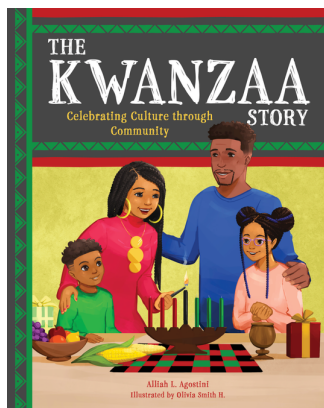




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The Kwanzaa Story



The Kwanzaa Story Activity Guide

By Alliah L. Agostini, illus. by Olivia Smith H.

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Ages 6 to 9

About the Book

Discover the history and importance of Kwanzaa, a week-long December holiday celebrated in Black, African, and African American culture.

In *The Kwanzaa Story*, little Alliah (of *The Juneteenth Story* fame) is all grown up and, along with her husband LeVaur, teaches their children Daphne and Alistair why they celebrate Kwanzaa as a family and as a community. This beautifully illustrated storybook shares the origins of the holiday—rooted in Africa, born in Los Angeles—giving historical and cultural context on how a joyful celebration was birthed after the Watts Rebellion and during the Civil Rights Movement.

2025 marks the 60th observance of Kwanzaa. *The Kwanzaa Story* offers Black, African, and African American children the opportunity to connect with their culture and the holiday in a meaningful way, and to see themselves and their family traditions represented on the page with accuracy and joy. This book also exposes children of different backgrounds to a new end-of-year cultural celebration, taking them on an engaging and educational journey about the principles and traditions of the holiday. This visually captivating guide to understanding Kwanzaa encourages young readers to connect with the holiday and its social impact.

Follow along as Alliah and her family discover the cultural significance of Kwanzaa's principles and symbols, providing a tangible element to the holiday that will allow kids and family members to fully and joyfully participate in its celebration. Readers of all ages will love learning about the amazing history and traditions of Kwanzaa through the wise and educational storytelling in *The Kwanzaa Story*.

About the Author



Buffalo, New York–native Alliah L. Agostini writes to spread joy and truth, and to illuminate the breadth of childhood experiences. Alliah is the award-winning author of a number of books for young readers, including *The Juneteenth Story*, *BIG TUNE*, *Oprah Winfrey: A Little Golden Book Biography*, *The Juneteenth Cookbook*, and more. She resides in New Jersey with her husband and two children, and has an AB and an MBA from Harvard.

About the Illustrator



Olivia Smith H. has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Graphic Design from California State University, East Bay. Her favorite materials are digital paints, watercolor, and gouache. Often inspired by nature, fantasy, beauty, and reality, she has created many watercolor and digital illustrations and illustrated several children's books, including *The Mess* and *A Father's Love*. Olivia is always excited to use her illustrations to help with education, bring joy, and make childhood dreams come true.

Activity 1: Swahili Word Match

Pair the Swahili word on the left with the English word on the right by drawing a line between the matching phrases.

Matunda	Straw Mat
Kwanza	Candleholder
Saba	Corn
Maulana	Candles
Umoja	Creativity
Imani	Unity Cup
Kuumba	Master Teacher
Kinara	Fruits
Mishumaa	Crops
Mkeka	Unity
Muhindi	First
Mazao	Faith
Kikombe Cha Umoja	What's the News?
Habari Gani	Let's Unite
Harambee	Seven

Activity 2: Kwanzaa Timeline

Put the following events in chronological order by adding a number 1 through 12.

- ____ Spain attempts to establish the first slave colony in current-day America. It fails after enslaved people fight back.
- ____ Black residents of the Los Angeles Watts neighborhood fight back against unequal rights and unfair treatment for almost a week.
- ____ The Civil War ends, signaling the end of slavery in the United States along with the Thirteenth Amendment.
- ____ The Egyptian kingdom rules as the earliest known kingdom in Africa. It would become the first of many.
- ____ Kwanza becomes Kwanzaa at the first karamu.
- ____ US, a Black Power group motivated to live life inspired by Black unity and love for the culture, is founded by Dr. Maulana Karenga.
- ____ Inspired by research on African harvest traditions and US's Kawaida principles, US holds the first Kwanza in Los Angeles, California.
- ____ The Civil Rights Movement, a massive effort to end racial segregation, is led by notable leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.
- ____ Kwanzaa spreads—first to San Diego, then to northern California, and then to other centers of the Black Power movement across the United States.
- ____ Along with an increase of Black pride in movies, music, and fashion, Kwanzaa becomes popular and is celebrated across schools, churches, and organizations.
- ____ Kwanzaa marks its sixtieth year as a holiday.
- ____ The Black Power Movement encourages Black pride, unity, and justice.



Activity 3: Seven Principles & You

Which of the seven principles of Kwanzaa means the most to you? Draw a picture on the next page, and write a short description below of yourself practicing that principle and what it means to you.

1. **UMOJA**, or unity—to establish a sense of togetherness in our families, communities, nation, and the African diaspora, or the many places where African-descended people live around the world.
2. **KUJICHAGULIA**, self-determination—our individual ability to define, name, create, and speak for ourselves.
3. **UJIMA**, collective work and responsibility—to work together to build and maintain our community.
4. **UJAMAA**, cooperative economics—a commitment to make and support Black businesses.
5. **NIA**, purpose—to make everyone’s focus the building of the community to restore Black people to their original greatness.
6. **KUUMBA**, creativity—to make our communities more beautiful and fruitful than they were when we arrived.
7. **IMANI**, or faith, focused on believing in our people and ourselves as we work together and move forward.



Activity 3: Seven Principles & You

Activity 4: Kwanzaa Vocabulary Identification

Match the labeled item on the cover with its Kwanzaa vocab word below.

___ mishumaa

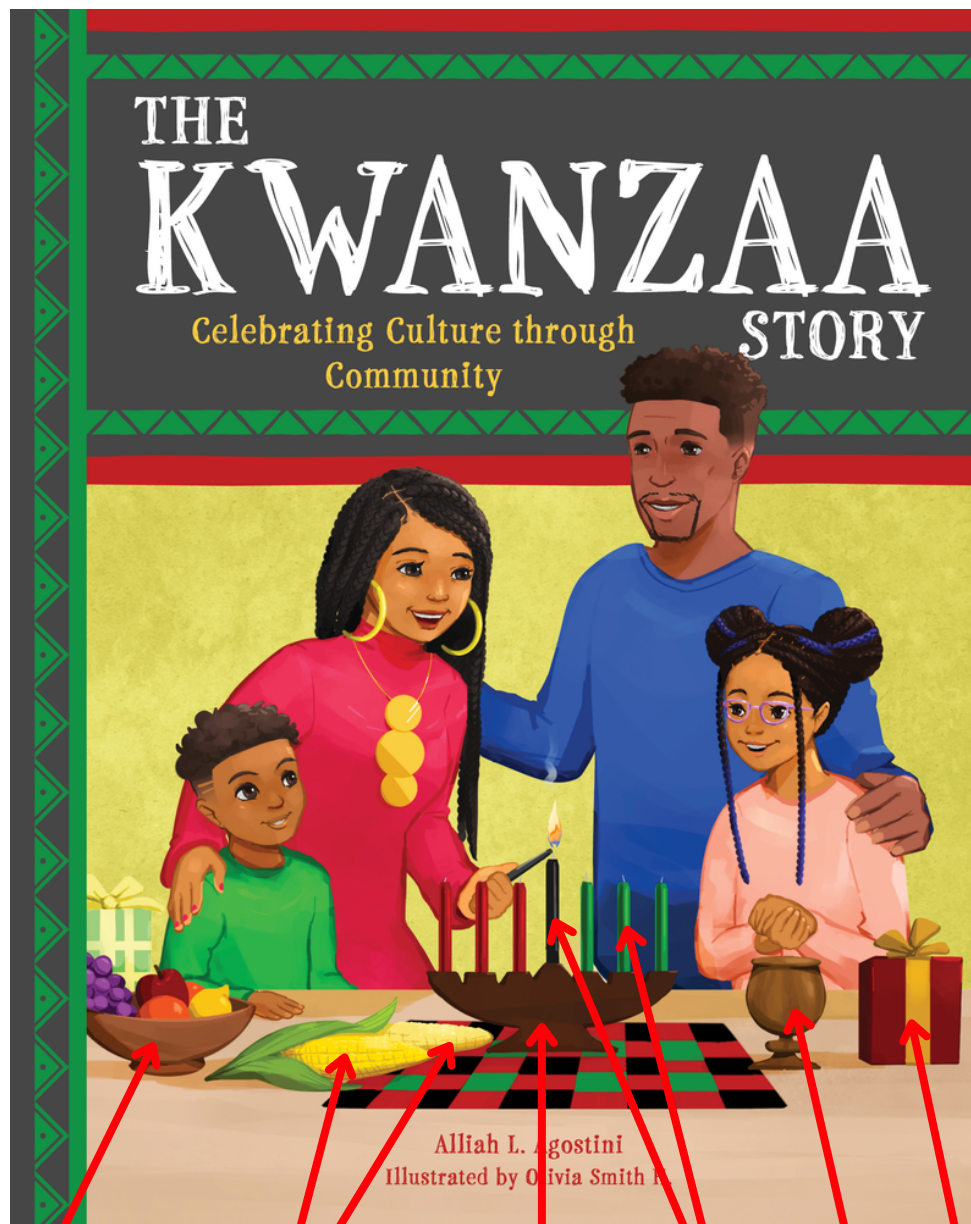
___ kikombe cha umoja

___ kinara

___ muhindi

___ zawadi

___ mazao



A

B

C

D

E

F

Activity 5: Zawadi - Make an African Tote Bag

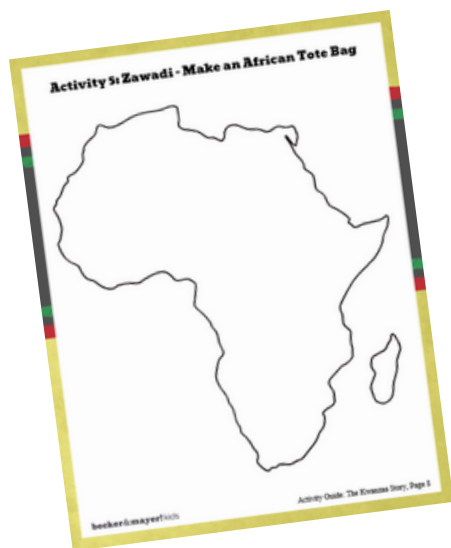
Make a colorful tote bag with an abstract illustration of Africa, the place where the Kwanzaa story truly begins.

Tools Needed:

- [Plain black tote bag or drawstring bag](#)
- Template - outline of Africa - printed on paper or cardstock (scale it so it fits on the bag you choose)
- [Scrap fabric](#), especially African wax cloth fabric
- Scissors
- Chalk
- Fabric glue
- 1 rectangular piece of solid colored fabric (big enough to cover the Africa template).

Directions:

- Cut out the Africa template on the following page and trace it onto a solid colored fabric lightly with chalk or a pencil. Then cut along the outline.
- Glue the fabric squares onto the solid cloth until it is covered. Once the glue is dry, trim the fabric as necessary to make sure the Africa outline is clear.
- Place the fabric-covered cloth into the bag and smooth it out so it is flat and Africa is filled with the fabric. Glue the Africa-shaped panel onto the bag. Let dry.
- Lift up the black fabric along the edge of the outline and generously glue the panel into place. Let dry.



Activity 5: Zawadi - Make an African Tote Bag



Activity 6: Re-enact the first karamu - where Kwanza became KwanzaA!

Kwanzaa didn't always have its second 'A'! It was added when another child wanted to participate in a play during the first karamu, and each child was supposed to wear one of the letters that spell 'Kwanza' around their neck. Only problem, there were 6 letters and 7 children, so someone added an additional 'A' so all could participate!

Imagine you and your classmates or friends were at the first karamu - act out what you think may have happened and take notes below.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Activity 7: Food of the African Diaspora: Plantain

Kwanzaa was started in America, but is now celebrated where people with African ancestry live all over the world, also known as the African diaspora. Because of their shared background, people of African ancestry eat some of the same foods all around the world, especially in Africa and the Caribbean. One of these foods is plantain! It can be made in lots of different ways. Here are a couple of popular favorites. Try it at home and serve it with dinner or at your own Kwanzaa dinner.

Fried sweet plantain, also known as maduros, is a hit from Guyana to Ghana. This is best made with very ripe, yellow plantains. They're cut in 2-3 inch long slices about a quarter inch thick and fried in vegetable oil. Cook on each side until they are golden yellow and can be pierced with a fork. Let them rest on a paper towel and lightly sprinkle with salt.

Plantain chips are made with green plantain. They are sliced into thin circles and fried until they are crisp, like potato chips. Rest them on a paper towel to blot the oil and lightly sprinkle with salt.



Activity 8: Conversation Starters

- Have you ever been to a Kwanzaa celebration? Where was it and what was it like?
- Kwanzaa was a product of a time in history known as the Black Power Movement.
 - Have you ever heard of it before?
 - What did you know about it?
 - What did you learn that may have challenged what you thought about it, or was different from what you may have heard before?
- New traditions. Traditions don't come out of nowhere - Kwanzaa was a tradition started by not very long ago by someone who is still alive! Are there any traditions your family, community, or your culture may have started recently? Talk to your family or guardians.
- Living History - The 1990s (or before!)
 - Ask your parents or guardians to share memories or photos from 'back in the day', especially the 1960s, 70s, 80s, or 1990s. Do they remember when some of the events mentioned happened?
 - The family throughout the book is from the present day! Are there any styles or things they're wearing that remind you of you or people you know?



Answer Key

Activity #1

Matunda - Fruits
Kwanza - First
Saba - Seven
Maulana - Master Teacher
Umoja - Unity
Imani - Faith
Kuumba - Creativity
Kinara - Candleholder
Mishumaa - Candles
Mkeka - Straw Mat
Muhindi - Corn
Mazao - Crops
Kikombe Cha Umoja - Unity Cup
Habari Gani - What's the News?
Harambee - Let's Unite

Activity #4

D: mishumaa - candles
C: kinara - candle holder
F: zawadi - gift
E: kikombe cha umoja - unity cup
B: muhindi - ears of corn
A: mazao - basket of fruit

Activity #2

1. 3000 BC The Egyptian kingdom rules as the earliest known kingdom in Africa. It would become the first of many.
2. 1526 Spain attempts to establish the first slave colony in current-day America. It fails after enslaved people fight back.
3. April 9, 1865 The Civil War ends, signaling the end of slavery in the United States along with the Thirteenth Amendment.
4. 1954–1968 The Civil Rights Movement, a massive effort to end racial segregation, is led by notable leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.
5. August 11–16, 1965 Black residents of the Los Angeles Watts neighborhood fight back against unequal rights and unfair treatment for almost a week.
6. Mid-1960s–early 1970s The Black Power Movement encourages Black pride, unity, and justice.
7. September 7, 1965 **US**, a Black Power group motivated to live life inspired by Black unity and love for the culture, is founded by Dr. Maulana Karenga.
8. December 26, 1966 Inspired by research on African harvest traditions and **US**'s Kwanzaa principles, **US** holds the first Kwanza in Los Angeles, California.
9. December 31, 1966 Kwanzaa becomes Kwanzaa at the first karamu.
10. Late 1960s Kwanzaa spreads—first to San Diego, then to northern California, and then to other centers of the Black Power movement across the United States.
11. 1980s–1990s Along with an increase of Black pride in movies, music, and fashion, Kwanzaa becomes popular and is celebrated across schools, churches, and organizations.
12. 2025 Kwanzaa marks its sixtieth year as a holiday.

The Kwanzaa Story Activity Guide was created by Alliah L. Agostini



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