presents

SWEET POTATO PIE AND SUCH

A Storytelling Experience

STUDY GUIDE

Queen Nur

BACKGROUND ON STORYTELLING

Storytelling is older than all other creative arts. It is said to be older than history. Storytelling transcends time, continents, and civilizations. It originated on the African continent and spread throughout the world. Stories may differ from place to place. In some cultures such as in Ghana, the teller is expected to repeat a story as it has been told for generations. It is not unusual to find a storyteller being interrupted by a listener if the style or content of a traditional story has been altered by the teller. In other instances, stories often change to fit the time and context in which they are being told, but universally, storytelling has continued to fill the same basic social and individual needs.

Stories are:

1. ...the way in which the history, traditions and cultural values are passed on from generation to generation.
2. ...the way in which the rules of the community are reinforced with children.
3. ...a way of explaining natural phenomena (*why* or *porquois* stories)
4. ...a fundamental unit of knowledge.
5. ...the foundation of memory.
6. ...essential to the way we make sense of our lives: the beginning, the middle and end of our personal and collective trajectories.

The early storyteller was established as the bringer of good news, the historian, the disperser of the culture, the upholder of religious belief systems and morals, and an entertainer. In many West African cultures there was the "resident storyteller" (*griot, djali,* or *Jali*) who was assigned to chiefs, royalty, and others with status in the community. His position was one of high honor, great respect, and power. The "travelling storyteller" went from village to village with tales, anecdotes, fables, accounts of natural disasters, births, deaths, successions, songs, and any event that affected the welfare of the people.

In the mid-to-late 1800's, folklorists began to seek out and preserve traditional African tales in written form. Collections of narratives became an important part of the preservation of the oral tradition. Out of this work came many anthologies of African and African American folktales by folklorists and researchers such as Roger Abrahams, Harold Courlander, B.A. Botkin and William Faulkner.

GETTING READY FOR THE STORYTELLER – Suggested Activities

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

Familiarize your children with African and African American folktales by:

...reading aloud or having your children read several folktales (consult your school librarian for help, or refer to the sources in this guide)

...choose an Anansi story, a tall tale, a dilemma tale (the resolution of a conflict is left for the listeners to discuss), a story that offers an explanation for natural phenomena (a *porquoi* or *why* tale) such as *Why Mosquitos Buzz in People's Ears.* Do any of the stories have morals or lessons? What are they?

...try to find two versions of the same story. Have children make comparisons between the two.

...encourage students to **tell** – not read – a story they are already familiar with. Discuss the differences between telling a story and reading that same story from a book.

...have your students brainstorm what they think a storyteller might do to make a story interesting to the audience. Make a list on chart paper. Encourage them to watch and listen carefully during the performance to observe the storyteller's voice, facial expressions, and body movements. Are there instruments used? How are they used in telling the story?

Please note: *It is important to refer to the* ***African continent*** *as just that – a* ***continent.*** *It is as diverse, if not more so, than the European continent. There are 52 separate countries and hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, cultural traditions and belief systems within each country's borders. Just as we make a point to clearly identify Pols, Czechs, Armenians, Scots, Celts, Welsh, Bosnians, Serbs, Croats, or the Hmong, we must also make a point to do the same when referring to inhabitants of the vast and ethnically diverse continent of Africa.*

Familiarize your students with the names, locations, and diverse cultures of the African continent by:

...identifying the ethnic group, culture, or country associated with the stories you use. Write and speak the name of the group or region of origin when referring to the story. *Example:* Anansi stories were created by the *Ashanti* people of what is now *Ghana* in the western part of the continent. Sungura the trickster rabbit comes from *Kenya* on the opposite side of the continent. The land areas, peoples, and lifestyles are all different.

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DURING THE PERFORMANCE

Listen and observe the storyteller carefully. Participate when asked.

Notice how the storyteller uses his or her voice? Take notice of any additional items that the teller uses to enhance the story.

Visualize the setting of the characters of the story.

Be aware of what parts of the stories make you laugh, feel empathy, excitement, sorrow, fear, or suspense. Did any of the situations in the story sound familiar to you? What were they?

If the story has animal characters, pay attention to their behavior in the story. Do they take on human characteristics?

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What specific things held their attention the most?

Did any of the stories leave them with something to think about or discuss? What, if any, lessons were learned from the stories? Which stories? What were the lessons?

If there were instruments, how were they used to enhance the story?

Which of the stories did you most enjoy? Retell the story in your own way.

Illustrate one of the stories.

Research and select a different story for telling.

Create your own story – one that teaches a lesson perhaps.

Sweet Potato Pie and Such

Story Repertoire

Queen Nur

The performance will include stories selected from the following repertoire.*
**story selections will vary*

Sweet Potato Pie Call is an original work song sung in a traditional format.

Ruth Oree's Sweet Potato *Pie* is a contemporary version of Red Riding Hood written by Queen Nur. It shares folkways of city life and lessons of truth centered around a family's traditional sweet potato pie.

John The Rabbit is a call and response traditional song from the time period when Africans were enslaved in America. It was used to teach children how to follow directions. Its primary function was as a coded message. While singing about a rabbit and a garden, the captives were planning their escape.

Harriet Tubman Didn't Take No Stuff is a retelling of Eloise Greenfield's popular poem. The storytellers add to the verses a phrase involving the audience through motion and singing.

Zora Neale Hurston and The Chinaberry Tree written by William Miller is a story that embodies the pursuit of hopes and dreams and overcoming circumstances. The story shares the childhood experiences of one of America's folklorist.

The Lion and The Hare is an interactive retelling of a favorite animal tale. The hare tricks the lion into acting like a horse. Students learn lessons of self-esteem and self-determination while engaging in thigh pats, singing and call and response.

Healing Hands is a telling of a traditional African tale. The written version is entitled The River That Gave Gifts. A very special celebration will take place for an elder mother. One little girl believes that she only has ordinary hands and cannot make her a special gift. However, nature reveals her inherent gift of healing. This is a story of self-discovery and identifying and appreciating the gifts each of us have.

In The Time of The Drum embodies life lessons learned by a young boy named Mentu. His teacher is Twe, his grandmother. The story takes place on an island during the time when African people were in captivity and bondage. This story comes from the Georgia Sea Island Tradition.

Baba Rabbit & The Coconut Tree tells how Baba rabbit's cousin Brer Rabbit, deals with the greed of his neighbors. The story ends with an African American proverb that says "Ashes fly back into the face of those who throw them."

Rafiki written and illustrated by Nola Langner, this animal tale speaks to gender equity. The animals all live in the same house and are told "animals do not clean, only little girls clean." Then, one day a little girl comes walking through the forest. Lessons are learned and attitudes are changed in this dancing story.

The Black Inventors Rap is an original call and response rap that teaches the inventions of varies African and African American inventors.

Women's First is an interactive rap honoring women who made first achievements. "It's alright to rearrange. It's all right to make a change."

Story Repertoire, continued

The Kwanzaa Yam Story is Queen Nur's repetitive retelling of a traditional Russian animal tale. It includes the seven principles of Kwanzaa, and the Kwanzaa symbols, and shouts of "Harambee" (Let's pull together) as all try to pull up a stubborn yam.

Jump Down Turn Around is a traditional work song used while picking cotton. Introduced by having the audience use math skills, the song bellows the emotion of working with family, while enduring the work. Selected participants join the storytellers to perform the work movements.

Mary McCleod Bethune Story is a story about a little girl who turned her desire to read (at a time when she would not have been allowed to pick up a book) into a life-long mission. As a civil activist and advocate of education, Mary was a soldier of truth, faith, and determination.

RESOURCE LIST*

Storytelling Websites:

National Association of Black Storytellers, Inc. WWW.NABSNET.ORG

National Storytelling Network WWW.STORYNET.ORG

Recordings by Queen Nur: *Sweet Potato Pie and Such* and *Generation to Generation*

Suggested Reading

A Story, A Story by Gail E. Haley. New York: Atheneum, 1970. The story of how Anansi brought "spider stories" to the world.

Misoso: Once Upon a Time Tales from Africa by Verna Aardema. New York: Knopf, 1994. A collection of twelve folktales from different parts of Africa.

The Hat-Shaking Dance, and other Tales from the Gold Coast by Harold Courlander. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1957. A collection of traditional Ashanti tales.

The Storytelling Handbook: a Young People's Collection of Unusual Tales and Helpful Hints on How to Tell Them by Anne Pellowski (1995).

The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales by Virginia Hamilton. New York: Knopf, 1985

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*WANT MORE INFORMATION?

An extensive ***EDUCATORS' RESOURCE GUIDE*** by Queen Nur is available from Theatreworks/USA upon request. A **KWANZAA** supplemental packet is also available. Contact us at (212) 647-1100 to request copies.

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THE BULLY-FREE ZONE

A Storytelling Experience

STUDY GUIDE

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THE BULLY-FREE ZONE

Folk tales, fables and hip-hop take center stage in Queen Nur's inspiring show about accepting each other's differences:

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What are they?

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DURING THE PERFORMANCE

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AFTER THE PERFORMANCE:

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BULLYING STATISTICS:

Researchers from the National Center for School Engagement conducted a series of studies to explore the connections between bullying in schools, school attendance and engagement, and academic achievement. This bulletin provides an overview of the OJJDP-funded studies, a summary of the researchers' findings, and recommendations for policy and practice.

Following are some of the authors' key findings:

- Bullying is a complex social and emotional phenomenon that plays out differently on an individual level.
- Bullying does not directly cause truancy.
- School engagement protects victims from truancy and low academic achievement.
- When schools provide a safe learning environment in which adults model positive behavior, they can mitigate the negative effects of bullying.
- Any interventions to address bullying or victimization should be intentional, student-focused engagement strategies that fit the context of the school where they are used.

IDENTIFYING BULLYING

- Bullying is identified as any behavior that tries to hurt or break a person's self-worth.

TYPES OF BULLYING

- Bullying is an ongoing problem and while schools try to prevent it, it can be a difficult task as there are several different types of bullying.
    - Physical bullying
    - Verbal bullying
    - Emotional bullying
    - Exclusion
    - Cyber bullying

Each case of bullying should be addressed and not taken lightly. Schools should take steps to make students feel safe at all times. While it's almost impossible to eliminate bullying, a good bullying prevention program can go a long way to trying to achieve this goal.

Cyber bullying; Cyber bullying is recognized as spreading of rumors and/or using hurtful words through the use of some electronic devices. While adults have separated "cyber" bullying from face-to-face bullying, this is an increasing problem as adolescents see their online and offline identities as one.

How to respond to cyber bullying:

- Parents and children should define their rules as a family about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior on a computer, cellphone, smartphone or any other wireless device.

- Parents should offer an open line of communication to their children so they feel comfortable coming to them to discuss any inappropriate images or messages that might be sent to them. Parents should remember to get all the facts before reacting.
- If the situation calls for school officials or law enforcement to get involved, parents should discuss this with their child and let them know what action they plan to take.

EXERCISES FOR SPEAKING GOOD OF OTHERS:

- Have students stand in a circle. Go around the circle and have students look to their right and say something positive about the person standing next to them. When the circle is completed, if there is time, have students repeat this action with the student on their left side.
- Have an open dialogue to discuss recognizing bullying. Ask the students for some situations that they might feel comfortable role-playing. Have the class watch the scene and come up with three possible, positive solutions. Then have the students act out the solutions. Discuss which solution the students thought were the most effective.
- Have students make a list of ten positive characteristics they see in themselves.
- Place an "anti-bullying" box in your classroom, like a suggestion box. Tell students they can write on a piece of paper when they witness or experience an instance of bullying. Read the papers on a daily basis and discuss them, trying to find positive solutions to what happened. Let the students know that their stories will be anonymous to encourage them not to be afraid to put their stories in the box.

TOLERANCE – CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES:

"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."
Coretta Scott King
"Memories of our lives, of our works, and our deeds will continue in others."
Rosa Parks

- Repeat the first exercise under 'speaking good of others' but have the students say something positive about the person standing next to them that is a different characteristic from them. For example, "You are really good in math. I admire that trait because math isn't as easy for me as some other subjects." Students will have the opportunity to see the positive traits others see in them while also understanding how it feels to build someone up through positive reinforcement.
- Have students bring in something they think represents their family background. It could be a family tree or crest, a photograph or a food dish. Have students share what they brought in with the class and discuss how it represents their family background. Encourage students to ask questions after each presentation.
- Have students research a culture they're interested in learning more about. Have them give a 3-5 minute report on what they learned using photographs, stories and maybe even music to tell demonstrate what they learned.

NO FIGHTING ZONE:

Queen Nur promotes a "Bully Free Zone" in her show as well as a "No fighting zone."

- After seeing the performance, talk to students about what they think a "no-fighting" zone is and how they can implement it in and outside of the classroom. Make a list of things they bring up and post it in school so if bad behavior begins, they can check the list and then make sure it stops. This way all of the students can take responsibility for their behavior as well as learning to stop bad behavior before it starts.

NO TEASING ZONE:

Queen Nur promotes a "Bully Free Zone" in her show as well as a "No teasing zone."

- After seeing the performance, talk to students about what they think a “no-teasing” zone is and how they can implement it in and outside of the classroom. Make a list of things they bring up and post it in school so if teasing begins, they can check the list and then make sure it stops.
- Teasing can often be misconstrued as funny and harmless if the person being teased doesn’t speak up. Ask students for examples of a time they felt teased and what they did about it. Discuss positive ways students can speak up or diffuse teasing before it escalates into something worse.

FRIENDSHIP DIALOGUE:

- Teaching students to recognize the power of words plays an important role in recognizing verbal bullying. Teach students to share “friendship dialogue” by speaking to each other in class as if they are all good friends.

KINDNESS:

- Ask students to keep a kindness journal and have them write down when they experience an act of kindness or do something kind for someone else. Have them write down how it makes them feel to spread kindness and joy and how it affects others around them as well.
- Hold a poster contest against bullying. Have the students put their names on the back and turn them in.

SUGGESTED READING:

Bullying: a resource guide for parents and teachers, Vivette O'Donnell, Attic Press

The Anti-bullying Handbook, Keith Sullivan, Oxford University Press

Bully Busting: how to help children deal with teasing and bullying, Evelyn Field, Finch

Breaking The Silence - A Guide To Helping Children With Complicated Grief, Linda Goldman

The Bully, The Bullied and the Bystander, Barbara Coloroso, Harper Collins

Encounters with Every-Day Angels, Kathy Noll

theatre works USA
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Presents

KWANZAA

A celebration of family, community and culture

STUDY GUIDE

KWANZAA, performed by Queen Nur and her percussionist partner, is an hour-long presentation featuring stories and songs about the African holiday, to the accompaniment of live percussion on traditional instruments. This highly energetic and interactive performance utilizes traditional storytelling techniques and African song structure (ie: call and response, etc.)

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STORIES INCLUDED IN QUEEN NUR'S KWANZAA:

The Kwanzaa Yam Story is Queen Nur's repetitive retelling of a traditional Russian animal tale. It includes the seven principles of Kwanzaa, and the Kwanzaa symbols, and shouts of AHarambee@ (Let's pull together) as all try to pull up a stubborn yam.

Sia Humba is a repetitive traditional African song. The lyrics are: Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos' (pronounced SIya HUMba KUKa NYEN KWEN kos), which translates as "We are marching in the light of God".

Mary McCleod Bethune Story is a story about a little girl who turned her desire to read (at a time when she would not have been allowed to pick up a book) into a life-long mission. As a civil activist and advocate of education, Mary was a soldier of truth, faith, and determination.

WHAT IS KWANZAA?

Kwanzaa is an African American and Pan-African holiday which celebrates family, community and culture. Celebrated from December 26 thru January 1, its origins are in the first harvest celebrations of Africa from which it takes its name. The name Kwanzaa is derived from the phrase "matunda ya kwanza" which means "first fruits" in Swahili, a Pan-African language which is the most widely spoken African language.

The first-fruits celebrations are recorded in African history as far back as ancient Egypt and Nubia and appear in ancient and modern times in other classical African civilizations such as Ashantiland and Yorubaland. These celebrations are also found in ancient and modern times among societies as large as empires (the Zulu or kingdoms (Swaziland) or smaller societies and groups like the Matabele, Thonga and Lovedu, all of southeastern Africa.

Kwanzaa builds on the five fundamental activities of Continental African "first fruit" celebrations: ingathering; reverence; commemoration; recommitment; and celebration.
Kwanzaa, then, is:

- a time of ingathering of the people to reaffirm the bonds between them;
- a time of special reverence for the creator and creation in thanks and respect for the blessings, bountifulness and beauty of creation;
- a time for commemoration of the past in pursuit of its lessons and in honor of its models of human excellence, our ancestors;
- a time of recommitment to our highest cultural ideals in our ongoing effort to always bring forth the best of African cultural thought and practice; and
- a time for celebration of the Good, the good of life and of existence itself, the good of family, community and culture, the good of the awesome and the ordinary, in a word the good of the divine, natural and social.

Rooted in this ancient history and culture, Kwanzaa develops as a flourishing branch of the African American life and struggle as a recreated and expanded ancient tradition. Thus, it bears special characteristics only an African American holiday but also a Pan-African one, For it draws from the cultures of various African peoples, and is celebrated by millions of Africans throughout the world African community. Moreover, these various African peoples celebrate Kwanzaa because it speaks not only to African Americans in a special way, but also to Africans as a whole, in its stress on history, values, family, community and culture.

Kwanzaa was established in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, in the midst of the Black Freedom Movement and thus reflects its concern for cultural groundedness in thought and practice, and the unity and self-determination associated with this. It was conceived and established to serve several functions.

Finally, it is important to note Kwanzaa is a cultural holiday, not a religious one, thus available to and practiced by Africans of all religious faiths who come together based on the rich, ancient and varied common ground of their Africanness

Why do we celebrate Kwanzaa?

First, Kwanzaa was created to reaffirm and restore our rootedness in African culture. It is, therefore, an expression of recovery and reconstruction of African culture which was being conducted in the general context of the Black Liberation Movement of the '60's and in the specific context of The Organization Us, the founding organization of Kwanzaa and the authoritative keeper of its tradition.

Secondly, Kwanzaa was created to serve as a regular communal celebration to reaffirm and reinforce the bonds between us as a people. It was designed to be an ingathering to strengthen community and reaffirm common identity, purpose and direction as a people and a world community.

Thirdly, Kwanzaa was created to introduce and reinforce the *Nguzo Saba* (the Seven Principles.):

Umoja (Unity)
To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.

Kujichagulia (Self-Determination)
To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.

Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)
To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)
To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.

Nia (Purpose)
To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

Kuumba (Creativity)
To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

Imani (Faith)
To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

(Note that the names of the children in Queen Nur's "Kwanzaa Yam Story" are also the names of the seven principles of Kwanzaa.)

This stress on the *Nguzo Saba* was at the same time an emphasis on the importance of African communitarian values in general, which stress family, community and culture and speak to the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest sense. And Kwanzaa was conceived as a fundamental and important way to introduce and reinforce these values and cultivate appreciation for them.

RESOURCE LIST*

Storytelling Websites:

National Association of Black Storytellers, Inc. WWW.NABSNET.ORG
National Storytelling Network WWW.STORYNET.ORG

Recordings by Queen Nur: *Sweet Potato Pie and Such* and *Generation to Generation*

Suggested Reading

- *A Story, A Story* by Gail E. Haley. New York: Atheneum, 1970. The story of how Anansi brought "spider stories" to the world.
- *Misoso: Once Upon a Time Tales from Africa* by Verna Aardema. New York: Knopf, 1994. A collection of twelve folktales from different parts of Africa.
- *The Hat-Shaking Dance, and other Tales from the Gold Coast* by Harold Courlander. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1957. A collection of traditional Ashanti tales.
- *The Storytelling Handbook: a Young People's Collection of Unusual Tales and Helpful Hints on How to Tell Them* by Anne Pellowski (1995).
- *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* by Virginia Hamilton. New York: Knopf, 1985

SYMBOLS OF KWANZAA

Here are the seven basic symbols and two optional symbols of Kwanza.

1. Kinara
(Ki-nara)
Candleholder

The symbol of our ancestors.

2. Mkeka
(M-Ke-Ka)
Mat

The Mkeka represents our foundation.

3. KiKombe Cha Umoja
(Ki-Kom-be Cha U-mo-ja)
Unity cup

A symbol of unity used by everyone taking part in the Kwanzaa celebration.

4. Mishumma Saba
(Mi-shum-ma Sa-ba)
The seven candles

The candles represent the Nguzo Saba (the seven principles of Kwanzaa). One candle is lit each day of the celebration.

5. Mazao
(Ma-zao)
Fruits and vegetables

The mazao is a symbol of how we work together.

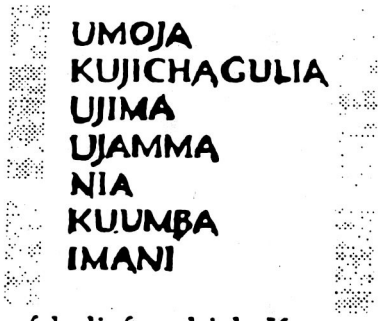
6. Vibunzi
(Vi-bun-zi)
Ears of corn

The Vibunzi represents children.

7. Zawadi
(Za-wa-di)
Gifts

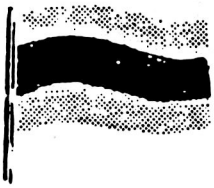
Gifts are given as a reward for work well done.

8. Nguzo Saba
(N-gu-zo Sa-ba)
The seven principles



A set of beliefs which Kwanzaa is based on.

9. Bendera ya Taifa
(Ben-dera ya Ta-ifa)
The red, black and green flag.

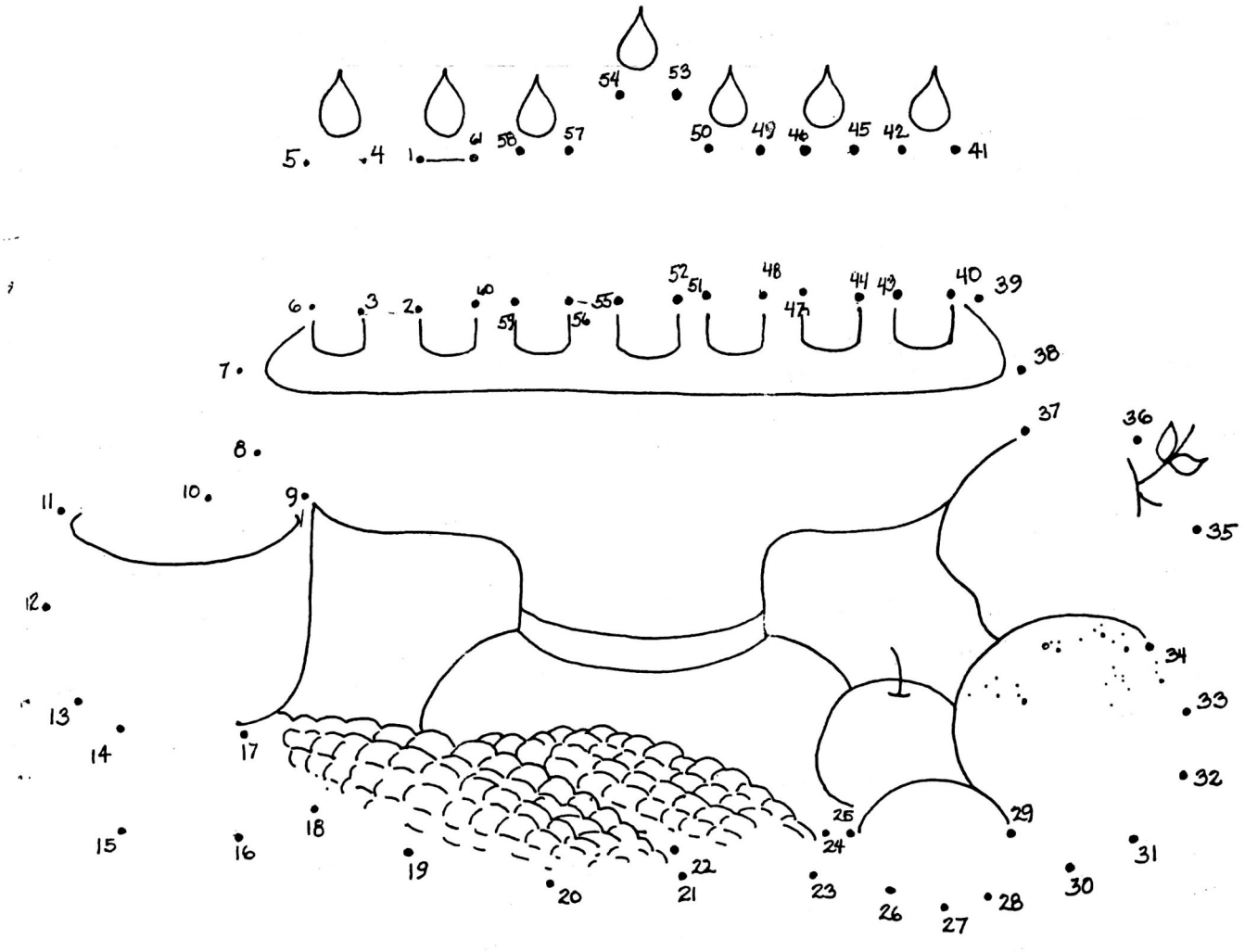


The flag was used by a great Black leader, Marcus Garvey. Red is for the blood of African people, Black is for the face of African people. Green is for hope and Africa.

KWANZAA -- WHAT IS IT?

Kwanzaa is a special African-American cultural celebration. It takes places from December 26 through January 1. For seven days and seven nights, families and friends celebrate the richness of African-American culture.

Connect the dots from 1 to 61 to complete this picture of the Kwanzaa table.

Can you name the different parts of this picture?

- *Kinara* (candleholder)
- *Kikombe Cha Umoja* (unity cup)
- *Mishumma Saba* (the seven candles – what do they symbolize?)
- *Mazao* (fruits and vegetables)
- *Vibundi* (vibundi)