

Kenning Vocabulary Chart

A kenning is a compound word that acts as a metaphor in place of a single noun. Use this chart to keep a list of kennings that you encounter throughout *Beowulf*.

Kenning	Source Line	My Definition	My Paraphrase
meal-taking	Then, his meal-taking finished, a moan was uplifted ... (3)	eating dinner	When the night was over, Grendel's dinner of humans was finished, and the survivors began to moan.
battle-thane	the battle-thane clever Was not anywise able evils to 'scape from (4)	a wise head of the clan, who was also experienced in battle.	The warrior head of the clan, who was wise, was still not able to escape from Grendel's nightly raids.
War-king	He said he the war-king would seek o'er the ocean (4)	a king, who was a military leader	Beowulf decides to go over the ocean to help Hrothgar, the king and military leader of the clan, who was being tortured by Grendel.

Kenning	Source Line	My Definition	My Paraphrase
hearth-friends	We are sprung from the lineage of the people of Geatland, And Higela's hearth-friends (5)	friends so close that they would be invited to sit in your house, next to your fireplace.	Beowulf says that he is one of the people from Geatland, who are friends of Hrothgar's father, such good friends that they would have been invited to sit at his fireplace.
war-shields	Their wide-fashioned war-shields they weary did set then (6)	wide shields that soldiers used to protect themselves in battle.	The soldiers put down the shields they would use in battle.
table-companions	We are Higela's table-companions, and bear an important commission to your prince (6)	close friends, close enough to be invited to sit at the table and share meals	The soldiers are friends of Hrothgar's father and are there to help.
strength-famous	The strength-famous went till he stood at the shoulder (6)	someone who is famous for their strength	Beowulf, who was famous for his strength, presented himself to Hrothgar.

gift-gems	I shall give to the good one gift-gems for courage (7)	a gift of gems, such as a garnet or amethyst.	Hrothgar gives Beowulf a gift of gems to give him courage, as he goes to fight Grendel.
battle-boards, wood-spears, war- shafts	Here let your battle-boards, wood-spears and war-shafts, await your conferring (7)	weapons	Lay down your weapons, while Beowulf and Hrothgar confer.
sea-farers	Sea-farers tell us, this hall- building standeth, Excellent edifice, empty and useless (7)	sailors	Beowulf says that the sailors told him about the glorious hall that sat empty and useless.
hoard-seat	I had lately begun then to govern the Danemen, The hoard-seat of heroes held in my youth (8)	where a stash of something, usually treasure, is held.	Hrothgar tells about how the Danemen of his youth were bountiful in heroes.
war-band hall-troop	Waned is my war-band, wasted my hall-troop (8)	a group of soldiers	Hrothgar explains that Grendel has eaten and defeated his best soldiers.
ale-vessel wassailing-benches	O'er the ale-vessel promised warriors in armor They would willingly wait on the wassailing-benches (8)	a cup for beer a bench where one would drink a punch of beer flavored with fruit and spices	Over beer soldiers promised, dressed in armor, that they would wait for Grendel in the drinking hall.

folk-hall	The folk-hall was gory (8)	the community building where warriors told stories, ate, and drank beer	After Grendel visited, their community building was steeped in the blood of murdered warriors.
seven-night	In the water's possession, Ye toiled for a seven-night; he at swimming outdid thee (9)	a week	Unferth claims that Beowulf's swimming match was vain and foolish, as he stayed out in the water fighting for a week.
sea-floods	While swimming the sea- floods, sword-blade scabbard Boldly we brandished our bodies expected To shield from the sharks (9)	deep sea	While swimming in the sea, we brandished our weapons to protect ourselves from sharks.
sword-terror	Not a word hath been told me Of deeds so daring done by thee, Unferth, And of sword-terror none (10)	when a warrior brings terror to his opponent with the sword.	Beowulf says that he hasn't heard any tales of Unferth's prowess or skills as a warrior.
ether-robes	Which the second day bringeth, the sun in its ether- robes, O'er children of men shines from the southward (10)	a garment of clear skies	On the second day, after Beowulf has slain Grendel, the sun will shine in a clear sky over all the Danish children.

decorous-mooded folk-queen	Treasure-cups tendered, till time was afforded That the decorous-mooded, diademed folk-queen Then she offers the cup to Beowulf (10)	a special cup that holds ale or mead. a polite, graceful mood	The polite queen in a graceful gesture, offers the special cup to Beowulf because she is so grateful he is with the Danes.
foe's-clutches	I would work to the fullest the will of your people Or in foe's-clutches fastened fall in the battle (10)	in the grasp of one's enemies	Beowulf explains that he decided that he is determined to face Grendel, whether that means he will be victorious or die in Grendel's grasp.
chase-handled chain-sword, battle-equipments	to his henchman committed His chased-handled chain- sword, choicest of weapons, And bade him bide with his battle-equipments (11)	weaponry	Beowulf hands over his weaponry to his henchman, sealing his promise to defeat Grendel with his bare hands.
gold-hall	The wine-joyous building, brilliant with plating, Gold-hall of earthmen (12)	a golden community building where warriors drank ale and mead, while telling tales of their victories. and ale	Grendel comes upon the building where much merrymaking and wine-drinking occurs; it shines, plated with gold.

hell-spirit death-haunts	so he conquered the foeman, The hell-spirit humbled: he unhappy departed then, Reaved of his joyance, journeying to death-haunts (20).	a being from hell territory for the dead	So Beowulf defeated Grendel, a creature from hell, and separated from the joy of eating men, Grendel crossed over to death.
shield-warrior battle-knight	A mighty shield-warrior, whom she murdered at slumber, A broadly-famed battle-knight (20).	a soldier who uses a shield a knight who has fought in battle	Grendel's mother kills a brave and mighty soldier, one who is famous for his skills, while he sleeps.
gold-friend earth-joys	Gold-friend of earlmen, what erst we agreed on/Should I lay down my life in lending thee assistance/When my earth-joys were over (23).	a friend so good he could be made of gold life	Beowulf said, "Healfdene, the truest of friends, if I should die helping you, when my life is over ...
gem-giver	When he looks on the jewels, that a gem-giver found I (23).	a generous person	When my father sees these jewels that Healfdene gave me, he will know that I found a generous friend.

grim-death	I shall gain me glory, or grim-death shall take me. (23)	a particularly gruesome, bloody death	I will win this fight or face a gruesome death!
limb-mail	That she proved but powerless to pierce through the armor, The limb-mail locked (23).	armor that protects an arm or leg	Grendel's mother could not reach her claws through the armor that protected Beowulf's limbs.
sea-wolf	The sea-wolf bare then, when bottomward came she (23).	Grendel's mother, a monster who lives underwater.	Grendel's mother, a mixture of wolf and sea monster, dives to challenge Beowulf.
hero-chief	the hero-chief angry Cast then his carved-sword covered with jewels (23).	the top hero	Beowulf, who was the best of heroes, became angry and thrust out his jeweled and carved sword.