



Applying Kwanzaa Principles to Education: Imani

By Educator Barnes – January 1, 2022

Kwanzaa is celebrated from December 26 to January 1. According to the book “The Seven Days of Kwanzaa” by Angela Shelf Medearis, “In 1966, Dr. Karenga created Kwanzaa, a cultural holiday based upon the ancient customs of Africa ... Dr. Karenga hoped that the things that were studied and practiced during Kwanzaa would guide African-Americans all year long.” Each day of Kwanzaa covers one of the seven Kwanzaa principles. On each day of Kwanzaa, Indy K12 will explore how these principles can be applied to education.

The last principle of Kwanzaa is imani which means faith. In the movie “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse,” there is a part when Miles Morales is sitting on the edge of a tall building. His legs are dangling over the side. In the background, the song “What’s Up Danger?” is playing. In his head, Morales recalls a conversation he had with Peter Parker. He asked Parker, “When do I know I’m Spider-Man?” Parker responds, “You won’t. That’s all it is Miles, a leap of faith.” Although Morales had fear coursing through his veins, he placed the soles of his tennis shoes on the side of the building, reached his hands back behind him, and stuck them to the side of the building which made his body parallel to the ground far below.

Although he did not know what would happen when he let go, he ripped his hands from the side of the building and dove straight down. My favorite scene is when he is completely upside down and you can see the city behind. We have to be like Miles Morales and put faith over fear. He had extra abilities because of a spider bite from an altered spider, but we all have abilities inside of us. We cannot be scared to get off of the edge of fear and take a leap of faith even if it seems crazy or we don’t know how it will turn out.

Kwanzaa is rooted in doing better and helping others be better. This also means supporting the dreams of others even when we are not sure how they will turn out.

We must be self-determined (kujichagulia) to put forth all the Kwanzaa principles in education throughout the school year. We must stay united (umoja) even as the media attempts to pit us against each other. We cannot point fingers at others. The work is the collective responsibility (ujima) of us all. We have to put our money (ujamaa) where our mouth is and support schools and research-based education initiatives. When we work in our purpose (nia) and combine it with others, we maximize our potential for creativity (kuumba). This is how education will improve.

We have to believe it. We have to have faith. We have to get off of the sidelines and participate in solutions even if we are scared. Our students deserve us making the effort to conquer our fears.

Let me leave you with one of my parts of the song “What’s Up Danger?”

‘Cause I like high chances that I might lose

I like it all on the edge just you, ayy

I like tall buildings so I can leap off of 'em

I go hard wit' it no matter how dark it is

The bigger the risk ... the bigger the reward. Are you willing to keep the faith and to be a risk-taker for our kids? Are you willing to keep working hard even if the path is unclear and there are obstacles?

I am. I hope you will join me in the fight in 2022! Harambee! (Let's all pull together!)

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Applying Kwanzaa Principles to Education: Kujichagulia

Applying Kwanzaa Principles to Education: Ujima

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