Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is an African-American holiday inspired by “first fruits” celebrations that take place in parts of Africa. First fruits celebrations are times of harvest, gathering of family and community, reverence for creation, commemoration of the past, recommitment to cultural ideals, and celebration of the good. At the heart of the celebration are Kwanzaa’s Seven Principles, which in Swahili is *Nguzo Saba*. These principles are the basis of a value system, intended as a year-round guide to help organize and enrich our relations with each other. Learn more about the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa during this journey through art.

**Kwanzaa Principle: Umoja** (Unity: To strive for and maintain unity in self, family, community, neighborhood, nation, race, and world.)

**Gallery 117 FIND Shrine Object, Yoruba artist, first half of 20th century**

When this object was not set up as a shrine dedicated to the god Eshu, a devotee danced with it at Eshu festivals held in the marketplace. Eshu, a god of the Yoruba religion, represents uncertainty in the universe and can affect the fate of each human being. For this reason, he is a popular figure of devotion among people who practice the Yoruba religion all over the world.

**SHARE** with the people who you are with traditions and beliefs that you have in common.

**Kwanzaa Principle: Kujichagulia** (Self-Determination: To define, name, create for, and speak for ourselves, instead of allowing others to define, name, create for, and speak for us.)

**Gallery 117 FIND Veranda Post, Yoruba artist, 20th century**

LOOK at the details in the carving. What do you notice?

In the early to mid-20th century, elite Yoruba people built communities with centrally located palaces and courtyards. Roofs and verandas were supported by wooden posts like this one. There are several figures depicted here including the Yoruba warrior Jagunjagun, a ram, and a hunter. These are designs that celebrate Ogun, the god of iron and hunting, an important patron of political leaders.

**WRITE** about leaders that you would choose to honor in a house post. Why did you choose those leaders?

**Kwanzaa Principle: Ujima** (Collective Work and Responsibility: To build and maintain our community and solve our problems together.)

**Gallery 102 FIND Crest Mask (ci-wara kun), Bamana artist, early 20th century**

This headdress, called *ci-wara kun*, represents an antelope, an important animal in Bamana culture. The antelope’s power stands for a farmer who tirelessly tends to his fields. This headdress would be worn on the head of a dancer and danced to the sound of drums in order to bring rain, clear the fields, and harvest the crops.

**SHARE** with the people who you’re with a time when you worked to accomplish something. How did it feel when you were finished?
Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa Principle: Ujamaa  (Cooperative Economics: To build and maintain our businesses and profit from them together.)

Gallery 117 FIND Chief’s Chair, Chokwe artist, 19th century

This is a chair for a Chokwe chief. Traders imported European-style chairs and presented them as gifts to their African trading partners. As the European chairs were traded among the community, they became sought-after objects and served as inspiration for chairs created by Chokwe artists, such as this one.

LOOK closely at the details in this chair. What animals and figures do you see?

Kwanzaa Principle: Nia  (Purpose: To make our collective work the building of our community.)

Gallery 117 FIND Crown (adenla), Yoruba artist, 19th century

This crown was made for a chief or king of a Yoruba community. The cone shape of the crown protects the king’s “inner head” which many Yoruba people believe holds a person’s character and intellect. This takes importance over the physical “outer head.” How does your character and intellect help you to contribute to your community?

DESIGN a crown for yourself that protects your character and intellect in the space provided.

Kwanzaa Principle: Kuumba  (Creativity: Leaving the world better than we found it.)

Gallery 102 FIND Puppet, Bamana artist, 1960s

This is a puppet made with moveable parts, allowing both the horse and the rider to strike a variety of poses. IMAGINE you are the rider. How would you feel? How would your body move?

This type of puppetry is known as sogo bò which means “the animals come forth.” It is a tradition among several groups in central Mali and is used to entertain children. CREATE your own animal puppet design in the space provided.

Kwanzaa Principle: Imani  (Faith: To believe in our people, parents, teachers, and leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.)

Gallery 102 FIND Reliquary Guardian Figure (mbulu ngulu), Kota artist, late 19th–early 20th century

LOOK closely at the materials used in this work of art. What do you notice?

This is a reliquary guardian figure or mbulu ngulu. This figure protected the remains, contained by a basket, of family ancestors. For Kota families, the remains of their most important ancestors extended protection and good fortune to the descendants.

SHARE with the people who you’re with the ways that you honor your family’s ancestors in your community.

This program is supported by the Dana Brown Endowed Fund for Education and Community Programs.