What Is Kwanzaa?

DC CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND

Kwanzaa, a holiday (or Holy Day) based upon the African tradition of celebrating the harvesting of the first fruits, was created and introduced for Black People in the United States by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966.

Kwanzaa is the ingathering of the people, a special reverence for the Creator and creation, a commemoration of the past, a recommitment to our highest ideals, and a celebration of all that is good. It is a time of reflecting, reassessing, recommitting, rewarding, and rejoicing in an atmosphere of peace, love and unity. Kwanzaa is a cultural and political expression to reaffirm our African Heritage and organize our people for the struggle of total Black Liberation.

Kwanzaa is celebrated for seven days: December 26th through January 1st. The seven days are based upon the Nguzo Saba (The Seven Principles), with each day being symbolic of one of the principles.

THE SEVEN DAYS

DEC 26	**Umoja** Unity	DEC 30	**Nia** Purpose
DEC 27	**Kujichagulia** Self-Determination	DEC 31	**Kuumba** Creativity
DEC 28	**Ujima** Collective Work & Responsibility	JAN 1	**Imani** Faith
DEC 29	**Ujamaa** Cooperative Economics		

THE SEVEN SYMBOLS OF KWANZAA

Mkeka (Straw Mat) – tradition and history; the foundation on which all else rests

Kinara (Candle Holder) – original stalk from which we come; our African ancestors

Mishumaa Saba (7 Candles) – Nguzo Saba; The Seven Principles firmly rooted in the traditions of our ancestors

Muhindi (Ears of Corn) – represents children and all the hopes and challenges attached to them

Kikombe cha Umoja (Unity Cup)

Mazao (Crops) – the collective fruits of our labor; seeds sown by the children

Zawadi (Gifts) – rewards for our achievements

What to do & when

DECEMBER 19TH

Gather and arrange Kwanzaa symbols. Any other decorations (African carvings, straw baskets) should be in a red, black and green color scheme, symbolizing the *bendera ya taifa* (Flag of the Black Nation):

Red
the blood of our people

Black
the collective color of all Black people

Green
land, Mother Africa, life and our future (we build together)

Arrange the symbols on a low table as follows:

1. Spread the Mkeka.
2. Place the Kinara in the center of the Mkeka.
3. Place the Muhindi on either side of the Kinara, one ear of corn for each child, or one as a symbol of prosperity.
4. Creatively place the Zawadi, Kikombe, and a basket of Mazao on the Mkeka.
5. Place 1 Black Mishumaa in the center of the Kinara, with 3 Green on the right, and 3 Red on the left.

DECEMBER 26TH – JANUARY 1ST

Greeting – greet each other in Kiswahili asking "Habari Gani?" (What's the news or what's happening?) Answer with the principle for that day. For example, on December 26th, respond with "Umoja."

> **Economic Empowerment** – only shop at Black-owned businesses during the seven days of Kwanzaa. In the spirit of Kwanzaa and Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) we as African people should support these same Black businesses, such as trade in the African marketplace in the calendar, all year round.

Fasting – fast from sunrise to sunset to help cleanse the body, discipline the mind, and uplift the spirit.

Libation (Ancestral Communion) – an elder or leader should pour libation, using water or juice, from the Kikombe into a bowl or potted plant, to honor our ancestors.

Candle Lighting Ceremony – light one Mishumaa each day for the principle of that day, beginning with the black candle, which represents the first principle Umoja. Each day thereafter, alternately light the red and green candles. After each lighting, discuss the principle of the day. The ceremony should be held at a time when all family members, especially children, can participate.

Karamu (The Feast) – the Karamu is held on the night of December 31st, and should be a festive occasion. When possible, observe traditional African practices, e.g., African music, dance and storytelling, sitting on the floor or on pillows, and eating with the hands (no utensils). Libation, Candlelighting and Harambee are conducted at the Karamu.

Gifts & principles

Zawadi (Gift) – (They should not be mandatory, expensive or excessive). It is suggested that Zawadi be given to the children in one or two ways:

1. One gift each day, reinforcing the principle of that day.
2. One or more gifts on January 1st, the last day of Kwanzaa.

Personally made gifts are strongly encouraged over commercial purchases. Regardless of what else is given, there are two strongly suggested items: a book and heritage symbol. These two items reinforce our commitment to education and the richness of our cultural heritage.

> The essence of Kwanzaa is a true appreciation of ourselves as Black People, collectively coming together to reflect on and enjoy the infinite beauty of being in the same family, organization, and community, sharing the same values, interests and aspirations, engaging in and committing to the same struggle.

NGUZO SABA · THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

1. **UMOJA (Unity)**
   To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.
2. **KUJICHAGULIA (Self-Determination)**
   To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves instead of being defined and spoken for by others.
3. **UJIMA (Collective Work and Responsibility)**
   To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and solve them together.
4. **UJAMAA (Cooperative Economics)**
   To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and profit from them together.
5. **NIA (Purpose)**
   To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
6. **KUUMBA (Creativity)**
   To do always as much as we can, in the way that we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.
7. **IMANI (Faith)**
   To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.