

# Brazos Valley African American Museum



**Curriculum Learning Trunk  
Lesson Plans for Elementary School- 3rd Grade**

**Kwanzaa  
1<sup>st</sup> Grade**

**Kwanzaa: Elementary 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Lesson Plan**  
**BVAAM**  
**Curriculum Learning Trunk - Lesson Plan**

- OBJECTIVE:** Students will learn and use new vocabulary related to Kwanzaa.  
Students will be able to identify the main ideas and details related to the celebration of Kwanzaa.  
Students will reflect on their daily lives to recognize how the Kwanzaa principles already play an important role in their lives.
- TEKS:** **Knowledge and Skills**  
**ELAR 1<sup>st</sup> Grade**
- 1.1A Listen actively, ask relevant questions to clarify information, and answer questions using multi-word responses.
  - 1.1D Work collaboratively with others by following agreed-upon rules for discussion, including listening to others, speaking when recognized, and making appropriate contributions.
  - 1.1E Develop social communication such as introducing himself/herself and others, relating experiences to a classmate, and expressing needs and feelings.
  - 1.7F Respond using newly acquired vocabulary as appropriate.
- BACKGROUND INFO:** Kwanzaa is a holiday celebrated in the United States to honor the African heritage and culture. It is a seven-day long festival that surrounds the lighting of one candle each day on the *kinara* (a candle holder). Each of the seven days of Kwanzaa is specifically dedicated to a principle of the African American culture: (1) unity, (2) self-determination, (3) collective work and responsibility, (4) cooperative economics, (5) purpose, (6) creativity, and (7) faith.
- TIME ESTIMATION:** 40- 45 minutes for the first day.  
15 minutes for the next six days.
- MATERIALS NEEDED:** 7 cardboard toilet paper rolls  
1 painted black  
3 painted red  
3 painted green  
Yellow, Red, and/or Orange tissue paper  
*The Gifts of Kwanzaa* by Synthia Saint James  
Kwanzaa Kinara coloring page (one for each student)  
Crayons (black, red, green, and yellow/orange/red) for students to use
- ENGAGE:** Before starting the lesson, gauge the students' understanding of what Kwanzaa is. Are there any students in class whose family celebrates Kwanzaa? (If so, allow them to share as they are comfortable.) What holidays do other students in class celebrate during the winter months? What are some important pieces of those holidays? Family? Gifts? Etc.
- EXPLORE:** **Step 1:** Answer the questions asked by the teacher and engage in small class discussion as students begin to unpack their understanding of

family and cultural holidays that they celebrate. It is important for the teacher to foster an open dialogue that is respectful of holidays that may be in the minority of other holidays celebrated in your classroom (i.e. Hanukah vs Christmas).

**Step 2:** Read *The Gifts of Kwanzaa* by Synthia Saint James out loud as a whole class activity.

**Step 3:** As you read the book, take time to stop and discuss each of the seven principles of Kwanzaa. Ask students how these principles might look in their own life? In the classroom? On the playground?

**Step 4:** Hand each student a copy of the Kwanzaa Kinara coloring page. Explain to students that each day of Kwanzaa one of the candles is lit and time of reflection is given for the principle of that day. Have the students color the black candle in the middle of their Kinara. (Each day, allow time for the students to color the respective candle for that day.)

**Step 5:** “Light” (use the tissue paper) the black “candle” (toilet paper roll) on the Kinara at the front of the class. Today, explain that the black candle is lit as a day of togetherness and unity: Umoja (oo-MO-jah).

**Step 6:** Have students repeat the word “Umoja” as a class and then have them discuss with their table why they are thankful for their classroom, their teacher, and their peers. Why is it important that we all get along together? How can sharing our feelings help make our classroom a happier place?

**\*\*Repeat steps 4-6 each day for the next six days focusing on the principle of that day:**

**Day 2: A red candle is lit. (Kujichagulia)**

What is a talent that each student has? Allow a few volunteers to share that talent with the class and encourage the class to show thankfulness and encouragement for their peers’ talents.

**Day 3: A green candle is lit. (Ujima)**

What is something that the entire class can do together? Perhaps straighten up a bookshelf? Clean the tables? Find something for the class to do together and celebrate once it has been complete.

**Day 4: A red candle is lit. (Ujamma)**

Bring a “gift” that the entire class can enjoy together. Show how the whole class gets to enjoy this gift together instead of only having individual gifts that they don’t share. This can be anything from a new pencil sharpener to a class pet, but it must be something that everyone benefits equally from having in the classroom.

**Day 5: A green candle is lit. (Nia)**

Today, share a hope or dream that you (the teacher) have. Ask students to share a hope or dream they have as well.

**Day 6: A red candle is lit. (Kuumba)**

Have each student create something, anything! It can be anything like a drawing, a poem, a dance, or a story. Allow time for students to share with their table/group and encourage students to share what they like about each of their creative pieces.

**Day 7: A green candle is lit. (Imani)**

On the last day of Kwanzaa, all the candles have been lit and a celebration feast is shared to reflect on ourselves, our friends and family, and our future. Have students bring in food to share or, as the teacher, bring in a few snacks for the students to celebrate.

**EXPLAIN:**

The mission of Kwanzaa is to put each of the seven principles into practice in our daily lives. Each day of Kwanzaa, a candle on the *Kinara* is lit. Each principle of Kwanzaa is typically spoken in Swahili. Go over each word on their respective days and explain what they mean in English:

Umoja (oo-MO-ja) means Unity: being joined together.

Kujichagulia (koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-ah) means Self-determination: being yourself.

Ujima (oo-JEE-mah) means Collective work and responsibility: helping one another.

Ujamaa (oo-jah-MAH) means Cooperative economics: sharing.

Nia (NEE-ah) means Purpose: having a goal.

Kuumba (koo-UH-mbah) means Creativity: using our hands and minds to make things.

Imani (ee-MAH-nee) means Faith: believing in ourselves, our ancestors, and our future.

**ELABORATE:**

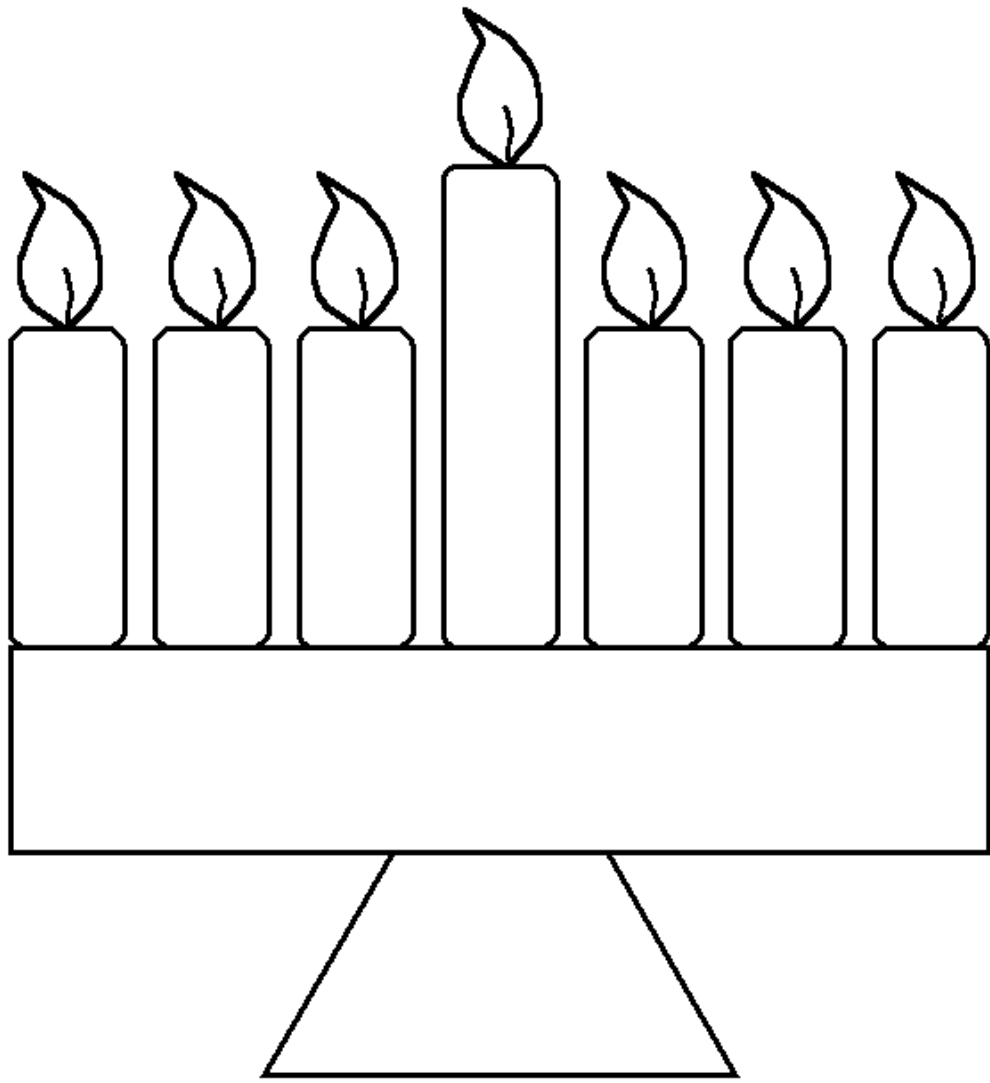
Have students choose their three favorite principles of Kwanzaa. On the back of their coloring sheet, have them draw a picture and write a sentence that describes those three principles. Gather students' completed Kwanzaa coloring sheets and display them in a "book" or binder as a unity gift for the class.

**EVALUATE:**

Assess the students' knowledge each day as they discuss the different principles of Kwanzaa. Praise and encourage students to continue to apply these principles even when they are outside of the class (playground, cafeteria, etc.).

**ACCOMODATIONS:**

Encouraging all students to participate is important, but allow students who are shy to write their discussion points down instead of speaking. Students who are ELL may benefit from having the candles on their coloring sheet labeled with both the Swahili and English words so that they can visually see them as they color and listen.



**Kwanzaa**