

Kwanzaa, a Celebration of Community, Family and Culture

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The day after Christmas marks the start of the Kwanzaa holiday in the United States. A week long non-religious holiday celebrating the African American community, culture and family from December 26- January 1.

The term Kwanzaa means “the first fruit of harvest “in Swahili. This holiday was created by Dr. Maluna Karenga the creator of Kwanzaa, a professor of Africana Studies at California State University.

Kwanzaa was designed to unite and strengthen the African American communities, to introduce and reinforce the seven Principles. Kwanzaa has seven focal principles: Umoja (Unity), Kujijachlia (Self Determination), Ujima (Collective Work & Responsibility), Ujamaa (Collective Economics), Nia (Purpose) Kuumba (Creativity) and Imani (Faith).

Kwanzaa is celebrated by many people every year, young and old. Although there are many that may not recognize the holiday, there are many that do. Kwanzaa can be celebrated by attending community events, taught in schools or celebrated at home.

Steven Thedford, author of the Kwanzaa Coloring Book, celebrates Kwanzaa with his family at home through traditions and learning moments.

“You can light a candle each day, have an informal ceremony on each day. Children may have smaller roles. My youngest will recite a poem, while the oldest sang a song. “Thedford said.

Kwanzaa celebrations may include having a big feast at homes or community celebrations. Dressing in Kenti Cloth, giving small gifts, using the Kwanzaa colors Red, Green and Black and lighting candles in addition to other activities.

The Kwanzaa Coloring book written by Steven Thedford, helps children learn about Kwanzaa in a fun engaging way.

“It can be used to reinforce the principles and symbols of Kwanzaa. By parents purchasing this book, they are also practicing the Kwanzaa principle of Collective Economics by putting money back into the community”. said Thedford.

Most kids today learn about Kwanzaa in school. From Kwanzaa programs, lessons and activities younger children are aware of the holiday’s existence.

“Schools celebrate all the holidays. Even kids that are not African American know about it”. Said Thedford.

Kwanzaa is still fairly a new holiday, it has only been around for 50 years. It was established in 1966 during the black liberation movement. Kwanzaa is a non-religious holiday and is not meant to replace Christmas.

Donna Washington, performer and author of "The story of Kwanzaa" and "Lil Rabbits Kwanzaa" tells stories of Kwanzaa and how it can be celebrated.

"Many people don't know Kwanzaa is not meant to replace Christmas. It's about reaffirming yourself to your community and your nation. It is a Civil Rights festival." Said Washington.

Although Kwanzaa is nationally recognized there are still many that do not celebrate the holiday.

"The more communal celebrations there are, the better. It has to be widely celebrated. Become more mainstream and get more media coverage, to become something more people celebrate. Said Washington.