



Kwanzaa

**READING: Kwanzaa**

Kwanzaa is a relatively new holiday which celebrates African American people, their culture, and their history. It is a seven day festival that begins on December 26 and lasts until January 1.

The holiday of Kwanzaa was created by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966 during the civil rights movement in the United States. This was a time of great struggle for black Americans. Dr. Karenga wanted to create a celebration that would bring African Americans together by recognizing their black culture.

Karenga used the harvest festivals of Africa as a model for his new holiday. Over the centuries, Africans have gathered to celebrate their crops and harvests as a time of thanksgiving and remembrance. Karenga named his holiday, Kwanzaa, which means “first fruits” (kwanza) in the African language of Swahili. However, Dr. Karenga added an extra “a” to the spelling so the word would have seven letters. This would correspond with the seven guiding principles or beliefs of the festival. Dr. Karenga based his seven principles of Kwanzaa on the traditional African values and characteristics of the ancient harvest festivals. The seven principles of Kwanzaa, called the Nguzo Saba, are unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

Each evening of the seven day festival a family member lights a candle in a special candleholder and discusses one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa. On the evening of December 31, family and friends get together to enjoy a large feast. The last day of Kwanzaa, January 1, is a time of gift giving.

The traditional colors of Kwanzaa are black, red, and green, which are the colors of the African flag. Black represents the people, red is their struggle, and green symbolizes hope for the future.

Since its beginning in 1966, Kwanzaa has gained wide recognition and is now celebrated by more than 18 million people worldwide. The holiday is celebrated in homes, churches, mosques, community centers, schools, and places of work. Africans and African-Americans of all religions celebrate Kwanzaa.

**READING COMPREHENSION**

A. Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner. Then write the answers in the spaces below.

1. When was the holiday of Kwanzaa created? _____

2. Why did Dr. Karenga want to create a new holiday? _____

3. What is Kwanzaa and when is it celebrated? _____

4. How did Dr. Karenga choose the name for his new holiday? _____

5. Why did he change the spelling of the Swahili word? _____

6. What does Nguzo Saba mean? _____

7. What did Dr. Karenga use as a model for his new holiday? _____

8. What happens each evening of the seven day festival? _____

9. Is the celebration of Kwanzaa associated with any particular religion? _____

10. How many people around the world celebrate Kwanzaa? _____

**VOCABULARY REVIEW****A. Match the words on the left with the correct meaning on the right.**

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| _____ 1. create | a) from long ago; old |
| _____ 2. struggle | b) state of being together or one |
| _____ 3. recognize | c) religious building in which Moslems pray |
| _____ 4. harvest | d) make something new |
| _____ 5. gather | e) 100 years |
| _____ 6. century | f) a very large meal |
| _____ 7. crops | g) belief; religion |
| _____ 8. correspond | h) basic rule |
| _____ 9. guide | i) cutting and gathering grain, fruit, vegetables |
| _____ 10. principle | j) of a group or society working together |
| _____ 11. ancient | k) come together |
| _____ 12. collective | l) be similar to or the same as |
| _____ 13. feast | m) agricultural produce; grains, fruits, vegetables |
| _____ 14. unity | n) know; be willing to accept |
| _____ 15. mosque | o) lead or show the way; influence |
| _____ 16. faith | p) fight |

B. Choose the correct word from the left column above to complete the following sentences.

1. Thanksgiving is a holiday that is celebrated in United States and Canada around the time of the autumn _____.

2. When the army killed the president and took control, no country wanted to _____ the new government.

**B. continued**

3. The farmers are worried that this terrible storm will destroy their _____.
4. The multicultural celebration will include music and dancing and a huge _____
with foods from all the different countries.
5. They are planning a vacation to Egypt to see the _____ pyramids.
6. He never does what he promises. His actions do not _____ to his words.
7. They live on a _____ farm where some people have different jobs but everyone has
an equal amount of work to do.
8. Parents cannot force their children to choose the right path in life, but they can _____
them in the right direction.
9. All Mr. Baxter's children and grandchildren from across the country are planning to
_____ in one place to celebrate his 85th birthday.
10. After a very long _____ with government officials, they finally were given their
freedom.
11. Do you think people will take vacations to outer space in the 21st _____?
12. He is a very religious man. He goes to the _____ to pray everyday.

**PAIR WORK: Sharing Information (Student A)**

Directions: You and your partner each have a short reading passage about the symbols of Kwanzaa. Read your passage and then share your information with your partner. Then complete the following questions together.

Symbols of Kwanzaa

Just as there are seven basic principles of Kwanzaa and seven days of celebration, there are also seven important symbols used in the festival.

1. The Mat (Mkeka in Swahili)

A woven mat of straw or fabric is placed on a table that has been covered with a beautiful piece of African cloth. All the other symbols are placed on the mat or right beside it because the mat symbolizes the foundation of the African tradition, culture, and history.

2. The Candle Holder (Kinara in Swahili)

The candle holder, which is placed on the mat, represents the African ancestors. It holds seven candles.

3. The Seven Candles (Mishumaa Saba in Swahili)

The seven candles represent the seven principles of Kwanzaa. There is one black candle, three red, and three green. The black candle represents the first principle, unity, and it is placed in the center of the candle holder. The red candles represent the principles of self-determination, co-operative economics, and creativity. The red candles are placed to the left of the black candle. The green candles represent collective work and responsibility, purpose, and faith. They are placed to the right of the black candle. Each day of the holiday one candle is lit to represent one principle.

**PAIR WORK: Sharing Information (Student B)**

Directions: You and your partner each have a short reading passage about the symbols of Kwanzaa. Read your passage and then share your information with your partner. Then complete the following questions together.

Symbols of Kwanzaa

Just as there are seven basic principles of Kwanzaa and seven days of celebration, there are also seven important symbols used in the festival.

4. The Crops (Mazao in Swahili)

A fruit basket is placed on the straw mat to symbolize the African harvest celebrations and to honor the work of the people who grew the crops. Bananas, peaches, oranges, mangoes, or any other family favorites can be included in the basket.

5. The Corn (Muhindi in Swahili)

The corn is used to represent the children and the future of the family. One ear of corn for each child in the family is placed on the mat. However, even if the family has no children, one ear is still placed on the mat to represent the children of the community. This symbol is also used to show respect for the Native Americans who grew corn and contributed to the culture of the African Americans.

6. The Unity Cup (Kikombe cha Umoja in Swahili)

The unity cup represents the principle of family and community unity. It is filled with water, wine, or juice. First, a little is poured out to honor the ancestors and then the cup is passed around to family and friends. Each person takes a sip from the cup.

7. The Gifts (Zawadi in Swahili)

Gifts are given to children on the last day of Kwanzaa to represent the love and commitment of parents. The gifts usually include educational items such as African art objects or books about African culture and life. Many gifts are home-made rather than store-bought to emphasize the principle of creativity.

**Pair Work: Question Sheet – The Symbols of Kwanzaa**

Directions: Work with your partner to complete the following questions. (You each have half of the information in your previous readings.)

1. Give several examples of how the number 7 is important in the holiday of Kwanzaa.
2. What is the Swahili name for the mat?
3. How many candles does the candle holder hold?
4. What is the mat usually made of?
5. Which symbol represents the children?
6. What are the three colors of the candles and how many are there of each color?
7. How many ears of corn are placed on the table if there are five children in the family?
8. Why is an ear of corn placed on the table even if the family has no children?
9. Which candle represents unity?
10. Why is some of the liquid in the unity cup poured out before it is passed around?
11. Why is a fruit basket placed on the mat?
12. Where is the black candle placed in the candle holder?
13. When are gifts given?
14. What types of gifts are given?
15. Which symbol is used to show respect for Native Americans?
16. What color candle represents creativity?

**VOCABULARY AND IDIOMS**

1. **mat** – (noun) – a piece of material used for a floor covering; a piece of material used for wiping dirty shoes; a piece of material placed under dishes to protect a table
ex. Please wipe your feet on the **mat** at the front door before you go into the house.
2. **mat** – (verb) – to become tangled or knotted
ex. Her hair is very **matted** because she hasn't brushed it since she got sick.
3. **hold a candle to** – (idiom) – be as good as; compare with – (used in the negative)
ex. The new teacher is quite nice, but she **can't hold a candle to** our old one.
4. **ear** – (noun) – organ of hearing
ex. She should have her **ears** checked. She is having trouble hearing.
5. **ear** – (noun) – the part of cereal or corn that carries the seeds.
ex. How many **ears** of corn should we cook for dinner tonight?
6. **to fall on deaf ears** – (idiom) to not be noticed or paid attention to
ex. Unfortunately my advice to him **fell on deaf ears**. He didn't study and he failed his exam.
7. **to be music to one's ears** – (idiom) – to be very good news
ex. It **was music to my ears** when my boss told me I could take the day off.
8. **to turn a deaf ear** – (idiom) – to refuse to listen or help
ex. I begged him to help me, but he **turned a deaf ear** to all my requests.
9. **the green light** – idiom – permission
ex. He gave me the **green light** to go ahead and start the project.



10. **to have a green thumb** – (idiom) to be good at gardening

ex. Mary's garden always looks so beautiful. She really must have a **green thumb**.

11. **to be in the red** – (idiom) – to lose money; to show a financial loss

ex. The first year we started our business, we were **in the red** but now we are finally making money.

12. **red tape** – (idiom) – many difficult government forms and procedures

ex. We experienced a lot of **red tape** before we were allowed to open our new business.

13. **to be in the black** - (idiom) – to show a profit; to be in a good financial position

ex. After losing money for several years, his company is now finally **in the black**.

14. **the black market** – (idiom) – illegal buying and selling of things

A long time ago, the only place you could buy American blue jeans in Russia was on **the black market**.

15. **the black sheep** – (idiom) - the bad one

ex. John has five successful brothers and sisters, but he is the **black sheep** in his family and is always getting into trouble.

16. **black out** - (idiom – used as a noun) – loss of electricity or loss of consciousness

ex. There was a long **black out** during the storm. It took several days to get the electricity back in some neighborhoods.

(idiom – used as a verb) to lose consciousness

ex. She **blacked out** during the accident and still can't remember what happened.

**VOCABULARY AND IDIOM PRACTICE****A. Directions: Use one of the words or idioms on the previous page to complete the following sentences.**

1. Frank's business is very successful. His company is always _____ .
2. When the teacher told the students that there would be no homework for the week-end, it was _____ .
3. Mr. and Mrs. Fontaine had to go through so much _____ when they decided to immigrate to United States, they almost stopped trying.
4. She didn't brush her hair before bed last night, so when she woke up this morning, it was all _____ .
5. When I asked my boss for a raise in pay, he _____ , so I quit my job.
6. Our old apartment was nice, but it can't _____ our new one. This apartment is so beautiful.
7. When I went on vacation, I asked my neighbor to look after my garden for me. When I got back, it looked wonderful. She really has _____ .
8. Robert hasn't seen his family in over ten years. They call him the _____ of the family.
9. They sell many videos on _____ for a much cheaper price than in the stores, but they are illegal.
10. I gave him directions before he started on his trip, but everything I said _____ . He got lost before he even left the city.

B. Now write your own sentences using the vocabulary and idioms on the previous page.

**FIND SOMEONE WHO....****Directions: Walk around the classroom and ask your classmates questions. Find someone**

1. who celebrates Kwanzaa or knows someone who does. _____

2. who can tell you the seven principles of Kwanzaa without reading the article again. _____

3. who has experienced a lot of red-tape recently. _____

4. who is the black sheep in his/her family. _____

5. who has a green thumb. _____

6. who can tell you the seven symbols of Kwanzaa. _____

7. who has bought something on the black market or knows someone who has. _____

8. who can tell you what the ears of corn represent in Kwanzaa. _____

9. who knows the colors of the candles used in Kwanzaa. _____

10. who can tell you the Swahili words for the seven principles. _____

**ANSWER KEY****READING COMPREHENSION**

1. Kwanzaa was created in 1966.
2. He wanted to create a celebration that would bring African Americans together by recognizing their black culture.
3. Kwanzaa celebrates African American people, their culture, and their history and begins on December 26 and goes until January 1.
4. He chose the name based on the the word kwanza in the African language of Swahili which means “first fruits”.
5. He added an extra “a” to the spelling so the word would have seven letters. This would correspond with the seven guiding principles or beliefs of the festival.
6. Nguzo Saba stands for the seven principles of Kwanzaa.
7. He used the traditional African values and characteristics of the ancient harvest festivals as his model.
8. Each evening of the seven day festival a family member lights a candle in a special candleholder and discusses one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa.
9. No, it is not.
10. More than 18 million people worldwide celebrate Kwanzaa.

VOCABULARY REVIEW**A. Match the words**

1. d 2. p 3. n 4. i 5. k 6. e 7. m 8. l 9. o 10. n 11. a 12. j 13. f 14. b
15. c 16. g

B. Choose the words

1. harvest 2. recognize 3. crops 4. feast 5. ancient 6. correspond 7. collective
8. guide 9. gather 10. struggle 11. century 12. mosque

PAIR WORK

1. individual
2. mkeka
3. It holds seven candles.
4. It is made of straw or fabric.



5. The corn
6. black, red and green
7. five ears of corn
8. One ear of corn is placed on the mat to represent the children of the community.
9. The black candle represents unity.
10. A little liquid is poured out to honor the ancestors.
11. A fruit basket is placed on the straw mat to symbolize the African harvest celebrations and to honor the work of the people who grew the crops.
12. The black candle is placed in the center of the candle holder.
13. Gifts are given on the last day of Kwanzaa.
14. The gifts given usually include educational items such as African art objects or books about African culture and life.
15. The corn.
16. The red candles.

VOCABULARY AND IDIOM PRACTICE

1. in the black
2. music to their ears
3. red tape
4. matted
5. turned a deaf ear
6. hold a candle to
7. a green thumb
8. black sheep
9. the black market
10. fell on deaf ears