

Kwanzaa and It's Impact on Westhill

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A fully lit kinara celebrates the final day of the African American holiday of Kwanzaa. Photo via Creative Commons

For many Westhill students, the holiday season is all about family. A familial holiday some might not know about is Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is an annual celebration of African-American culture that takes place from December 26th to January 1st with the goal of honoring family and social values.

Each day of Kwanzaa is related to one of seven principles: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Kwanzaa originated in Africa, but it is also celebrated by students at Westhill.

“Kwanzaa is the holiday of African Americans because when they were slaves, they couldn’t celebrate Christmas.

Kwanzaa is celebrated with foods like corn, squash, lots of beans, and traditional African patterns are worn. Gifts aren’t given and no decorations are put up, it’s a dinner with family,” Anne-Laurie Petite-Frere (‘27) said.

Kwanzaa is celebrated in different ways by each family, but there is often different food on each day of Kwanzaa.

On December 31, the sixth day of Kwanzaa, there is a large feast called

Karamu. Just like other Kwanzaa meals, any dish can be included as part of the Karamu. The community celebrates through music, dance, poetry, storytelling, and art.

“Kwanzaa connects African-Americans to their roots. It’s very important for African-Americans to understand where they come from, their foundation, and this is why Kwanzaa is so important for African-American adults and children,” assistant principal Claudia Obas said.

Other ways that people celebrate through the seven principles are lighting the kinara, attend-

ing community events, reciting poems together, singing, and honoring ancestors.

The kinara is a seven-branched candleholder used in Kwanzaa celebrations in the United States.

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Seven candles are placed in the kinara. Three red candles on the left, three green candles on the right, and a single black candle in the center. The

black candle symbolizes the African people, the red their struggle. Meanwhile the green candle represents the future and hope that comes from their struggle.

African families share readings of the African Pledge, a principle of the day, or a chapter in African history. Households are decorated with art, African cloth like kente, and kaftans (worn by women.)

Kwanzaa is a very important holiday for African Americans as it connects them to their culture, and they enjoy feasts with their family.