Kwanzaa (QUAN-ah) is a holiday celebrated by many African Americans. It is held Dec. 26 through Jan. 1.

The seven-day celebration encourages people to think about their African roots as well as their lives in present-day America. Kwanzaa is based on African festivals. The word from the Swahili language means “the first fruits.”

Kwanzaa is not a religious celebration like Christmas and Hanukkah. It was started in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor of Black Studies at California State University.

Symbolic candles

On each night of Kwanzaa, families hold ceremonies and light the candle for the day. The kinara (kee-NAR-ah) holds seven candles. A new candle, or mishumaa (mee-shoo-MAH-ah), is lighted each night. The first one lighted is the black one in the middle.

The seven candles stand for the seven principles of Kwanzaa. These principles serve as a guide for daily living. After lighting the candle, the family discusses the principle for that day.

Kwanzaa symbols

• The mkeka (m-KEH-kah) is a straw mat that represents the foundation on which everything else rests.

The Seven Principles

The seven principles, or main ideas, are called Nguzo Saba (n-GOO-zoo SAH-bah).

1. Umoja (oo-MOH-ja): unity for family, community and country.
3. Ujamaa (oo-JAH-mah): building our stores, shops and businesses.
4. Imani (ee-MAH-ne): faith.
5. Kuumba (koo-OO-mah): creativity or making the world around us clean and beautiful.
6. Nia (nee-YAH): purpose to build and develop our community.

Other Kwanzaa customs

The colors of Kwanzaa are:
• black for the people
• red for the Blood of the people
• green for the land of Africa

During Kwanzaa, friends and families gather every other by saying “Habibi gain” (hai-REE-ye GAH-ne), which means, “What’s happening?” They answer with the special principle of the day.

Adults may fast, or refuse to eat food from sunup to sundown, as a way of cleansing the mind, soul and spirit.

On Dec. 31 there is a joyful celebration of food, dance and music. The feast is called karamu (kar-RAH-moh). The children receive their gifts. They also tell how they will improve their lives using the seven principles in the coming year.

Try ’n’ Find

Words that remind us of Kwanzaa are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

African-American
instructions: 3. 2. 1.

AFRICAN, AMERICAN, BLACK, FAST, FRUIT, GREEN, KARAMU, KINARA, KWANZAA, LANGUAGE, MATUNDA, MKEKA, PRINCIPLES, RED, SEVEN, SWAHILI, ZAWADI.

Cook’s Corner

Sweet Potato Biscuits

What to do:
1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large mixing bowl, stir together flour, brown sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, salt, ginger and allspice.
2. Add shortening and cut in with two knives until crumbly. Add sweet potatoes and mix well with a whisk.
3. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Roll out dough to 1 1/2 inches thick. Cut out biscuits with a 2-inch floured biscuit cutter. Place 1 inch apart on ungreased baking sheets.
4. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes until golden brown. Makes about 2 dozen biscuits.

Mini Jokes

Katie: What do you call a shy lamb?
Kaleb: Baaaahhhhh!

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Resources

On the Web:
• bit.ly/MPKwanzaa

At the library:
• “Together for Kwanzaa” by Juwanda G. Fox
• “Seven Candles for Kwanzaa” by Andrea Davis Pinkney

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For later:

Look in your newspaper for items about Kwanzaa celebrations in your community.

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