



Activity 8 Biodiversity kennings

Kennings poems encourage close observation of the natural world and development of vivid language. Pupils use them to record their experiences and understanding and share this as a group.

Curriculum area(s)	Resources needed	Preparatory activity
<p>Literacy and English Listening and talking; writing.</p> <p>Science Planet Earth – biodiversity and interdependence.</p>	<p>Any outdoor space Preferably with as many natural elements as possible.</p> <p>Biodiversity resources e.g. wildlife images or objects.</p> <p>Materials Clipboard, paper, pencil; or chalk, per pair; mat to sit on.</p>	<p>'Knowing' Introduce the concept of 'kennings' and read examples to your class. Kenning means 'knowing'. Old English and Norse poetry used kennings to name something without using its name – for example a cat becomes 'mouse catcher', a sword is a 'skull-splitter' or a person becomes known as 'hairy breeks'. See the RSPB literacy resources below and the 'hedgerow kennings' sheets, with their worksheet example for a <i>Blackbird</i> kenning.</p>

Main activity description

Biodiversity Kennings

First write a kenning together as a class, before attempting the individual/paired work. Collect natural objects like pine cones, shells and stones to touch and handle, or use examples of Scottish wildlife in your biodiversity pack.

Choose one subject

Discuss their special characteristics and how they live. Ask the pupils to describe what the object or creature does, its shape, colour, how it moves, what noises it makes, where it lives, etc. Create a series of two word pairs to describe it, e.g. 'cone chewer/tree scrambler' (red squirrel).

From this inventory of words, create a class 'kennings'. Then provide children with clipboard, paper and pencils. Ask them to work in pairs outside, using their senses and close observation. They should choose to focus on one subject – for example a tree, a flower, puddles on the tarmac, tadpoles in a pond. Avoid letting others see what each pair is looking at!

By each subject, pupils should shut their eyes and listen – what can they hear? Carefully use the senses of touch and smell. Look at each chosen object closely – a cardboard tube or hand held lens can add extra focus.

How does it move and sound? Where does it live? How does it make you feel? Each person in a pair takes turns to explore and describe, while the other records the words used. Each pair can then use their collected words to help them develop their own kennings on their chosen subject.

Kennings can be shared with the whole group. Can the group guess what each pair is describing in their kennings?



Extension activities

Compare kennings on the same subject written by different people to compare and extend vocabulary as a group.

See *A sense of place vertical poem* available at the LTS outdoor learning website www.ltscotland.org.uk/outdoorlearning under School/centre grounds – resources – landscape activities.

Sources & further inspiration

RSPB Teaching resources – the section on literacy under teaching resources www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork

Ideas for working with pupils on different poetry styles www.primaryresources.co.uk under fiction resources in the 'English' subsection.

Celebrating Nature by Gordon MacLellan. Search under Gordon's books' in www.creepingtoad.org.uk

