

The African American Heritage & Kwanzaa Celebration

Introduction of Event

Introduction to Kwanzaa (Executive Board):

Kwanzaa is an African-American and Pan- African holiday that celebrates family, community and culture- honoring the historic path of Black people through the course of history. It reminds us of our African heritage, our triumphs and struggles as a people, and asks us to reflect on our future.

Kwanzaa was established in 1966 in the midst of the Black Freedom Movement and thus reflects its concern for cultural groundedness in thought and practice, and the unity and self-determination associated with this. Its creator, Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor of Africana Studies at California State University, Long Beach, author and scholar-activist, derived the ceremony from the first-fruit celebration of ancient and modern Africa. For Dr. Karenga, the purpose for this ceremony was the indispensable need to preserve, continually revitalize and promote African American culture.

Kwanzaa lasts for seven days, from December 26 to January 1. Each day corresponds to one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, called the Nguzo Saba (**nn-goo-zoh sah-bah**) and uses various symbols, all of which are recognized in the Swahili language. A copy of the seven principles can be found at your table.

The symbols we recognize for Kwanzaa include the bendera (the flag/stripes of red, black and green), the Mkeka (**mm-keh-kah**) or place mat, the Kikombe Cha Umoja (**kee-kom-beh chah oo-moh-jah**) or Unity Cup, the Mazao (**mah-zah-oh**) or fruits and vegetables, the Muhindi (moo-hin-dee) or corn, the Kinara (**kin-nah-rah**) or candle holder, and its candles, the Mishumaa Saba (**mee-shoo-mah sah-bah**).

First day of Kwanzaa:

On the each day of Kwanzaa we light a candle, one for each day of Kwanzaa that has passed. In addition, we read the principle that corresponds to the day. Every day of Kwanzaa we greet one another in Swahili saying, “Habari gani (**hah-bah-ree gah-nee**)?”- “What’s the news?”

On the first day of Kwanzaa we respond, “Umoja (**oo-moh-jah**)” meaning unity and we light the black candle. Umoja is not only coming together, but also staying together. We strive to create a community- people who work, live and build a future together. A strong community is the reward for people who practice Umoja.

Second day of Kwanzaa:

Habari gani? On the second day of Kwanzaa we respond, Kujichagulia (koo-ji-chah-goo-lee-ah), meaning self-determination. We light the black candle and the first red candle from the middle. This candle symbolizes struggle.

For many years people of color had no power and no voice in the American society. We must now act and speak for ourselves, no matter what others may say.

Third day of Kwanzaa:

Habari gani? On the third day of Kwanzaa we respond Ujima (**oo-gee-mah**) and light the black candle, the red candle and first green candle from the center representing the future.

Ujima means collective work and responsibility. In our lives we can face even the heaviest of loads, but in community, or Ujima, even a heavy load is easy to carry.

Fourth day of Kwanzaa:

On this the fourth day of Kwanzaa we light the candles of the last three days and the next red candle. Habari gani? Ujamaa, meaning cooperative economics, or buying from one another, suggests that buying from within one's community shares the wealth within one's community.

Fifth day of Kwanzaa:

The second green candle is lit on the fifth day and we respond to "Habari gani?" with Nia (**nee-ah**) meaning purpose. We find our purpose in strengthening and advancing our community. Here at Kwanzaa, we remember our tradition of greatness and we carry the legacy to go further and aim higher.

Sixth day of Kwanzaa:

On the sixth day Kuumba (**koo-oom-bah**) is the answer. We light the black candle, the red candles and all but one green candle.

On this day we recognize Kuumba, or creativity, as our capacity to do all that we can to enhance the community in which we live, as well as having new visions and dreaming new dreams.

It is also on this day that we hold the karamu (**kah-rah-moo**) or feast. Everyone comes together with whatever food they can bring and we share in the meal.

Seventh day of Kwanzaa:

On the final day of Kwanzaa the candles are lit in order, ending with the last green candle. Imani is the response which means faith. On this day we remind ourselves to always believe wholeheartedly in the capacity of your community and yourself to succeed.

As the ceremony comes to a close we come together to say Harambee (**hah-rahm-beh**) seven times in unison. Harambee means to pull together.

Closing of ceremony:

As we close we offer these words:

May we live by the nguzo saba.

May the year's end meet us laughing and stronger.

And at the end of next year, may more of us sit together.

May we achieve a better life.

Kwanzaa yenu iwe ne heri! (**Kwanzaa yeh-noo ee-weh nah heh-ree**)