

Kwanzaa One of Many Holiday Traditions Uniquely African American

Kwanzaa touches on family, culture and community

Kwanzaa is a unique African-American celebration with focus on the traditional African values of family, community responsibility, commerce, and self-improvement.

It is a time of reaffirming African-American people, their ancestors and culture. Kwanzaa, which means "first fruits of the harvest" in the African language Kiswahili, has gained tremendous acceptance. Kwanzaa is observed by more than 18 million people worldwide.

The African-American holiday was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a scholar-activist who is currently professor and chair of the Department of Black Studies at California State University at Long Beach. It is a holiday based on the harvest festivals of mother Africa and celebrates family, community and culture.



Origin of Christmas

Celebrate Jesus' birth on Dec. 25

The origin of Christmas is, and should be, the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of God, as recorded in the Bible. Nothing more and nothing less. However, most of what we witness on Dec. 25th each year has little to do with that blessed day, which probably occurred in late summer or early fall about 2,000 years ago. In fact, most of the customs and traditions of Christmas actually pre-date the birth of Jesus.

For example, the earliest ancestors to the Santa Claus of Christmas date back to pre-Christian days,

when sky-riding gods ruled the earth. The mythological characters Odin, Thor, and Saturn gave us the basis for many of Santa's distinctive characteristics.

But the most influential figure in the shaping of today's generous and loving Santa Claus was a real man, St. Nicholas of Myra (now Turkey), a fourth century bishop. As a champion of children and the needy, he was legendary for his kindness and generosity.

Throughout his life, St. Nicholas tried to help others while inspiring them to imitate his virtues. Legends of his unselfish giving spread all over Northern Europe, and accounts of his heroic deeds blended with regional folklore.

Observing Hanukkah

Festival of Lights is a Jewish holiday

Hanukkah, which means "dedication" and is also referred to as the "Festival of Lights," is a Jewish festival which began this year on Nov. 30 and concluded Dec. 7.

Hanukkah commemorates the victory of the Maccabees, led by Judah, over the Hellenistic Syrians

in a revolt that took place around 165 BC.

The victory in itself was considered a miracle, but Jewish legend gives an additional explanation for Hanukkah rituals. Once the Temple Mount in Jerusalem had been reclaimed, the Temple had to be rededicated. According to legend, only one jar of sacramental oil was found, enough for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days, thus the eight days of Hanukkah.

The most important Hanukkah ritual is the candle lighting. Jews light candles in a special candleholder called a menorah.

It is traditional to eat foods fried in oil during Hanukkah. Some common foods are potato latkes and sufganiot (jelly doughnuts). Another tradition is to play the dreidel game, a four-sided top.

Another common Hanukkah practice is giving gifts or gelt, meaning money, to children.

Celebrating Winter Solstice

Origins go back thousands of years

Winter Solstice has been celebrated in cultures the world over for thousands of years. The shortest day of the year in late December marks the start of the solar year and the rebirth of the sun.

In old Europe, it was known as yule, from the Norse, *jul*, meaning wheel.

Many of the customs, lore, sym-



bol, and rituals associated with Christmas are linked to Winter Solstice celebrations of ancient Pagan cultures.

Celebrate yule with a series of rituals, feasts, and other activities. In most ancient cultures, the celebration lasted more than a day. The ancient Roman Saturnalia festival sometimes went on for a week.

Although Winter Solstice hits this year on Dec. 21, you can make New Year's Eve a Winter Solstice festival by not just welcoming in the new calendar year, but also to welcome the new solar year.



Kwanzaa Goes First Class

The United States Postal Service released a new 37-cent first-class Kwanzaa stamp, which is now available nationwide. The self-adhesive stamp is a different design from the first Kwanzaa stamp that was issued in 1997.

Kwanzaa Crafts for Children

Extend the holiday season for your children by introducing them to the African-American cultural celebration of Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is a time to celebrate life, heritage and values. Here are a few craft ideas from Trish Kuffner, author of "The Toddler's Busy Book," to help your child learn more about this holiday's customs:

Pasta necklace

This project offers a creative way to teach your child about the traditional colors of Kwanzaa. Black represents the people, red symbolizes their struggle and green stands for hope. Paint ziti noodles with black, red and green tempura paint. Allow to dry. Spray with clear acrylic spray if you like. Give your child a shoelace (or a piece of ribbon, yarn, or thin elastic cord) with a piece of masking tape wrapped around one end. Show him how to thread it through the noodles to make a colorful necklace.

Napkin rings

Ears of corn are another important symbol of Kwanzaa used to represent children and hope for the future. Cut an empty paper towel roll into 1-inch sections. In separate containers, mix black, red and green paint with white glue. Have your child paint each section and roll them in popcorn kernels. Once they are dry, insert a napkin and set the table for a Kwanzaa feast.

Woven mat

It is customary to place the traditional Kwanzaa symbols on a woven mat. To make one for your table, fold a piece of black construction paper in half to make a frame for the mat. Show your child how to cut from the folded edge to within one inch of the opposite side. Make an even number of cuts



Kids can paint this Kwanzaa holiday scene.

about one inch apart across the entire width of the paper; unfold. Cut 1-inch strips of red and green construction paper the length of the frame's width or slightly longer. Show your child how to weave the red and green strips over and under the cuts in the frame. Use glue or a stapler to secure the strips in place along the edge of the frame.



Celebrate Kwanzaa by protecting your family from secondhand smoke.

1. Children who grow up with smokers in the family are more likely to have asthma than children living in non-smoking households.
2. Secondhand smoke can trigger Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). African-American babies are two to three times more likely to die from SIDS than Caucasian babies.
3. Children and babies who live with – and around – smokers are more likely to have ear infections, coughs and colds.



Create a smokefree home during the Kwanzaa holiday -- and all year long.

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