



Kwanzaa

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 (*umoya*) – 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.

1. Key Words

Find the words below in the text and match them to their definitions.

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| 1. alienated | ● 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. heritage | ● spending a lot of time thinking very carefully about something |
| 3. collective | ● serious promises that you make publicly, stating that you will do something |
| 4. contemplative | ● an opinion about an important issue |
| 5. unity | ● feeling that you do not belong in a particular society, place or group |
| 6. pledge | ● involving all the members of a group |
| 7. position | ● the quality of being morally good or correct, especially according to the standards set by religion |
| 8. principles | ● the art, buildings, traditions and beliefs that a society considers important to its history and culture |
| 9. righteousness | ● a situation in which people, groups or countries come together or agree about something |

2. 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.

3. 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 the descriptions of each symbol to their Swahili and English names.

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|--|---------------------------------|
| a. It represents the seven days and principles of Kwanzaa. | ● mkeka / mat |
| b. This is filled with water, fruit juice or wine. It represents togetherness. All family or community members drink from this. | ● kikombe cha umoja / unity cup |
| 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. | ● mazao / crops |
| d. These are given especially to children during Kwanzaa. These should be handmade to avoid any unnecessary expenditure. They are given on 1 January. | ● kinara / candleholder |
| e. Made of fabric, raffia or paper. The other symbols are placed on it. It symbolizes the foundation on which other things are built | ● mishumaa saba / seven candles |
| f. Fruit and vegetables from the harvest. These symbolize work | ● mahindi / corn |
| 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. | ● zawadi / gifts |

Now write the names of each symbol next to their correct item in the image below.



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