

# The Kanza Kinship System

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **What Is Family?**
- **Different Systems, Different Relations**
- **General Considerations**

### What Is Family?

The traditional Kanza concept of family is quite different from that of American society today. If asked "Just what exactly is a family?" most folks these days would probably think of a mother and a father and all their children. Perhaps it might also include grandparents, uncles and aunts, nephews, nieces, and grandchildren. Kanza kinship includes all of these, but many are assigned very different names.

### Different Systems, Different Relations

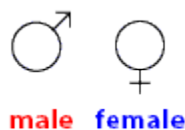
Let's see an example. Consider a person named Corey. Everybody would agree what Corey calls **his mother's sister's son** Thomas in English. Thomas is Corey's **first cousin**, or just **cousin**. But according to the Kanza kinship system, Thomas is considered Corey's **brother**. In fact, Corey will call him either **elder brother** or **younger brother** depending on their relative ages. Furthermore, this is not unusual, because Corey considers most of his male cousins brothers. Nevertheless, Thomas would be called something else entirely if Corey were a woman, instead of a man.

Corey's other maternal cousins are known by even more surprising titles. His **mother's brother's daughter** Tina is considered one of Corey's many **mothers**! And despite the fact that Tina's son Buck is considered Corey's **brother** (just like Thomas), Buck has what we would call second cousins that Corey also calls **uncles, mothers, brothers, and sisters**. All of these youngsters are about the same age as Corey's grandchildren, who happen to call Corey and all of his closest siblings their **grandparents**.

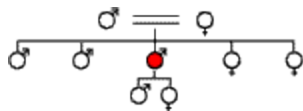
This whole thing sounds incredibly convoluted to us, but it's really not so difficult to get used to. It only sounds strange because we have a different **kinship system**, i.e., model by which we derive our kin relations.

### General Considerations

There are some things you must understand before we can really examine the Kanza kinship system. For starters, our English words for relations give away the English kinship system whenever we use them. So, we can't really use those words to describe the Kanza model--it would be too confusing. Instead, it's much easier to represent the kinship system visually. So, we will use symbols to represent males and females and arrange them on a chart representing a family. First, here are the gender symbols we'll use for males and females:



We must also understand that whatever chart we end up using can only represent a possible family and even then only some of the important relations therein. In other words, while your mother and father might have had anywhere from one to thirteen or more children, our chart will need to list exactly five--an older and a younger brother, an older and a younger sister, and you. Marriages will be important, but to save space, some marriages will not actually need to be represented. Marriages, when necessary, will be denoted by = (equals sign). Implied marriages will only show descendants from a single individual. Let's see a simple kinship chart to demonstrate these principles:



In this simple kinship chart, we see a set of parents, their five children, including a male 'self', and two of his children. The children are listed as male to female by age, but are not necessarily sorted by birth order. Thus, the order of the children may have been son-daughter-self (son)-daughter-son, perhaps daughter-son-self (son)-son-daughter, or just about any possible combination thereof. Nevertheless, the leftmost of any same-sex pair (excepting self) is the elder, while the rightmost is the younger. Note that the marriage of the father and the mother is shown, but the marriage of self and his wife is not. Again, this is only done to save space.