

Kennings

A National Poetry Day
resource from James Carter

Key Stage 1-2

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kennings

from James Carter

Sun Kenning

We thank you, Sun
for all you've done

You're always such an . . .

early - riser
life - inspirer
moon - eclipser
summer - sizzler
winter - ender
lolly - melter
shadow - maker
dehydrator
earth - creator
nothing - greater

Brilliant
that's what you are -
we call you 'sun'
but you're a S T A R !

James Carter

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www.jamescarterpoet.co.uk

Most recent KS1 poetry titles – *Zim Zam Zoom*
(Otter-Barry Books) and *Once Upon a Big Idea –
the story of inventions* (Little Tiger Press)



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WHAT IS IT?

kennings are great for reading, writing and even performing. But what is a kenning? It's simple - it's just two words, often nouns, brought together - and in doing so they give something a new image or meaning. Most often the second word ends in the -er sound. What kenning are you right now? A 'word - reader'! The Vikings invented kennings over a thousand years ago, and their kenning for a sword was 'skull - splitter'!

READ IT

Read through 'Sun Kenning'. Notice how this poem both begins and ends with a short rhyme then in the middle it has a whole list of sun-themed kennings. Do you have any favourite lines in this poem? Or can you think of other kennings for the sun?

THINK ABOUT IT

The theme for this year's National Poetry Day is THE ENVIRONMENT, and that means us thinking about and taking better care of the earth. What environment-based topic could you choose? Trees? Rivers? Forests? The seas? Water? The sky? Or even the earth itself?



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WRITE IT

Let's start with a tree. Below is a short opening rhyme then two kennings, 'air-giver' and 'fruit bringer'. Now add your own kennings. Make a list of all the many things a tree does – such as grow / give shade / drop leaves / get taller / builds forests / dances in the wind and so on. But there are many, many other things as well. Okay. Let's change 'drops leaves' into 'leaf - dropper' and 'dances in the wind' to 'wind - dancer'. Try and make as many tree kennings as you can, and also think of a little rhyme to finish your poem off with. If you prefer, you could do a kenning about the earth, the sea, a forest, a river and so on. Whatever topic you do, your kenning poem would be great in an assembly or put up in a display or could be included in a class poetry anthology.

Tree Kenning

We thank you, Tree
for all you've done
you're always such an . . .

air - giver
fruit - bringer



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PERFORM IT

Read through the poem 'Sun Kenning' quietly and slowly in your head. Now read it again, but out loud this time, and still really slowly. If you can, it's always best to learn a poem off by heart. This can be tricky, but the more you practice the easier it becomes. Once you know a poem, your performance will be even better! You could perform this by yourself. Or you could do the poem in pairs or groups, reciting different verses and lines each. You could take individual lines until the last rhyming verse in which half the class loudly whispers 'Brilliant – that's what you are' and then pause – before everyone comes together for the 'we call you sun/but you're a S T A R!'.

Try some actions too, but not too many - or you will be thinking about what your hands are doing rather than how the words are sounding! Even if one person is saying a specific line, everyone else can be doing an action related to it.

Try performing the kennings you've written yourselves too!

A top tip for performing any poem to an audience is '**DOUBLE THE VOLUME, HALF THE SPEED!**' - and what this tells us is to be **L O U D** but also to go as **S L O W** as you can. Enjoy!



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We Are Lewisham Creative Challenge KS2

A National Poetry Day resource by the teachers and children of Dalmain Primary School, from creative workshops with Francesca Beard and support from National Poetry Day.

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Swan

The tickle of soft waves
strokes my white feathers
as I swing my feet back and forth,
the force of water
pressing against them.

The sound of my bevy
quietly calling.

The sound of human children
laughing on the bank in excitement.

Cool grass on my feet
and another sound;
a fox ever cornering.

© Iman Begum

Read Swan out loud and talk about it together.

- How does it make you feel?
- Is there anything surprising about the Swan's experience?
- What do you think the fox's poem might be like?

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Go outdoors into nature, with pen and paper. Spend some time as poetry detectives.

Choose something from nature that you see.

Look closely and finish the sentence stems – 'I see / I notice / I wonder'.

Now imagine that you are the natural thing that you have seen (like in the swan poem).

Include in the poem everything that you can see / hear / feel / smell / taste.

Alternatively, try writing a praise poem for an aspect of nature. This [Zulu women's praise poem](#) is a good example of this.

Write a list of things that you feel proud of in yourself. Or compare yourself to something in nature. Are you tall and enduring like a tree or obstinate and determined like a donkey? How could you write about an aspect of nature in this way?



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Night Music

I saw sounds at night
altering the shapes of trees

tickling shadows
dancing on an owl's tongue,

I saw sounds skipping
from door to door,

rattling the letterbox,
slipping into dreams,

I saw a gentle drumbeat
chase a prancing fox,

amongst a tiny applause
of closing flowers.

Copyright © by **Alex Wharton**
from *Daydreams and Jellybeans* by Alex Wharton,
illustrated by Katy Riddell (Firefly Press, 2021)

Poems can make sense in unusual ways.

Read 'Night Music' by Alex Wharton and talk about it together.

- Do any of the descriptions of the sounds surprise you?
- What do you think is meant by sounds altering the shapes of trees?
- What do you think about the image of sounds dancing on an owl's tongue?
- How can sounds slip into dreams? (remember there is no wrong answer here).

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Look at some images of nature and brainstorm what sounds there might be and what effect they might have.

Now think about some less obvious verbs to describe the movement of the sounds e.g thunder 'punching'.

You could write a poem now using the refrain: I saw sounds.

Or you can take it in a different direction:

- Think about the change you want to see for the environment.
- What do we mean by change?
- Who has the power to change things, and how would you speak to them?
- What sort of language would you use?

Together list some ideas of who or what you want to change things for. For example, you might want to change things for the trees being cut down/for a species on the verge of extinction/for your grandchildren.

Now write a poem, using this structure:

I speak the language of... to the...

example: *I speak the language of the forests to the politicians
who are felling them*



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Decimation

They're cutting down the trees.

And all I can hear
above the machines
is a voice
screaming
Hurt not the trees!

Hard to believe the girl up there,
held high by branches,
is real.

Her hair flies in bunches and
she's waving a flag
that she's made of her clothes.
Half-naked she stands
astride the world,
in her bra and ripped jeans,
in the rain,
certain she'll stop the bulldozers,
the saws,
that grate and grind,

salivating, mechanical wolves,
teeth bared
and tearing at air.

I dream of doing
something incredible.
I dream of daring to do the impossible
sometime,
soon,
before it's too late.

from *Activist* by Louisa Reid (Guppy Books, 2022)
© **Louisa Reid**

Poetry can be a powerful tool for protest.

Read 'Decimation' by Louisa Reid out loud
and talk about it together.

- What is the mood of this poem and why?
- Who has the power in this poem?
- Does the writer make you want to do something about the trees?

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February

The number of amphibians are in decline, they have suffered from an increase in disease and a lack of habitat as we build and bulldoze.

Soft pond jewels are forming
in sunlit forest eyes
and garden pools.

Expectation and hope
balled-up in clear jelly.
Frog baby crèche.

When the frogs were plenty
and the spawn everywhere
we'd jar-scoop them.
Handlebar dangle them
to the old fish tanks stored
on our balconies.

We'd watch the full stop grow
on an unwritten sentence,
would our hopes hop?

It is now too dangerous
to take frogs home.
We've diminished their numbers,
filled in their forest eyes.
Denied our childhood hopes.

from *A Year of Nature Poems* by Joseph Coelho,
illustrated by Kelly Louise Judd (Wide Eyed Editions,
2020)

© **Joseph Coelho**

Now read 'February', by Joseph Coelho.

- How is the mood different about the impact of bulldozing nature?
- What emotions does he conjure up in this poem?
- Does it make you want to act?

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Brainstorm some ideas in groups about anything you want to protest to do with the environment – it could be about clean air, global warming, or something very particular in your local area.

Write down some things that connect you personally with the issue you have chosen e.g. your brother has asthma and struggles with the pollution

Think how you will use your poem to protest. It could be spoken word, or a short poem for a placard. You could write a poem letter to someone in a position of power.

You could use a strident voice, like in 'Decimation', starting with a bold statement like 'they are choking up our streets' or the nostalgic tones of 'February' – remember how people used to revel in the sun but many felt fear this summer during the heatwave. Or try using repetition, writing a list poem where each line begins in the same way, like the beginning of ['I Never Asked for Another City' by Dean Atta](#).

Further reading: this [collection of poems of protest from the Poetry Foundation](#) may inspire you with how different writers have tackled a range of issues.



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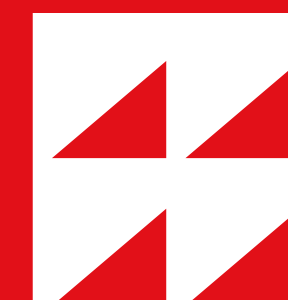
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