



# THE PRINCIPLES OF KWANZAA

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# THE PRINCIPLES OF KWANZAA

Time: 12:44

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

As the video opens, viewers see various activities associated with Kwanzaa. The narrator then explains the role of Dr. Maulana Kerenga in establishing the holiday, and reviews Kwanzaa's seven guiding principles – *umoja*, *kujichagulia*, *ujima*, *ujamaa*, *nia*, *kuumba* and *imani*. The rest of the video shows how those

principles are manifested in traditional African cultures and in African-American culture.

*Umoja* is defined as “uniting for the benefit of everyone in the group.”

The Igbo people of southern Nigeria, for example, unite themselves

into various groups to help the sick. In the United States, citizens may band together to combat gangs in their neighborhood. *Kujichagulia*, or self-determination, was found in the ancient kingdom of *Shambaa*, where *Mbegha*, its first ruler, was appointed by the people only after he agreed to be responsible for their well being. Today, many local, state and national leaders in the United



States have come from the African-American community. The *Nuer* people of Sudan exemplify *ujima*, or collective work and responsibility. They work together to assist their neighbors, and take responsibility for each others' children. In America, young people practice *ujima* when they baby-sit and do household chores together. *Ujamaa*, or cooperative economics, is seen in *Gonji Ngombe* society in Zaire. There, people share their wealth and resources. To the *Gonji Ngombe*, greed is seen as the work of evil spirits. In the U.S., youngsters can buy things they want, and money to help send a member to college. *Nia*, principle of Kwanzaa. African cultures, a to find a newborn's Finding this purpose a person was expected time productively. youngsters can find their themselves to all the good and positive things available to them – in books, in school, and by participating in church and community activities. *Kuumba*, or creativity, is seen in the beautiful *kente* cloths and in the performances of professional storytellers of western Africa. The African tradition of creativity can be seen in the United States, with so many African-American greats in the worlds of film, television, literature and music. Young African-Americans can continue this rich tradition by studying, and building upon, the creative accomplishments of those who have gone before them. *Imani*, or faith, is the final principle of Kwanzaa. The Akan people of southern Ghana believe they are descended from a Supreme Being, and are meant to do good during their time on earth. Most African- Americans also have faith in their Divine origin – and have faith that if they follow their ancestral ways, they can build a meaningful, positive future for themselves.



## **STUDENT OBJECTIVES**

After viewing this video and participating in the suggested activities, students should be able to do the following:

- (1) Name and explain the seven principles of Kwanzaa.
- (2) Briefly describe how the seven principles are manifested in African cultures.
- (3) Tell how the seven principles are manifested in the African-American community.
- (4) Explain how the principles are manifested in their own lives.
- (5) Briefly describe how they can use the seven principles to make their lives more meaningful and fulfilling.

## **SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN**

### **Introduction**

Discuss the holiday of Kwanzaa. Do any of your students celebrate Kwanzaa in their homes? If so, have them describe the holiday and how they celebrate it in their household. Help your students understand that the holiday is held to help African-Americans understand their history and traditions. Ask why it is important for people to understand those things. Help the class comprehend that unless people understand where they have come from – and what is important in their tradition – they have difficulty forming an ethical basis for their lives. Ethics form the glue of civilization. Without an ethical foundation, societies disintegrate, and peoples' lives become meaningless.

## Pre-Viewing Activities

Tell the class that they will now see a video entitled “The Principles of Kwanzaa.” Write the seven principles – *umoja*, *kujichagulia*, *ujima*, *ujamaa*, *nia*, *kuumba*, and *imani* – on the chalkboard. Explain that after the video is seen, you’ll want the class to be able to define each principle and tell how it is part of the lives of both Africans and African-Americans.



## Post-Viewing Activities

Review each principle. Have the class tell how each is manifested in African and African-American communities. Then ask the class to discuss how each principle could become part of their daily lives. If you feel it would be helpful, ask the class to write an essay entitled, “How I Can Use the Principles of Kwanzaa in My Life.” Be sure that concrete examples are given in the essay.

## TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

Every year, untold thousands of African-American families celebrate a holiday called Kwanzaa.

During this seven-day, early-winter celebration, family members may wear African clothing, eat traditional foods from their ancestral homeland, dance and sing much as their ancestors did before crossing the Atlantic Ocean, display African and African-American arts and crafts, perform their forebearers' ancient art of storytelling, exchange presents that have come from Africa, and recall and honor members of their family from past generations.

As these families celebrate Kwanzaa, they build a strong sense of togetherness.

And they learn about their heritage – one rich in bravery, beauty and wisdom.

The African-American celebration of Kwanzaa was started by Dr. Maulana Kerenga, a university professor. Dr. Kerenga studied a large number of African societies, and found that most of them used seven principles to guide their lives.

In Swahili, the mother tongue of many Africans, those principles are called *umoja*, *kujichagulia*, *ujima*, *ujamaa*, *nia*, *kuumba*, and *imani*.

According to Dr. Kerenga, these ideals have helped make the African peoples who practice them strong and honorable. Therefore, on each day of Kwanzaa, December twenty-sixth through January first, one of the principles is discussed, and the question is often asked: "How can this principle be used to guide my life?"

The first of those principles, *umoja*, can be translated as "unity." But the meaning is far more than just "uniting" or "joining together."

The true meaning of *umoja* is uniting for the benefit of everyone in the group.

In southern Nigeria, the Igbo people offer an excellent example of how *umoja* benefits the entire community.

The Igbo, who unify themselves into family groups, age groups, and others, use those associations to help one another in times of need.

For instance, no one is left alone, untended, in sickness.

If an Igbo child misbehaves, it's the responsibility of any group member to show disapproval, and to explain a more appropriate way to act.

If an Igbo woman's husband dies, members of her late husband's age group will help her by bringing food and other things she might need.

Across the ocean, in many African-American families, the principle of *umoja* is also put into practice.

Brothers and sisters may unite and work together to help a younger member of the family with his or her homework.

*Umoja* is often practiced in neighborhoods, too, when people band together to solve a problem, such as the growth of gangs in their area.

By unifying, they show that they will work together to solve the problem – for the benefit of all.

As the ancient African proverb states, “One stick is easily split. But many bound together are unbreakable.”

A youth group that unifies for a particular cause, such as helping a person who's lost his job, and needs to feed his family until he can get back on his feet, is still another example of *umoja* in practice.

On the second day of Kwanzaa, the principle of *kujichagulia*, or self-determination, is discussed.

In Africa, one of the best examples of *kujichagulia* can be found in the ancient Shambaa Kingdom, which was located in today's Tanzania.

The first king of the Shambaa people was Mbegha, a skilled hunter, a wise scholar who studied the stars, and a defender of the weak.

Because he had these, and other admirable qualities, the people of Shambaa asked Mbegha to be their king. When doing so, however, they stated the terms of his rule: that he would be responsible for their well-being.

This idea of self-determination, of people choosing their leaders, and determining their leaders' responsibilities, took place in Africa many hundreds of years before a similar idea took hold in Europe and America.

For African-Americans, it has been a long, ongoing journey from slavery for *kujichagulia* to take hold.

In many cities today, however, Black political leaders have been elected to top positions in government.

As in the African kingdom of Shambaa, they have agreed to do the peoples' will.

African-Americans have also been elected to many state-wide and national offices. As with their fellow elected officials, they have promised to uphold their responsibilities as given by the people: *kujichagulia*.

Youngsters can also practice this African principle by participating in class or school-wide elections, working for the candidate whose ideas are similar to theirs'.

The third principle of Kwanzaa, *ujima*, or collective work and responsibility, is practiced by the Nuer of southern and central Sudan – as well as by other African peoples.

In Nuer culture, a large number of jobs that could be done by one person are instead done by more than one.

By working together, the tasks go faster – not only because more people are working, but also because time seems to go by more quickly when individuals socialize.

Many Africans take responsibility for their neighbors' children when those neighbors are working in the fields.

They know that everyone benefits when a child is properly fed and protected.

Many young people in our country practice *ujima* when they baby-sit cousins, nephews or nieces, or brothers and sisters.

They take the responsibility to help the children and their parents when mothers and fathers are unable to be around.

Working collectively on household chores is another way to practice *ujima*.

On the fourth day of Kwanzaa, *ujamaa*, which means “cooperative economics,” is discussed.

In northwestern Zaire, the Gonji Ngombe people live their lives according to this principle, which, says Dr. Kerenga, means sharing wealth and resources.

All things, including hunting, fishing and farming tools, are shared by the Gonji Ngombe. If a tool isn't being used, the person who owns it is happy to lend it to another so it won't remain idle.

Payment is never expected.

The Gonji Ngombe, then, are known for their generosity. To them, greedy people are influenced by evil spirits.

No one goes wanting because everyone in the community shares.

We can practice *ujamaa*, too. If no one has enough money to buy a video game everyone wants, for example, we can share our money, pool it, purchase what we want, and then receive the benefit of everyone's generosity.

Another example of *ujamaa* could take place if someone needs financial help for college and members of his family pool their money so he will be able to attend.

*Nia*, or purpose, is Kwanzaa's fifth principal.

In many ancient African cultures, a shaman, or medicine man, would be asked to find a newborn's purpose in life.

The shaman would use his knowledge of planetary alignments and other astronomical factors at the time of the child's birth to find out what the newborn was to do with his or her life.

To these ancient Africans, all people needed to know their purpose so they could spend their time wisely and productively.

Today, of course, we don't use shamans to tell us our purpose in life.

But we can find our purpose by experiencing all the good and positive things that are available to us in books and other media, by learning everything we can in school, by participating in community projects, and church activities, and by expanding our creative talents – our creativity.

In fact, *kuumba* – creativity – is the sixth principal of Kwanzaa.

One of the best places to find the creative genius of the African people is in the continent's western nations, where beautiful *kente* cloths are made, as well as other fabrics.

All are known world-wide for their bright, colorful and intricate patterns.

In the same area, professional storytellers have written and performed original songs and dances for an untold number of generations.

Many of their songs are composed as they are performed, much like jazz, and their stories may be improvised to fit the occasion – all of which takes considerable creative ability.

Countless numbers of African-Americans have continued this tradition of exceptional creativity shown by their ancestors.

In the field of music, there's Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong – and so many others it's impossible to mention even a fraction of them.

In the literary world, there are the great poets Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks, and novelist Ralph Ellison, to name only a few.

Bill Cosby, Paul Robeson and Sidney Poitier are only three out of the hundreds of African-American luminaries in the world of film and television.

The next generation of African-Americans can build upon that rich tradition of creativity by carefully studying – and finding out about – what has gone before, and then building upon what they have learned.

The final principle of Kwanzaa, discussed on the seventh day of the holiday, is *imani*, or faith.

In southern Ghana, the Akan people, like many other Africans, believe they are descended from a Supreme Being.

The Akan pray to their God, Who is believed to be the source of all

justice, and the power behind all events of life, including the birth of children.

Newborns, therefore, are believed to be sacred and pure.

The Akan have faith that all of us are of Divine origin from the time we are born and so we are meant to do good during our time on earth.

We also have faith in our Divine origin, and faith in our own people, faith that we will follow in our ancestral ways so we can build a meaningful, positive future for ourselves, a future built on the principles of Kwanzaa – *umoja, kujichagulia, ujima, ujamaa, nia, kuumba, and imani.*