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.)

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**

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 culutres 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.

...identifying on a map or globe – not just the African continent – but the country (and ethnic group or culture where possible) of the story's origin. *Examples:* The Ashanti of Ghana, the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Baganda of Uganda, the Shona of Zimbabwe.

...selecting an ethnic group, country or region of the continent. Research and explore the cultural traditions, foods, clothing, family structures, and languages of that region.

...if you have access to a computer, search through an encyclopedia on CD-ROM (such as *Grolier's* or *Encarta*). Type in (or click-on) and African country and download or print out the information. What do you discover that you didn't know before? Did you discover information that is on your brainstormed list?

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?
- Notice if a character – human or animal – learns a lesson in the story. Is there something in the story that the listener can learn from?

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

- Review the list that was brainstormed before the performance. Ask your students to see if there are any items on the list that the storyteller incorporated into her storytelling style. Ask them to recall anything the storyteller did that was not on the list.
- 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.

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

UMOJA
KUJICHAGULIA
UJIMA
UJAMMA
NIA
KUUMBA
IMANI

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)

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