

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?

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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.

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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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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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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?