

Growing Orchard Communities

COMMUNITY ORCHARD TOOLKIT



Writing orchard kennings (Anglo Saxon Naming Riddles)

Using your orchard to inspire some poetry by Sara Hurley

What is a Kenning?

Kennings are a type of poem that traditionally has two words in a line. The word 'Kenning' shares its origin with the word - to know, or to ken. A kenning is like a riddle, it 'speaks of the thing but never names it. That is the job of the listener.

As the old classic tale of Beowulf is Anglo Saxon, there are kennings in it:

swan road - calm ocean
sky candle - the sun
slaughter dew - blood

They are popular in school and a fun way to write about each other.

Guess who?
Football player
Secret keeper
Dog liker
Comic reader

Here's one Sara wrote about an animal.

Guess what?
wise old
air glider
head turning
silent swooper
moon lit
hungry hunter



Orchards are full of things to write kennings about. From grass to fruit, plants, insects, tools or food. Here's a simple way to build one without being a poet!

- ✧ Remember the rule - two words on a line
- ✧ 'Er' endings work better than too many 'ing' endings.

Making a Kenning

This activity works well in pairs

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1. Look around the orchard and find something that attracts you. Don't worry too much about what you choose or spend too long deciding. What do you like today?
2. Collect words on note paper. Single, unconnected, odd words. Think about it from different angles -
 - ✧ what does it look like? Colours, shapes, size, texture
 - ✧ Describe it. Simple words work best, remember the obvious things - green, red, small.
 - ✧ What does it do? What actions does it have? An apple grows, snails slime, leaves shimmy.
 - ✧ How does it make you feel inside? calm, disgusted, itchy, joyful.
3. The collected words are not connected yet; you should just have some words on a piece of paper.
4. Begin to pair them.
 - ✧ Play with your words.
 - ✧ Try joining them.
 - ✧ What works well together?
 - ✧ Leave some out.
5. Do the endings need to change?
6. Decide in what order the word pairs work best? Play with it.
7. Mix up the lines.
 - ✧ Try a few different orders
 - ✧ Try a few different endings.
 - ✧ Find a rhythm and order you are happy with.



Ta da!



You have now made a kenning!

Read it, share it, write it down, decorate it, hang it in a tree for an orchard event.