

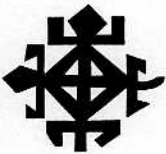
The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa

A Celebration of African Heritage

The week-long Kwanzaa holiday is based on traditional African celebrations of the harvest season. Its name comes from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, or “first fruits.”

Kwanzaa is more than a harvest festival, however. Dr. Maulana Karenga, an African American university professor, created the holiday in 1966 as a way to strengthen the African American community through a shared recognition of basic values rooted in traditional African culture.

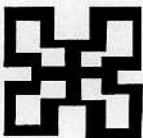
Each of the seven days of Kwanzaa, December 26 through January 1, reminds us of one of the Nguzo Saba, or seven principles, that are the building blocks of community. The list given here identifies works of art that exemplify these principles. Can you find other examples as well?



Umoja (Unity)

The first day of Kwanzaa emphasizes the importance, for the family and the community, of maintaining a sense of togetherness.

Like many Akan goldweights, the double-headed crocodile represents a familiar proverb of the Akan people. “The crossed crocodiles have one belly, but when eating they struggle, saying that each must feel the food passing down his own throat.” When the family as a whole benefits, quarreling and greed are senseless.



Kujichagulia (Self-determination)

The second day of Kwanzaa reminds individuals that they have the power to shape and define their own lives.

Asante legend tells the story of Akua. Unhappy because she was not able to have a child, Akua consulted a diviner. The diviner told her to make a wooden doll and treat it as if it were a real child. Although the other villagers laughed at her, Akua persisted and eventually had a child of her own. Tradition can provide the framework to believe in one’s dreams until they come true.



Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)

The third day of Kwanzaa shows how the community is strengthened when individuals help each other, working together to solve problems.

One way that traditional Kongo villagers make commitments as a community is with the aid of an *nkisi nkonde*. Each person who drives a knife blade or nail into the figure awakens the power of the figure’s spirit, which then works to hold everyone to the agreement that has been reached.



Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)

The fourth day of Kwanzaa teaches that when members of a community support each other, whether by pitching in to help in times of need or by buying each other's goods and services, the community as a whole prospers.

Traditional agricultural practices depend on a community working together at critical times, like harvesting. The Senufo granary door, decorated with a crocodile, horse, and fish to symbolize strength, wealth, and abundance, would have safeguarded a family's sustenance for months to come.



Nia (Purpose)

The fifth day of Kwanzaa asks people to find a way to use their particular talents to build upon the strengths of tradition and bring about a great future for the community as a whole.

The Mangbetu people of northern Congo made vessels such as this one for trade with Europeans and Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this way, Mangbetu potters contributed to their local economy.



Kuumba (Creativity)

The sixth day of Kwanzaa encourages self-expression and creativity to make the community a beautiful and lively place.

Many masks, like the Bwa plank mask from Burkina Faso, are worn in prescribed rituals and ceremonies. But dancers bring their own skills and interpretations to the framework of tradition, and clans often compete to present the most elaborate and innovative performances within a village community.



Imani (Faith)

The seventh day of Kwanzaa promotes confidence in the ability of the African community, its individuals and its leaders, to prevail through generations.

The Luba people trace their heritage through their mothers. The two figures on this headrest represent matrilineal ancestors who are the literal and figurative support of the hereditary chiefs. The embracing women reference the importance of family unity and continuity. They show the strength that comes from the generations of women who have produced the family line.

For ways to celebrate Kwanzaa at home, consult *Kwanzaa Fun*, by Linda Robertson and Julia Pearson (New York: Kingfisher, 1996). Information on Kwanzaa rituals is also available on the Internet at www.tike.com/celeb-kw.htm. Dr. Karenga's "The Message and Meaning of Kwanzaa" can be found at www.itskwanzaatime.com/message.html.