

Exploring Kwanzaa



Learning about Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a special celebration that begins on December 26th and ends January 1st. It is a celebration of family, community and culture. Use the resource links below to help you gather information about Kwanzaa to share with your group. How much you share and how you choose to share it will be dependent on the developmental levels of the children in your group. And, of course, if you have families in your program that celebrate Kwanzaa, be sure to invite them in to participate in or lead experiences as well. Here are a few links to help you get started.

Information from the Smithsonian

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/seven-principles-kwanzaa>

Video by Sesame Street:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kV-6qVp98Q>

Official Kwanzaa Website

<https://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/>



Learning about Kwanzaa

Here is a book list to help you gather books about Kwanzaa. Your local librarian is a great resource as well!

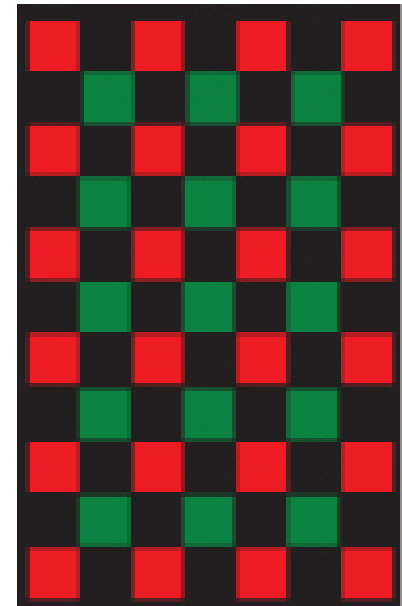
Together for Kwanzaa by Juwanda G. Ford

My Family Celebrates Kwanzaa by Lisa Bullard

The People Remember: A Kwanzaa Holiday Book for Kids by Ibi Zoboi

Li'l Rabbits Kwanzaa by Donna L. Washington

Celebrate Kwanzaa by Carolyn Otto



Kwanzaa Symbols

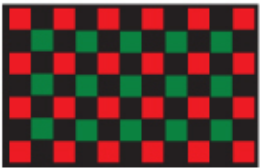
There are several key symbols of Kwanzaa. They are:

Kinara (ki-hahr-ah)



The kinara (ki-nahr-rah) is a special type of candlestick that holds 7 candles. Each candle represents a principle. The 7 principles are umoja (unity), kujichagulia (self-determination), ujima (collective work & responsibility), ujamaa (cooperative economics), nia (purpose), kuumba (creativity), and imani (faith).

Mkeka (em-KEH-kah)



A mkeka is a traditional straw or woven textile mat. It symbolizes the historical and traditional foundation upon which everything is built.

Muhindi (moo-hin-di)



Muhindi is corn/maize and this represents children and the hope that younger generations represent.

Kwanzaa Symbols

There are a few more Kwanzaa symbols. They are:



Kikombe cha Umoja (kee-KOHM-bee chah oo-MOH-jah)

Each day during Kwanzaa, a libation (water, juice or wine) is poured into a kikombe cha umoja or unity cup. Everyone sips from the cup to symbolize the unity of family and community.



Mazao (mah-ZAH-oh)

Mazao symbolizes the collective work it takes to plant, grow and harvest the crops. Mazao also represents the celebration of what it takes to achieve this goal together. During Kwanzaa, fruits and vegetables are placed on the mkeka.



Zawadi (zaa-WAD-di)

Kwanzaa, like many holidays, has gifts associated with it. But unlike many other holidays, gifts are only given on the last day and are often homemade. They are intended to symbolize growth and success.

Kwanzaa Activities

The Colors of Kwanzaa

The 3 colors associated with Kwanzaa are black, red and green. Black represents the people, red represents the struggle and green represents the future. Provide the children with large sheets of white paper along with red, green and black paint. Invite them to create as desired. Talk about the colors of Kwanzaa as they do so. Be sure to have different sized paintbrushes on hand for children with different fine motor skill levels.

Making Gifts

Handmade gifts are most often given on the last day of Kwanzaa. Set up a Gift-Making Station with assorted art/collage materials, empty food boxes/cartons, plastic containers, markers/crayons, etc. Invite the children to use the materials in any way they would like to create gifts. The gifts they create may be for family members, friends or other relatives. More advanced children can create cards to accompany their gifts. This will open the door for you to talk with these children about letters, letter sounds, words, sentences, etc. in a meaningful way.

More Kwanzaa Activities

Drumming Fun

Drumming is part of African culture. Sharing African drumming music with the children is easy with the internet to help you! Here is just one of many videos you might want to share: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIGMYsWs6jc>. Watch the video together and have drums and/or plastic bowls on hand for the children to attempt to recreate the song. Be sure to pause the video frequently to ask open-ended questions that engage the children in back-and-forth conversations.



Let's Dance!

African music and dance is beautiful and a big part of African culture. There are many different options for African music both on the internet and streaming services like Spotify. Turn on your favorite African music and invite the children to dance. Dancing is a wonderful way for them to express their thoughts, ideas and emotions. This would be a great experience to video and share with families.

More Kwanzaa Activities

Kwanzaa Collages

Collage is a wonderful type of art because it invites children to express their ideas in a different way. Set out large sheets of black construction paper along with red & green construction paper, art tissue, yarn, etc. Invite the children to use these materials as desired to create collages. If you have Toddlers, Twos or Threes that are not yet ready to cut, they can tear paper instead. Provide both gluesticks as well as glue in shallow dishes and paintbrushes so children can choose what works best for them.

Jollof Rice

Jollof rice is a dish served all over West Africa. Each country has a slightly different version but they all contain many of the same ingredients. Obviously, for children, you will want to reduce/eliminate any of the hot peppers. But, to help the children be a part of the preparing process, they could help cut up sweet red peppers and onions using plastic knives. Be sure to also provide them with the opportunity to smell any of the spices that will be used to make the rice.

This blog post has a recipe for jollof rice as well as other dishes you may want to prepare and serve for Kwanzaa. <https://www.njpbs.org/blog-post/cooking-up-kwanzaa/>. As always, be sure to check with parents/guardians before serving any food.

Kwanzaa Patterning

Purpose: The purpose of this material is to help children learn more about some of the symbols of Kwanzaa, build visual discrimination skills, eye-hand coordination and patterning skills (copying, extending and creating patterns). Additionally, because there will be plenty of time for back-and-forth conversations, the children will build language along with social/emotional skills.

Preparation:

To prepare, print out a copy of both sheets for each child. More advanced children can cut the strips and cards apart by following the dotted lines. You will probably need to do this step for children with limited cutting skills.

Helpful Tip: Have the children use different colored markers to make dots on the back of each of their cards and strips. That way, if things get mixed up, you will be able to sort them out easily. Plus, it is a great way to talk about colors!

Use:

You can use this material in different ways based on the developmental levels of the children in your group. Younger children can copy the pattern by putting the cards on the strips. More advanced children can extend the patterns on the strips by putting the cards at the end to keep the pattern going. Your most advanced children can use the cards to create their own patterns.

