

# Celebrate Kwanzaa: Weave a Mkeka

A traditional straw or woven textile mat, called a *mkeka*, is one of the seven symbols of Kwanzaa. Those who celebrate Kwanzaa view the *mkeka* as the base for the other six symbols of Kwanzaa, representing the idea that nothing can be built without having a foundation upon which to rest.

Celebrate this Kwanzaa tradition with your child, or acquaint them with a new and unexplored cultural practice, by helping them weave their own mat out of an ordinary paper bag! As your child spends an afternoon weaving, they'll strengthen important fine motor skills and receive valuable measurement practice.

## What You Need:

- Brown paper shopping bags
- Scissors
- Ruler or measuring tape
- Pencil
- Red, green, and black crayons or markers

## What You Do:

1. Cut two 9" x 12" rectangles out of the paper bag.
2. Invite your child to color a side of either one or both paper rectangles. Red, green, and black are traditional Kwanzaa colors, so encourage them to get creative with crayons or markers in these hues.
3. Using a ruler and pencil for assistance, have your child cut nine 12" x 1" strips out of one of the rectangles.
4. From the remaining rectangle, assist your child in cutting nine 1" strips starting at one edge of the shorter side and reaching to one inch from the other short end. To clarify, this means you should not cut all the way through the paper; there should be a 1" wide area that is not cut through. It may be helpful to use a pencil and ruler to mark both the width of the strips and the spot where your child will end their cut for each strip. However, encourage your child to get involved with the measuring as it will provide great math practice for them!
5. Now it's time to put it all together! Show your child how to weave the strips they cut in step 3 over and under the connected strips. Help them spread glue under the end of the strips to hold them in place.
6. If your child is interested in fringed edges for an extra touch, show them how to use scissors to cut fringes into the edges of all or some of the paper strips.

As your child intertwines strips of paper—and adds their own creative touches—they will be doing their part to honor the Kwanzaa principle of *kuumba*, or creativity.

