in the ways of earth, another wight within as when from the sky there shines unclouded heaven's candle. "Whale-path = sea or ocean "For he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve, till before him the folk, both far and near, who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate, gave him gifts: a good king he!" Nature and poetry have been lovers since the dawn of time. As such, you won't be surprised to learn there are many kennings which relate to nature. Ancestor's watch = a stone circleBane of wood = fireBoreas's burning = snow blindnessBranches of fjord, Wave-swine = shipDragon's bile = poisonFeather's fall = falling snowFrozen road = ice-covered riverGreen clearing = a shaman's gathering placeNorthern kiss = cold windRibs of Ull = skisSerpent's lair = goldShip of night = the moonSky's black cloak = nightfallSky candle = the sunThor's laughter = thunderWeather of wolves = harsh winterWhite death = killed by an avalancheWind racers = horsesWinter's blanket = snowWinter spear = icicle The author of Beowulf turned to kennings for good reason. He wanted to describe the horrible loss of life and torturous scars of battle with bright imagery. Simple language would never do to describe the horrors of war. As such, here are some battle kennings that might strike up a bold image. Battle metal = weaponsBlack song = war cryBlood ember = axeDew of slaughter = bloodFeeding the eagle = killing enemiesMind's worth = honorTraveling the Hell road = dyingWar needles = arrowsWeather of weapons = large-scale battle People are, perhaps, the most baffling of all. The next time you're trying to describe a complex character in your short story or poem consider creating a kenning. Here's some inspiration to kick things off: Bear shirt = Norse warriorBringer of rings = chieftain or kingChildren of battle = soldiersFeller of life-webs = slayerFeeder of eagles/ravens = warriorLord of laughter = composer, poetRing rich = a generous personRune caller = wizardSlayer of giants = ThorWolf's joint = wrist Then, of course, there are all the abstract components of life. We have our thoughts, emotions, fears, and wonderings that can't be seen or touched. Still, that doesn't preclude them from a clever kenning or two Draught of giants = sudden realizationForseti's failure = unjust decisionsMimir's warning = prophecy of doomUncut thread = destiny to be fulfilledWind of troll wives = thought Go for it! Be bold and add a clever kenning or two to your next body of work. It would be difficult to label a unique kenning a cliché. So, have some fun and insert one or two in your next piece of literature or poem. For some inspiration, enjoy these examples of free verse poems. Then, let your hair down while you dip your latest poem in clever kennings from the past. Kenning represents a unique and evocative rhetorical device. It is a figurative phrase that describes something through compact and imaginative metaphorical language. Kenning has been employed in Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon verse. Kennings add color, nuance and depth to the poetic works. This technique enables the writers to extend vivid mental images and symbolic associations through a linguistic form of synecdoche. A kenning is a metaphorical phrase used in place of a single concrete noun. It is employed to describe or symbolize an object or concept. In poetry, Kenning is used to re-envision and re-frame the thing. This rhetorical device redefines the object through vivid metaphor and symbolic association. For example, instead of using the word "ocean", a poet may employ a kenning like "whale's road" to metaphorically refer to the sea. Compact phrases like "sky candle" for the sun, "ring giver" for a generous lord, or "storm of swords" for battle are all examples of kennings exhibit several distinguishing characteristics: Use of Compact Phrasing: Kennings are typically brief, two-word phrases rather than full sentences or clauses. Their rhetorical power comes through condensed, pithy metaphorical language. Innovative Metaphorical Description. Symbolic Undertones: Well-crafted kennings go beyond simple description, imbuing objects or concepts with symbolic significance through specific word choices and juxtapositions. Alliterative sounds to achieve musical and prompt effects, which are pleasing to the ear. Synecdochal Representation: Kennings utilize a rhetorical technique to describe something through its relation to a figurative form of synecdoche. Kennings serve many key functions in literary and poetic works: Poetic Enrichment - They poetically embellish verse with creative metaphors. Kenning transforms everyday language into creative one. Memory Aid - The compact phrasing and alliteration of kennings help the poets to memorize and recite oral poetry. Fresh Perspectives - Their innovative metaphors encourage imaginative leaps and new perspectives on ideas. Thematic Resonance - The symbolic word choices of kennings reinforce deeper themes and undertones. Artistic Density - They pack immense representational power into condensed phrasings. Audience Engagement -Kennings imaginative wordplay captures the minds of the readers and emotions, which transports them into the artistic vision. Kennings provide evocative embellishment that goes beyond mere linguistic ornamentation. They are a powerful device for generating symbolic associations, transforming perceptions, aiding memory and engaging audiences - all within the concise structures of compound phrases. Example #1 "And now my spirit twists out of my breast, my spirit out in the waterways, over the whale's home it soars widely through all the corners of the world —it comes back to me eager and unsated." In the above excerpt, the kenning "Whale's home" has been used, which refers to the ocean. This kenning is used to describe the sea as the dwelling place of whales. It emphasizes the speaker's deep connection and longing for the vast and mysterious expanse of the sea. Example #2 "Often when one man's fortune fails him after he has to mourn the loss of a gold-friend, a dear one..." Here, the kenning "Gold-friend" refers to a generous lord and benefactor. In the context of Anglo-Saxon culture, where the poem originates, a lord or king was expected to be generous with wealth and gifts to his loyal followers. This kenning emphasizes the value and importance of this relationship. Example #3 "Then stood on stern, steered the craft, the wake of the ship, till that they saw the sandy cliffs. The warriors stood ready, warriors by the sea, keenly saw the battle-light." The kenning in the above stanza is "Battle-light" which is a reference to the shining of weapons and armor in the sunlight. It signifies the onset of battle-light which is a reference to the shining of weapons and armor in the sunlight. It signifies the onset of battle-light which is a reference to the shining of weapons and armor in the sunlight. It signifies the onset of battle-light which is a reference to the shining of weapons and armor in the sunlight. didst waken from his summer dreamsThe blue Mediterranean, where he lay, Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams." Shelley personifies the West Wind as a powerful force that can awaken the Mediterranean Sea from its calmness. This personification attributes human-like abilities to the wind. It enriches the poem with a sense of the wind's powerful, almost divine influence on nature. Example #5 The writer explores themes of history, identity and connection to the past through the physical objects like bones. Heaney uses metaphorical language to evoke complex ideas in it. "I push my hands in the wet flax of your hair, In the watery motions of surrender" In the excerpt, the writer uses metaphorical language to evoke the tactile sensation and intimate connection with the past by using "wet flax" and movements to "watery motions of surrender." These expressions create vivid imagery and emotional depth, which corresponds to the purpose kennings serve in Old English and Norse poetry. Example #6 The use of language in this sonnet is more direct and less given to the compound metaphorical imagery found in kennings. "He says the highway dust is over all. The bird would cease and be as other birds but that he knows in singing not to sing." In these lines, the language of the writer particularly in phrases like, "singing not to sing." aptures a paradoxical quality that reflects on the nature of existence and the passage of time. It is a metaphorical expression that suggests the bird's song is both a celebration of summer and an elegy for its passing. It embodies the dual nature of existence in a way that is reminiscent of the layered meanings found in kennings. A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action in the manner that is not literally true but helps to explain an idea or make a comparison. Kennings are specific type of metaphor, where two words are combined to create a new compound expression. For example, in Old Norse poetry, a ship might be called a "sea-steed," where "sea" and "steed" (a term for a horse) are combined to metaphorically suggest the idea of a ship by comparing it to a horse that moves over the sea. The metaphorical and often involve compound constructions, so they sometimes overlap with the concept of synecdoche when the compound elements of a kenning refer to a part of something to represent the whole. For example, a kenning like "whale-road" for the sea uses "whale" (a creature commonly found in the sea) as a part to represent the whole expanse of the sea. This device enriches the text by adding layers of meaning and encouraging readers to make connections between the part and the whole. Examples of Kenning in Literature Read also: Literature Read al writer is already here to make your dreams come true: seize the moment! Our secret to success is... ... sequence. Firstly, we assign the appropriate writer. Secondly, he conducts the research on the required topic. Thirdly, he checks the latest general requirements on formatting and editing. Finally, the writer uses all the material and creates individual essay according to customer's needs. 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In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrāde or 'whale-road', bæþ-weġ 'bath-way' or hwæl-weġ 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrāde or 'whale-road', bæþ-weġ 'bath-way' or hwæl-weġ 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrāde or 'whale-road', bæþ-weġ 'bath-way' or hwæl-weġ 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrāde or 'whale-road', bæþ-weġ 'bath-way' or hwæl-weġ 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrāde or 'whale-road', bæþ-weġ 'bath-way' or hwæl-weġ 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrāde or 'whale-road', bæþ-weġ 'bath-way' or hwæl-weġ 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrāde or 'whale-road', bæþ-weġ 'bath-way' or hwæl-weġ 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrāde or 'whale-road', bæþ-weġ 'bath-way' or hwæl-weġ 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrāde or 'whale-road', bæþ-weġ 'bath-way' or hwæl-weġ 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic Beowulf the sea is called the hronrade or 'whale-road'. Saxon literature and Celtic literature. Kennings are especially associated with the practice of alliterature werse, where they tend to become traditional fixed formulas. A good knowledge of mythology was necessary in order to understand the kennings, which is one of the reasons why Snorri Sturluson composed the Younger Edda as a work of reference for aspiring poets. Here is an example of how important this knowledge was. It was composed by the Norwegian skald Eyvind Finnson (d. ca 990), and he compares the greed of king Harald Gråfell to the generosity of his predecessor Haakon the Good: Bárum Ullr, of alla ímunlauks, á hauka fjöllum Fyrisvalla fræ Hákonar ævi; nú hefr fólkstríðir Fróða fáglýjaðra þýja meldr í móður holdi mellu dolgs of folginn Translation in prose: Ullr, the onion of war! We carried the seeds of the Fyrisvellir on the mountains of the hawks during all of Hakon's life; now the enemy of the people has hidden the flour of Fródi's hapless slaves in the flesh of the mother of the enemy of the giantesses. Onion of war is a kenning for "sword" and names for gods were often used as base word in kennings for men and women. Ullr, the onion of war means "gold" and refers to Hrólf's men spread on the wolds (vellir) south of Gamla Uppsala fleeing the Swedish king Adils in order to make the king's men dismount and collect the gold. The mountains of the hawks is based to the knowledge that royalty often had tame falcons and hawks that they carried on their arms, and means "arms". In the second part the flour of Fródi's hapless slaves means "gold" and in order to understand the kenning, we need to know Grottisong and the legend of the Danish king Fródi. In Sweden, he bought the giantesses Fenja and Menja whom he had grind a mill that produced gold as if it were flour. The two giantesses were hapless because Fródi never let them rest and in revenge they finally produced bad luck and war until the mill broke down and Fródi's hall burnt. The flesh of the mother of the enemy of the giantesses refers to the Earth (Jörd), as she was the mother of Thor, the enemy of the Jotuns. A notable peculiarity of kenning strings by means of consecutive substitution. For example, those who are keen in kenning readily know that slaughter dew worm dance is battle, since slaughter dew is blood, blood worm is sword, and sword dance is battle and spear-din dancer. The root "ken" is still used in Scandinavian (känna) and in German (kennen) whereas its English use is restricted to Scots and the North of England. In northern Britain it is used in describing what a person knows about something or what they see, especially when seafaring. For instance, if somebody queries the happenings of the North Sea, of a lighthouse resident, the watcher would say they are kenning this or that - "D'ye ken what a kenning is?". The root was applied to the "k" rune, pronounced similarly. Modern kennings Despite the archaic connotations of the term, many kennings exist in the modern lexis: "The devil's dandruff" - cocaine. "Falling over juice" - alcohol. "The Game of Kings" - various sports, primarily tennis. "The Beautiful Game" - football. "wood-pusher" - skateboarder Kenning for death The eternal sleep The last breath The grim reaper's call The great leveller The silent passage The shadow's embrace The end of the line The dark abyss The inevitable fate The final curtain The cold touch The ultimate departure The cessation of being The final rest External links Jörmungrund: Lexicon of Kennings — The Domain of Battle