

Beowulf vs Grendel

Activity 1

LO: I can evaluate an author's use of language.	What I think	My teacher thinks
<i>I can remember to:</i>		
reread the text carefully to find the kenning.	☐	
infer from context what it means.	☐	
make notes on what images the kenning makes you think about.	☐	

Kennings are compound words used to describe. They are usually joined with a hyphen. Kennings often conjure interesting images in the mind of the audience.

Identify what the kenning is describing and write down what it makes you think of. Find the kennings in the text to read them in context.

Kenning	Describes	Makes you think of...
whale-way	<i>the sea</i>	<i>It makes me think about a pod of whales going on a long journey across a stormy sea.</i>
cat-fire	<i>the fire</i>	
six-stringer	<i>the harp</i>	
dragon-slayer	<i>a warrior</i>	
salt-waves	<i>the sea</i>	
sea-garment	<i>the sail</i>	



In the hall of Hygelac, the king of the Geats, a hundred men feasted.

“Stranger!” called Hygelac.

The men near the king stopped talking and picking their teeth and swilling stone-cold mead over their gums.

Silence.

The cat-fire hissed and spat, golden-eyed tapestries winked out of the gloom. Silence. The man rose from the stranger’s seat.

“Your name?” demanded Hygelac.

“Gangleri,” said the stranger. “In your tongue: Wanderer.”

“All right, Wanderer. Sing us a story for your supper.”

Men on the mead-benches shifted their buttocks, and stretched out their legs. The gathering turned to face the Wanderer in the poet's place by the fireplace.

Wanderer stooped and scooped up six-stringer, the harp that always stood in the poet's place.

"Listen!" said Wanderer. "A story of heroes!"

Now he plucked the harp with a plectrum, "A story of monsters!"

And plucked it again, "A story of Denmark!"

King Hygelac spat into the straw at his feet, "Ugh! The old enemy."

But a young warrior, Beowulf, leaned forward. Hadn't his own father once taken refuge with the Danes? Hadn't Hrothgar, the Danish king, saved his father's skin? Hrothgar ... he sounded a good man.

In Wanderer's hands, the harp cried the stabbing cries of seabirds, and wept the salt-waves' weeping.

"I sing of the woes of Hrothgar, king of the Danes," said Wanderer.

Beowulf nodded. Hrothgar! He had known it.

"When he was a young man, Hrothgar built a glorious feasting-hall, the finest on this middle-earth. He called it Heorot. Day after day the rafters echoed with cheer of his warriors. Year after year the king rewarded his followers with gifts at the feast - arm-rings of twisted gold, brooches, buckles, belts, beaver-skin bags, can you imagine it?"

My father has stood on that hall-floor; Hrothgar gave my father treasures in Heorot: that's what Beowulf was thinking.

“But,” said Wanderer, pausing and piercing Beowulf with his eye, “there was one who could not bear the sounds coming from the hall - the laughter, the happiness or the poet’s song.”

Wanderer spun round, raised his elbows, spread out his cloak, and pointed at his monstrous shadow on the wall, the shadow reaching right above the gables.

“Grendel!” growled Wanderer. “Grendel is his name.”

The name sent a chill down the spine of every warrior there.

“No one knows where he lives. He wanders the countryside. He is the father of every evil being - monsters and dark elves and spiteful spirits,” Wanderer slowly turned back to face his audience. “One night Grendel came to Heorot. That monster barged in and broke the necks of thirty thanes. Thirty! He carried them out into the night and away to his lair.”

Beowulf crouched on the edge of a bench, intent, almost angry.

“He was back next day,” continued Wanderer. “And after that the Danes learned their lesson. Those who had escaped his clutches stowed themselves into dark crannies and corners in the outbuildings. The great hall Heorot stood deserted after nightfall.”

King Hygelac shook his head and breathed deeply.

“For twelve years now Grendel has terrorized the Danes. Men and women and children, old and young, they all live under the dark death shadow. He is so strong, so huge, so terrible, that no one is able to do anything about it.”

“I will then!” Beowulf leaped up in front of the Geats and heard himself shouting, “I will then!”

Wanderer’s eye gleamed. He watched the warrior, unblinking, and spurred him on.

“All right, Beowulf,” called the king. “Go to Denmark and prove your might!”

There were cheers in Hygelac’s hall. The mead-horn passed from man to man, and each of them toasted Beowulf.



The next morning Beowulf chose fourteen keen and well-tempered men to travel with him to Denmark.

The stronghold of the Geats rang with the blows of black smiths as armour was made ready and a boat was fitted out for the sea-voyage.

On the third day, there were kisses and embraces on the windswept beach; some said they feared that Beowulf and his companions would never return, some wept, some said nothing.

But the warriors were eager to begin their journey. They turned their backs on mothers and fathers, on wives and children, and pushed off with fourteen oars.

The great sea-bird rode over the breakers. And as soon as the Geats hoisted a sail, a bleached sea-garment, the boat foamed at the prow and surged over the waves, urged on by the wind.



After that day and night, the warriors sighted shining cliffs, steep headlands - the shores of Denmark.

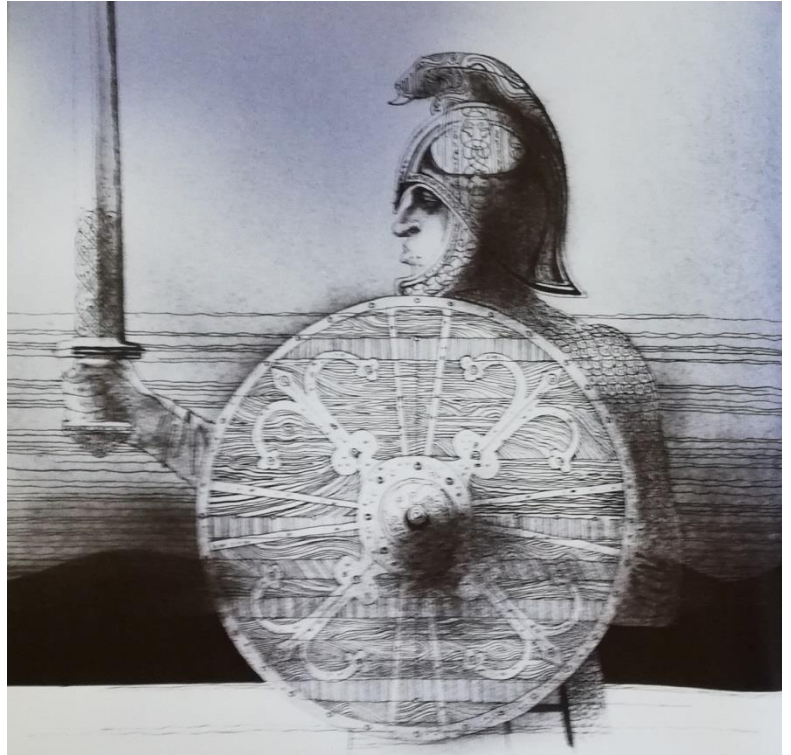
A Danish coastguard stood on a cliff-top. He watched the boat beat across the black-and-dazzling field of water, and heard it beach screaming on the shingle.

When he saw men carrying flashing shields and gleaming war-gear down the gangway, he leaped on his horse, and brandishing a spear, galloped down to the water's edge.

“Warriors!” he shouted.
“Who are you? Where do you come from?”

Beowulf held up his right hand like a flag. “Peace!”

“Your names!” demanded the coastguard. “What are you doing here? Before you step one foot further into Denmark.”



“Friends of the Danes!” called Beowulf. “We’ve heard that Grendel has laid his hand on the Danes.”

“No man can stand against him,” said the coastguard.

“That is why we’ve come,” said Beowulf. “I’m here to pit myself - against this monster. I mean to put an end to Grendel?”

Then, the coastguard welcomed Beowulf and his companions, undertook to watch over their boat, and set them on the paved road that led to Heorot.

The Danes told Beowulf and his band to leave all their weapons against one wall: linden shields inlaid with gold, coats of mail, a grey tipped forest of ash-spears. Then they led the Geats into Heorot.