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 333 FIND Douglass Square, Allan Rohan Crite, 1936
Allan Rohan Crite illustrated his love for humanity and honored that multiple life paths may lead to success, well-being, and happiness. He described himself as “an artist reporter,” painting this scene from his neighborhood in Boston of people doing ordinary activities. Crite wanted to tell the everyday stories of African American people living in the United States, who were often portrayed in oversimplified and negative ways during his time period.

DRAW your neighborhood’s buildings, people, and the world you live in.

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 336 FIND Jar, David Drake, June 6, 1857
Near the rim of this jar, while the clay was still damp, David Drake, an enslaved potter, wrote the date June 6, 1857 and his name. His handprint is visible where his fingers gripped the base of the jar as he worked. Drake was literate during a time when laws prohibiting enslaved people from being able to read and write were common. His inscription declares his literacy, authorship, and creativity, leaving a bold impression of resistance that has survived the test of time.

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

Gallery 117 FIND Helmet Mask (ndoli jowei), Mende artist, first half 20th century
A broad forehead, elaborate hairstyle, downcast eyes, and small nose and mouth illustrate Mende ideals of feminine beauty and behavior. Mende Sande Society masks are associated with coming of age ceremonies, when girls receive instruction for their roles and responsibilities as women in the community. Sande masquerades, performed by women, reinforce the Society’s role as a principal go-between connecting the community and the spirit world.

DESIGN your own unique hairstyle.

CREATE a hairstyle that reflects who you are.
Kwanzaa Principle: Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics: To build and maintain our businesses and profit from them together.)

**Gallery 117 FIND Helmet Mask (mukenga)**, Kuba artist, 20th century

This mask from the Kuba people emphasizes the wealth and power of the “nyeem” (king). Cowrie shells, seen all over this mask, were used as a currency. Additionally, the strength and majesty of an elephant represents ideal characteristics for a king.

**LOOK** closely at the details of the mask. Do you see a part that reminds you of an elephant’s trunk?

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

**Gallery 334 FIND Seated Woman**, Elizabeth Catlett, 1962

Elizabeth Catlett, an African American artist who lived her adult life in Mexico, greatly respected the artistic traditions of African masks and Mexican sculpture. To support social change, Catlett presented positive images of people who were often not shown, such as women and people of color. Elizabeth Catlett carved this sculpture out of mahogany, a strong and resilient tree that can grow as tall as nearly 200 feet and live for hundreds of years.

**SHARE** why you think the artist may have used this material to carve this figure of a woman. What does this sculpture mean to you?

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

**Gallery 336 FIND Woman Standing near a Pond**, Edward Mitchell Bannister, 1880

Edward Mitchell Bannister, an African American, stated that the discrimination he experienced because of his heritage multiplied his artistic struggles. Despite such challenges, Bannister became one of the premier landscape painters of his time, depicting the serene natural landscapes around him.

**IMAGINE** you are the woman near the pond. What do you see, hear, and smell?

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

**Potent:** something that is used as money

**Currency:** something that is used as money

**Galley 117 FIND Power Figure (nkishi)**, Songye artist, early 20th century

“Nkishi” or power figures such as this served as containers for potent ingredients used in judicial and healing contexts. This figure must be activated by the ritual specialist—the expert who owns it, sources and assembles the powerful ingredients and embellishments, and activates it. To the Songye people, its importance lies in its ability to protect the community from evil forces and disease.

**WRITE** a short story about a time when you felt powerful and you helped others around you feel powerful.