

# CELEBRATIONS

## Kwanzaa

### Teacher's notes

**Age:** Adults and young adults

**Level:** Upper-intermediate–Advanced (B2–C1)

**Time:** 60–90 minutes

**Activity:** In this lesson, students will:

1. Read an article about Kwanzaa;
2. Learn about the celebration of Kwanzaa, its principles and symbols;
3. Discuss activities that take place between 26 December and 1 January;
4. Watch a short video and answer questions about Kwanzaa.

**Language focus:** vocabulary related to Kwanzaa and African American culture

**Materials:** one copy of the worksheet per student; access to the internet

### Procedure

#### 1. Warmer

Students answer the questions, depending on whether or not they have any prior knowledge of Kwanzaa. This can be done in pairs, groups or as a whole class. They should then read the article and see if it reflects their prior knowledge or guesses.

#### 2. Key words

Students first look at the key words in the box then highlight them in the article. Next, they should write the correct key word next to its definition, while noticing how the words are used in context.

**Note:** The definitions are in the order that the words appear in the article.

#### Key:

- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. principles    | 6. collective    |
| 2. contemplative | 7. righteousness |
| 3. pledge        | 8. heritage      |
| 4. position      | 9. unity         |
| 5. alienated     |                  |

#### 3. Understanding the article

Students read the statements and decide whether they are true or false according to the information in the article. Working in pairs, they should correct the false statements.

#### Key:

1. False. Kwanzaa is the name of a cultural (non-religious) celebration mostly celebrated in the USA.
2. False. It is mostly celebrated by black Americans, but the events and celebrations are open to anyone who would like to join in.
3. True.
4. False. Kwanzaa was created just over 50 years ago by Maulana Karenga.
5. True.
6. False. Kwanza (with six letters) is part of a Swahili phrase, *matunda ya kwanza*, which means *first fruits* (of the harvest).

#### 4. The symbols of Kwanzaa

Students read and then match the names and descriptions of the seven main symbols associated with Kwanzaa. They should then write the names in the appropriate places to correctly identify the objects in the photo.

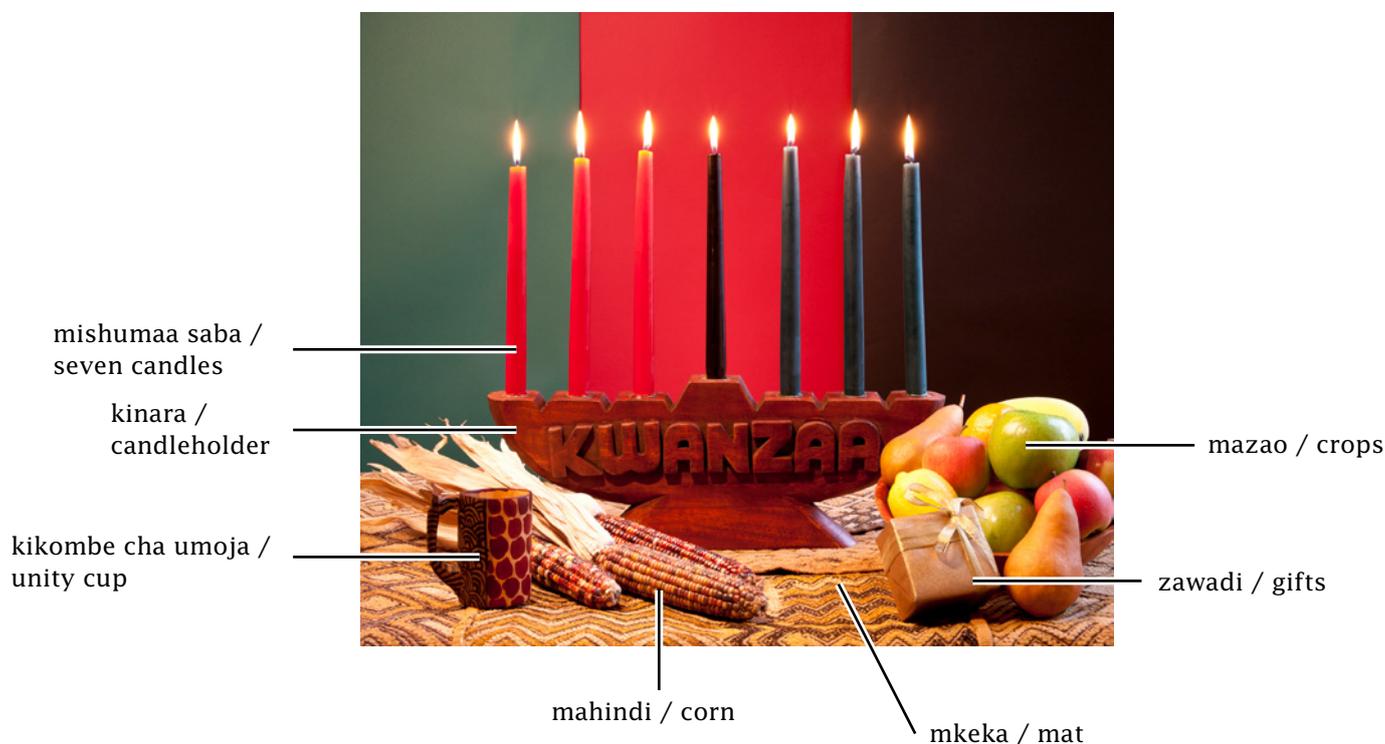
#### Key:

1. e
2. b
3. f
4. a
5. g
6. c
7. d

# CELEBRATIONS

## Kwanzaa

Teacher's notes



### 5. Video and online research

- Students watch the short informative video about Kwanzaa. After watching, they should discuss the questions as a whole class.
- Students use the internet to research the Kwanzaa events held each year at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

### 6. Discussion

In pairs, students discuss the questions. Feedback as a whole class, focussing on any interesting answers given. Similar festivals include Thanksgiving (celebrated in the USA), the New Yam Festival (celebrated in Ghana and Nigeria) and the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

# CELEBRATIONS

## Kwanzaa

### Worksheet

#### 1. Warmer

**Have you ever heard of Kwanzaa?**

**If yes:**

- **What do you know about it?**
- **Do you know anyone who celebrates it?**
- **Have you ever been to a Kwanzaa celebration?**



**If no:**

**Looking at the picture above, what do you think might happen at Kwanzaa?**

**Now read the article. Does this match up with what you know/guessed about Kwanzaa?**

# CELEBRATIONS

## Kwanzaa

### Worksheet



Kwanzaa is quite a new celebration of community, family and culture that was established in 1966 to encourage and help African Americans to connect with their African roots and heritage. It is celebrated from 26 December to 1 January each year. It was created in the USA by Maulana Karenga, as a way to bring African Americans together and celebrate African culture.

The name of this seven-day festival comes from a Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza* which means *first fruits of the harvest*. Karenga added a second 'a' to the last word so that the new festival name would contain seven letters: *Kwanzaa*.

The number seven is important to Kwanzaa. It has seven principles and seven symbols. One of these symbols is the *kinara* (candleholder) which holds seven candles in the colours of the pan-African flag. One candle in the kinara is lit on each of the seven days of Kwanzaa, starting with the black centre candle and moving outwards. The colours of the candles and the Kwanzaa flag, the *bendera*, are black for the people, red for fire and struggle, and green for the earth.

The seven days and seven candles of Kwanzaa represent:

- Unity (*umoja*) – unity of family, community, nation and race
- Self-determination (*kujichagulia*) – being responsible for ourselves
- Collective work and responsibility (*ujima*) – working to help each other and the community
- Cooperative economics (*ujamaa*) – working to build and maintain community shops and businesses
- Purpose (*nia*) – remembering and restoring African American cultures, customs and history
- Creativity (*kuumba*) – using imagination to create better communities
- Faith (*imani*) – believing in people, families, leaders and teachers

Kwanzaa is a contemplative, meditative but also joyful celebration that includes African drumming and dancing, pledges, readings and discussions. Many people who celebrate Kwanzaa wear clothes made of brightly coloured traditional fabrics and decorate their houses with cultural objects. On the sixth day of Kwanzaa, 31 December, a traditional African feast (*karamu*) is held.

At first, Karenga meant Kwanzaa to be an alternative to Christmas, but he changed his position a few years later as the celebration gained popularity so that practising Christians could celebrate their African heritage and not feel alienated. These days, many African American families celebrate Kwanzaa as well as Christmas.

Although Kwanzaa originated and is popular in the USA, it is also celebrated in other countries, particularly those where there are many people of African descent. It is neither religious nor political. People of all backgrounds are welcomed to join in with Kwanzaa celebrations – if not necessarily in people's homes then at the more public celebrations such as the one held annually at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

# CELEBRATIONS

## Kwanzaa

### 2. Key words

Find and underline the words from the box below in the article.

alienated	heritage	collective	contemplative	unity
pledge	position	principles	righteousness	

Now match the words in the box above to the definitions below.

1. basic rules or beliefs about what is right and morally good, that influence the way a person behaves and the way they treat other people \_\_\_\_\_
2. spending a lot of time thinking very carefully about something \_\_\_\_\_
3. serious promises that you make publicly, stating that you will do something \_\_\_\_\_
4. an opinion about an important issue \_\_\_\_\_
5. feeling that you do not belong in a particular society, place or group \_\_\_\_\_
6. involving all the members of a group \_\_\_\_\_
7. the quality of being morally good or correct, especially according to the standards set by religion \_\_\_\_\_
8. the art, buildings, traditions and beliefs that a society considers important to its history and culture \_\_\_\_\_
9. a situation in which people, groups or countries come together or agree about something \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Understanding the article

Decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the information in the article. Correct any that are false.

1. Kwanzaa is the name of a religious festival that takes place in most of Africa. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Kwanzaa is celebrated solely by African Americans in the USA. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The celebration of Kwanzaa includes elements of dress, light, gifts and decoration. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Kwanzaa was created in the 1960s by Dr Martin Luther King. \_\_\_\_\_
5. At first, Kwanzaa was not accepted by Christian African Americans as it was said to be an alternative to Christmas. \_\_\_\_\_
6. *Kwanzaa* is the Swahili word for harvest. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Kwanzaa

### Worksheet

#### 4. The symbols of Kwanzaa

**Kwanzaa has seven celebratory symbols which represent the values and concepts of African culture. These symbols are often placed on a Kwanzaa table in the home.**

**Match the Swahili and English names of each symbol (1-7) to the descriptions (a-g).**

- |                                  |                                  |                   |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. mkeka / mat                   | 4. kinara / candleholder         | 7. zawadi / gifts |
| 2. kikombe cha umoja / unity cup | 5. mishumaa saba / seven candles |                   |
| 3. mazao / crops                 | 6. mahindi / corn                |                   |

- a. It represents the seven days and principles of Kwanzaa. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. This is filled with water, fruit juice or wine. It represents togetherness. All family or community members drink from this. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Each child in the family is represented by one ear of this crop. If there are no children in the family, then one ear is used to represent all the children in the community. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. These are given especially to children during Kwanzaa. These should be handmade to avoid any unnecessary expenditure. They are given on 1 January. \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Made of fabric, raffia or paper. The other symbols are placed on it. It symbolizes the foundation on which other things are built. \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Fruit and vegetables from the harvest. These symbolize work. \_\_\_\_\_
- g. These are placed in the kinara. One is black, three are red and three are green to represent the colours of the pan-African flag. \_\_\_\_\_

**Now write the words from the box above next to their correct item in the image below.**



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# CELEBRATIONS

## Kwanzaa

### 5. Video and online research

**a. Watch this short video.**

*The Story of Kwanzaa: From Civil Rights to Corporate America* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aEbpFb1HZY>

**How many points from the article are mentioned and shown in the video? What else does the video tell you about Kwanzaa?**

**b. Find out more about the Kwanzaa events held annually at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Would you be interested in going to this year's event? Why / Why not?**

### 6. Discussion

**How do you usually spend the time between 26 December and 1 January (Christmas and New Year)? Are there any special days, celebrations or traditions that you follow during this time? What other celebrations do you know of that are similar to Kwanzaa?**