

# unique and united

EAST AFRICA AND BEYOND



 **students**  
REBUILD

 **CREATIVE**  
VISIONS

# East Africa and Beyond

These Students Rebuild: Unique and United activities celebrate the rich cultural heritage of East Africa through creative expression. They highlight messages of collaboration, strengthen connections, and showcase the unity that brings East African communities and the world-at-large closer.

## activity one | THE UMOJA CHAIN

### Objectives

Students will be able to explain how individual stories and cultural expressions, when connected, create a stronger sense of unity, using the concept of umoja (oneness) as a guiding principle.

### Materials Needed

- Colored paper strips
- Glue/tape
- Markers/crayons

### Instruction

#### 1. Introduction

**Discussion Prompt 1:** *I want you to share a short story about something you recently experienced with the class.*

Example: The other day, I was walking home from school when a soccer ball suddenly rolled toward me from across the street. At first, I didn't see anyone around, and it seemed strange to watch the ball moving on its own. Then, six kids came running after it from around the corner. I didn't know any of them—except for one boy, Isaiah. He and I used to be really good friends before his family moved away, but he was back in town visiting his grandparents. I was so excited to see him! I joined in their game, and by the end, not only had I reconnected with Isaiah, but I had made new friends too. It was so much fun!

**Discussion Prompt 2:** *Imagine now that the stories we tell are like paper links in a chain, each one representing one person's story. What happens when we connect our stories together?*

**Teacher Script:** *Each of us carries a story, like a single link in a chain. While one link is important, when connected with others, it becomes part of something much stronger.*

*Think about music like Afrobeats. It started in West Africa but is now danced to all over the world, connecting people from Nairobi to California.*

*Amapiano, another popular form of dance, started in South Africa, but has brought people together in movement and celebration across continents.*

*Like dance, when we link our paper rings, we connect our unique stories to form a powerful chain of unity.*



## 2. Time to Create

Students will create a colorful paper chain using East African Community colors to represent how diverse cultures can unite. Each decorated ring symbolizes the unique cultural contributions that strengthen and connect all the communities represented in the chain.

**Learning Note:** *Umoja is a Swahili word, which means “oneness” or “unity.”*

### Instructions:

1. Give each student paper strips in East African Community colors.
2. Have students decorate their strips with patterns, symbols, or words representing unity.
3. Students form rings by connecting the ends of their decorated strips.
4. Link individual rings together to create one long classroom chain.
5. Display the completed Umoja chain as a symbol of how different cultures connect to form a strong, unified community.

### Learn More about Afrobeat and Amapiano

- Link to an example of [Afrobeats](#)
- Link to learn how to [dance to Afrobeats](#)
- Link to an example of [Amapiano](#)
- Link to learn how to [dance to Amapiano](#)

## 3. Reflection

**Final Discussion Prompt:** *Did you notice how each ring you created is unique but becomes stronger when connected to others? What does this teach us about our personal and cultural differences? What does this teach us about umoja, i.e. oneness and unity?*

## 4. Submit

Take a photo of what your students created and share it at [Studentsrebuild.org](https://Studentsrebuild.org). Creative Visions will donate \$5, up to \$1 million for each submission or student engaged. The project is open from September 16, 2025 – June 1, 2026.



## activity two | MIKONO YA UMOJA TREE

### Objectives

Students will be able to describe how individual contributions, like handprints on a tree, strengthen and support a community, connecting this idea to the cultural symbolism of indigenous trees and Swahili values of unity.

### Materials Needed

- Large working surface
- Paper, canvas, or fabric
- Paint
- Brushes
- Water containers
- Pencils



### Instruction

#### 1. Introduction

**Discussion Prompt 1:** *Why are trees made up of many branches and leaves?*

**Teacher Script:** *A tree needs many branches and leaves to catch sunlight, form a crown that gives shade, and stay strong enough to keep growing.*

*If one branch is cut, the others still help the tree live on as long as the roots, trunk, and other branches are strong.*

*From this, we can say that every part of a tree matters, even the tiniest leaf.*

*It's the same case with us. Let's say, for example, that I drop my books in class, but before I can pick them up, three of your classmates rush over to help. Their kind actions are like little "leaves" holding me up. They remind me that I belong to a strong community that grows through small acts of kindness and unity.*

#### 2. Time to Create

Students will create handprints on a large indigenous tree drawing and fill them with Swahili words of unity, symbolizing how individual contributions grow together to form a strong, rooted community.

#### Instructions:

1. Draw or outline a large Baobab or Mugumo tree on the working surface.
2. Have each student dip their hand in paint and create handprints on the tree branches and trunk.
3. Once handprints dry, students write Swahili words, such as "upendo" (love), "amani" (peace), "umoja" (unity), or "jumuiya" (community), inside their prints.
4. Allow students to add decorative elements around their handprints.
5. Display the completed tree as a symbol of how individual contributions create a strong, unified community rooted in shared values.

**Additional Resources:** Link to information and images of the baobab tree: [African baobab tree: how one plant creates an entire habitat](#)

Link to information and images of the mugumo tree: [The Sacred Mugumo tree – schoolfor.africa](#)

### 3. Reflection

**Final Discussion Prompt:** *Each handprint represents an individual and adds to the tree’s beauty and meaning, while the indigenous trees like the Baobab and Mugumo symbolize community strength, resilience, and cultural heritage. What connections do you see between personal contributions and the ways communities grow stronger together?*

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## activity three | MASKS OF IDENTITY & UNITY

### Objectives

Students will be able to express aspects of their personal identity through art and explain how diverse individual identities can come together to form a unified community.

### Materials Needed

- Plain paper
- Markers/crayons/paint
- Pencils/erasers
- Rulers
- Decorations (stickers, glitter, beads)

### Instruction

#### 1. Introduction

**Discussion Prompt 1:** *What are some things that show who you are (your values, hobbies, culture, or traditions)?*

**Teacher Script:** *I have a friend who fills the margins of her notebooks with doodles. Do you do that too? She has been doing this for a long time and she has come to realize those little sketches are pieces of her. They show her love for creativity, her curiosity, and the way she makes sense of the world around her.*

*In the same way, the masks you will create today will reflect parts of who you are, including your likes, highlights, values, hobbies, culture, and traditions.*

*At the end of today's activity, we will combine all of our masks and they will tell one complete story of unity.*

## 2. Time to Create

Students will create personal paper masks representing their values, identity, and character, then collaborate in teams to merge their masks into a unified group montage. East African motifs will be incorporated to emphasize oneness and promote appreciation of diverse identities within a community.

### Instructions:

1. Students reflect on their personal identity, values, and interests.
2. Each student creates an individual mask incorporating East African patterns and motifs.
3. Allow students to present their completed masks to the group.
4. Teams collaborate to arrange their individual masks into one large montage on poster paper.
5. Add connecting decorative elements that represent unity while maintaining each mask's unique identity.
6. Display team montages and have each group briefly present their unified creation.

**Learning Note:** Examples of East African patterns and motifs can be found in fabrics like the Kente cloth. The geometric designs have symbolic value that tells stories and proverbs.

Symbolic meaning of the colors:

- **Red:** Symbolizes life, vitality, power, and sacrifice.
- **Black:** Represents unity, spiritual transformation, protection, and the spiritual world.
- **White:** Signifies purity, spiritual presence, and the beginning of a process of learning.
- **Green:** Represents the earth, fertility, and the prosperity of Africa.
- **Yellow/Gold:** Symbolizes fortune.
- **Blue:** Conveys peace, harmony, and the spiritual realm.

Meaningful motifs are also created by repeating these shapes and symbols: diamonds, squares, triangles, chevrons, checkers, lines, and abstract figures.



## 3. Reflection

**Final Discussion Prompt:** *Discuss how individual identities can remain distinct while contributing to a stronger, unified community, reflecting East African values of interconnectedness.*

## 4. Submit

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