

**Teacher's Guide**

# Grass Roots

*African Origins of an American Art*

**Museum for African Art  
New York**



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*African Origins of an American Art*

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Front cover:

Granary, Humbe, Angola, mid-20th century. H. 113.5 cm. American Museum of Natural History, and Egg basket, Elizabeth Mazyck, S.C., 2002. H. 38 cm. American Museum of Natural History.

Frontispiece:

*Top*: Baskets for sale, Thiès, Senegal, 1998. Photo: Enid Schildkrout. *Bottom*: Sister Elizabeth Coakley's basket stand, Hwy. 17, Mt. Pleasant, S.C., 1990. Photo: Dale Rosengarten.



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## About the Exhibition

*Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* explores the humble but beautifully crafted coiled basket which has been made in Africa for millennia and by Africans in the American South for as long as they have been on these shores. Once a common agricultural tool, these baskets are containers of memory, repositories of history, symbols of identity, and works of art.

More than 300 years ago people from Africa brought an understanding of rice cultivation and skills as basket makers to plantations in America. Their knowledge and labor transformed the landscape and economy of the Carolinas and made rice the colony's first major export crop. Although working under the brutal conditions of slavery, African people retained their rich cultural traditions.

The grasses and sedges that grew in the south Atlantic marshlands were ideal for making coiled baskets. The plantation system demanded huge quantities of a few kinds of work baskets—notably, winnowing trays and carrying baskets, both essential for processing rice. For these reasons, the coiled basket became the signature form made by Africans in America.

The coiled basket has no single place of origin in Africa. Its roots lie in Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It represents a mingling of many different cultures. Today the African-American basket is a reminder of a unique African heritage and at the same time a distinctive and uniquely American art.

## About This Guide

This guide approaches the study of history through the ancient craft and modern art of basketry. It encourages an interdisciplinary study by students as they integrate their understanding of history, geography, social studies, and art. While the importance of baskets as agricultural tools has diminished, basketry still serves as an expression of an artistic vision, cultural identity, and as a source of income for many people.

The labor of Africans on the early plantations of the southeastern United States, along with their knowledge of rice cultivation, transformed the landscape and economy of the Lowcountry—the coastal region from North Carolina to Florida—making rice the colony’s first major export crop. From the first planting of rice in the late 1600s, well into the 20th century, wide coiled winnowing trays called fanners were used to separate the grain from its husk. The story of the African origins of this essential coiled basket reveals deep cultural connections with Africa that have endured to this day.

In both Africa and America, baskets have served countless purposes. As agricultural tools they were used to process and store grain and carry food to market. While their function as tools is no longer as important, baskets continue to be made as works of art. On both continents, the supply of raw materials needed to make baskets is declining, yet basket makers find innovative ways to practice their craft. They create original designs and celebrate traditional forms, bringing new vitality to an ancient art.

### History

This guide tells the story of how people from West and Central Africa exported their cultures and technology to America, turning coastal South Carolina and Georgia into one of America’s earliest grain-growing

regions. An accompanying 27-minute film, *Grass Roots: The Enduring Art of the Lowcountry Basket*, follows the basket makers of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, as they harvest materials, create their baskets, and talk about the meaning of their work. From field to market, this documentary portrays the current state of the art and its prospects for the future.

### Visual Arts

This guide will assist students in comparing baskets from different continents and making connections among art, history, and culture. Students will examine how artists think about tradition, innovation, and the creative process.

### English Language Literacy

Using historic documents and narratives from basket makers’ oral histories, the guide provides a framework for developing and practicing listening comprehension, reading and vocabulary skills, and analyzing original sources. In describing the history of the African-American tradition of coiled basketry, you will be able to guide your students in gathering, summarizing, and integrating information from a variety of media. Based on the many themes in the exhibition the guide will provide a variety of organizational techniques to assist in storytelling and writing that will be useful in developing assessments and follow-up classroom exercises.

### Art and Science

The guide brings together various aspects of the curriculum to focus upon broad areas of study in the arts and sciences. Lesson plans suggest interdisciplinary activities bridging art and science topics. The sessions on botany support plant classification, anatomical

identification, and principles in ecology. These ideas promote an understanding of the geography of two continents—Africa and North America—and span the history and cultures of many peoples and nations.

### **How to use this guide**

An important aspect in using this guide is activating students' prior knowledge. By engaging what students already know, teachers will facilitate the learning process. In the suggested lesson plans presented here, teaching strategies include concept maps, K-W-L (Know-Want to Know-Learned), brainstorming exercises, Venn diagrams, and the introduction of relevant vocabulary. Students should be familiar with the general elements and principles of the history of the transatlantic slave trade during the 18th and 19th centuries. Students should also have some experience with a variety of art media and techniques, such as blending and shading with pencil crayons.



## **SECTIONS**



# 1

## What is a basket?

### Fanner Baskets

Wide winnowing baskets, known as fanners (fig. 1), were the earliest and most important type of coiled basketry made by Africans in America. From the introduction of rice in the late 1600s, well into the 20th century, fanner baskets were used to separate the rice grain from its husk. Pounded grains of raw rice were placed in a fanner and thrown into the air or dropped from one basket to another. During this process the wind blew away the chaff and the rice was ready for cooking. Fanners were also used to carry food and even to cradle babies while their mothers worked in the fields.

In Africa coiled or woven baskets continue to be used to process grain and to cover bowls of food. Coiled baskets made in Senegal and Angola look similar to African-American fanner baskets. In other places, such as Sierra Leone, fanners are woven rather than coiled (fig. 2). The preference for one technique over another is most likely due to the kinds of plant materials available.

### Techniques and Materials

Coiled baskets are made from one continuous strand or from bundles of fibers sewn together in a spiral. Woven baskets are made from discontinuous



**Fig. 1**  
Fanner basket  
Waccamaw Neck, South Carolina  
Ca. 1938  
Collection of Alberta Lachicotte  
Quattlebaum

*Opposite:*  
**Fig. 2**  
Rice fanner  
Serer. Thiès, Senegal  
1998  
Private collection

elements interlaced and typically held together by a binding at the edge. Throughout the world, basket makers have invented many variations on these basic methods of creating elaborate objects from simple strands of flexible fiber.

Baskets have been made for many purposes – more so in the past than today. They serve as strainers and containers, traps and hats, beehives and bonnets, even houses and rafts. They can be porous or watertight, flexible or rigid. The uses of a basket, the materials available to make it, and the skill and inventiveness of the basket maker determine what a basket looks like.

African basket makers often combine different techniques and materials in a single basket and add color or beading for decoration. On rice plantations in the Lowcountry the predominant technique was coiling and the preferred materials were bulrush (*Juncus roemerianus*) bound with splints of white oak (*Quercus alba*) or stalks of the saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*). Today, Lowcountry basket makers prefer to use sweetgrass (*Muhlenbergia sericea*) in combination with bulrush and pine needles (*Pinus palustris*). These two elements are sewn in combination with strips of palmetto leaf (*Sabal palmetto*).

### **Vessels of Memory**

On both sides of the Atlantic, the art of basketry continues to be passed down from generation to generation. In the Lowcountry, as in many parts of Africa, virtuoso basket makers invent forms, experiment with new materials, and perfect the techniques they have learned from their parents and grandparents (fig. 3). A child begins by sewing the bottom of a basket while an older relative builds up the sides, pointing out how to give the basket shape and strength. Certain baskets are cherished because they evoke memories of loved ones and link generations.

While no one can say precisely what kinds of baskets were made in Africa 300 years ago, striking similarities between African and African-American baskets point to a common cultural heritage. Besides the utilitarian fanner, distinctive stepped-lid baskets and stacked baskets are made in both places. In the Congo, the stepped-lid form, also found on grave mounds, is said to refer to the passage of the soul through birth, life, and death. While African Americans have always made such baskets, they attribute different meanings to the baskets forms.



**Fig. 3**  
Generations of a basket-making family, ca. 1989. Photo: Courtesy Henrietta Snype.

# Rice Sugar amongst the Bagos



B

The Bagos are very expert in cultivating rice and in quiet a  
 different manner to any of their neighbours on the Westward Coast  
 the country the soil is chiefly low and swampy. The rice  
 they first sow on their (swampy) and rising spots where the  
 water when it is full of mud is carried into the sugar made  
 for their purpose which are flat low swamps, at some sides  
 they have a narrow bank they can let in water. They plant  
 the seeds B is a narrow cut so that they can let of water they  
 please. The water is not much more than a foot deep  
 with with which they turn the soil wooden iron and iron  
 that winter water they bring copious water to the  
 the root of the plant. Women of the tribe with their  
 and so distance as the plant fifty rods in by rows are  
 when the rice is ready for water they turn the water of the  
 their (swamp) is used then they let the water over it and  
 into the stands then as low as possible it being so compared  
 their manner of planting is in deep and narrow

## 2 African Rice and Baskets

### African Rice

Around 3,000 years ago, West African farmers in the floodplains of the inland Niger delta domesticated African rice, *Oryza glaberrima*. Rice became a dietary staple of the great empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai during the 11th to 16th centuries. Along the coast, African farmers perfected methods of growing rice in marine estuaries, controlling water levels with canals, embankments, gates, and hollow logs.

European traders admired African systems of rice cultivation and bought rice to provision their ships. Geographers described how African farmers grew rice in many different environments and could obtain three crops a year by planting it along tidal rivers, in swamps, and in upland fields. In 1793, slave ship captain Samuel Gamble noted that the Baga people in Guinea “are very expert in cultivating rice” (fig. 4).

Enslaved Africans who came from rice-growing societies planted grain left over from the oceanic voyage for food. In this way, African rice, sometimes called “red rice,” was transplanted to the American South. African rice eventually gave way to higher-yielding Asian white rice, *Oryza sativa* (fig. 5). Both Asian and African varieties are grown in Africa today, where rice remains central to the diet of millions of people.



Opposite:

Fig. 4

Illustration and description of Baga rice cultivation from the log of the slave ship, *Sandown*. Captain Samuel Gamble, 1793–94. National Maritime Museum, London.

Fig. 5

Mandinka women displaying bundles of African rice (right) alongside the Asian species. Casamance, Senegal, 1987. Photo: Judith A. Carney.

### African Origins: Rituals of Rice

Rice features prominently in many West African ceremonies. Weddings, rites of passage, and funerals include gifts of rice. Women do much of the farm work in Africa and celebrations that mark bountiful harvests also honor women's fertility. African rituals relating to rice vary from place to place and are associated with a range of artworks. Men perform masquerades with full-length costumes, masks, and headdresses. Women's dances that commemorate their role as mothers and cultivators feature beautifully carved bowls, ladles, and baskets.

Among the Dan in Liberia and Ivory Coast, women dance with large wooden rice ladles carved to portray animals and people. A special ladle (fig. 14) pays tribute to the most hospitable woman in a village. She parades with the ladle and is expected to host a feast highlighting rice. In Mali, just before the rainy season, Bamana men wearing raffia costumes and carved antelope headdresses (fig. 12), called *ci-wara*, dance in order to call on the spirits to bring a successful harvest. Among the Baga in Guinea and Liberia, a woman's dowry includes special ceramic bowls and baskets for storing rice (fig. 11), and a new bride dances with a basket on her head into which onlookers toss gifts of rice and money.

Fig. 6  
Footed basket ornamented with  
brass tacks  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Early 20th century  
American Museum of Natural History

Fig. 7  
Footed fruit basket  
Rebecca Coakley, South Carolina  
Ca. 1984  
South Carolina State Museum



## Congo Connections

Many Africans who worked on Lowcountry plantations came from the Congo and Angola. Rice was not grown in this region, but people made all kinds of baskets for food processing, storage, and even clothing. Coiled trays were used for winnowing maize and drying for honey, large containers were made to store grain, and many kinds of bowl-shaped baskets were fabricated for serving, measuring, and carrying food. In America during the heyday of rice, the pressure put on basket makers to produce quantities of work baskets left little opportunity for variety and embellishment. Nevertheless, some Congolese and Angolan forms, notably baskets with stepped lids and footed bowls, have been made continuously for centuries (figs. 6-9).

Starting in the late 1400s, Europeans sailed along the African coast picking up cargoes of human beings, food, and raw materials; not until the end of the 19th century did they explore the interior of Africa. Coming in contact with Africa's many cultures, Europeans began to admire and collect African art, including basketry. While baskets are fragile and often do not last, museum collections still contain examples from the late 1800s that are remarkably similar to baskets made in the American South.



**Fig. 8**  
Stepped Lid basket  
Yombe. Democratic Republic of  
Congo  
American Museum of Natural History

**Fig. 9**  
Stepped-lid basket  
Ida Jefferson, South Carolina  
Ca. 1998  
Museum for African Art



**Fig. 10**  
 The journey of African rice (*O. glaberrima*) to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade.  
 Map courtesy Judith A. Carney

Present-day West and Central Africa



### 3

## Three African Rice Growing Cultures

This section explores three West African peoples through the objects they have created to transport rice, harvest rice, or bless certain crops during a growing season. Refer to the map (fig. 10) to locate the Baga, Bamana, and Dan today.

### Baga

Many of the people shipped to the Americas from the area then known as the Guinea Coast, or the Rice Coast, were of Baga ethnicity. As far back as their history can be traced, the Baga have grown rice. The Baga and their neighbors, who undoubtedly brought knowledge of rice cultivation with them to America, have proven extremely adaptive to different environmental concerns when cultivating rice. In fact, they invented many of the techniques adopted in the Carolinas for growing rice in coastal estuaries. In order to keep ocean salt water, which would ruin their crop, away from the rice fields they used gates, embankments, and hollow logs to take advantage of the tides.

Rice played an intricate role in Baga society and much of their material culture, from baskets, mortars and pestles, masks, and drums are related to rice. Baga baskets were not only used for winnowing, storage, and carrying things, but were also used in marriage ceremonies (fig. 11). Frederick Lamp describes women in Baga society and the role of rice in marriage:

In the traditional wedding ceremony practiced before mid-century the bride ... was expected to perform a dance ... in which she carried on her head a basket [which looked like] a wine glass. As she danced, which she did every day for a week, gifts of money from men and women onlookers were thrown into this basket, mingling with the rice grains tossed by the other women (Lamp, Frederick. (1996). *Art of the Baga: A Drama of Cultural Reinvention*. New York: The Museum for African Art and Prestel, p. 124).

The integration of rice and ritual in perhaps the most important phase in the life of a Baga woman shows how intertwined rice cultivation was with Baga culture.

**Fig. 11**  
**Marriage rice basket**  
**Baga, Guinea**  
**Mid-20th century**  
**Collection of Frederick John Lamp**





Fig. 12  
*Ci-wara* headdress  
 Bamana. Mali  
 Late 19th or early 20th century  
 Museum for African Art

Fig. 13  
*A-Tshol* shrine piece  
 Baga. Guinea  
 Late 19th century  
 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

### Bamana

The Bamana of Mali have developed a specialized dance known as the *ci-wara* masquerade which features headdresses in the form of male and female antelopes surmounting woven basketry caps (fig. 12). The purpose of the sculptural wooden headdress and the accompanying ceremony is to celebrate a good harvest. Art historian Tavy Aherne describes the *ci-wara* ceremony this way:

*Ci-wara* masquerades appear just before the onset of the rainy season, in entertaining yet efficacious performances that articulate and harness the ancestors, spiritual forces, and nyama (spiritual energy, power) in order to ensure successful harvests. Today they are increasingly a source of secular entertainment, performed by dance troops and age groups (Aherne, Tavy. (2005). *Resonance from the Past, African Sculpture from the New Orleans Museum of Art*. New York: The Museum for African Art. p. 31).

There is an interesting connection between the Bamana antelope headdress and the arts of the Baga. *Ci-wara* headdresses come in several styles and are fastened to woven fiber hats worn by men in the masquerade. A horizontal type, in which horns protrude forward from the head, resembles a Baga shrine piece called *A-Tshol* (fig. 13). The relation of these two cultures as illustrated by the formal similarities in these objects may be the result of migration by the Baga people to their present homeland from the Fouta Jallon area much further North. Both the Bamana and the Baga today create ritual objects specific to the cultivation of certain crops.



**Fig. 14**  
**Feast ladle (*wunkirmian*)**  
**Dan. Liberia**  
**Mid-20th century**  
**American Museum of Natural History**

## **Dan**

The Dan people also create beautiful objects which relate to their cultivation of rice. The Dan of western Ivory Coast and Liberia carve beautiful rice spoons, some with human and animal faces, others with legs. A specific type of spoon, called the *winkirle*, is a large figurative object carved for a woman who is honored as the most hospitable in her village.

Some spoons are said to be portraits of specific individuals. When a woman becomes old, she passes the spoon on to another who she believes is most qualified to succeed her. At special feasts the *winkirle* distributes rice to guests and dances with the spoon; women also dance with spoons at funerals to banish the ghosts of the dead. Still in use today, the spoons symbolize abundance and fecundity and represent women's connection to the spirit world (fig. 14).

The importance of the *winkirle* in Dan culture signals the importance of rice in their culture - not only as a source of food but also as a symbol of self-being. Rice cultivation is clearly integral to Dan cultural identity.



## 4 The Lowcountry

### The Lowcountry Plantation

The logs of slave ships, as well as advertisements for the sale of slaves, reveal what Europeans knew—and did not know—about Africa. Ship captains noted where rice was grown and stocked their holds with rice to feed their captives. People from Africa’s rice growing regions were sold at a premium to planters in America who were made wealthy from the cultivation of the pearly grain (fig. 15). From the founding of the colony of Carolina in 1670 through the end of the transatlantic slave trade to North America in 1807, about 40 percent of all Africans arriving at the port of Charleston, South Carolina came from the region then known as the “Rice Coast” or “Upper Guinea Coast.” An equal number came from the Congo and Angola, where farmers did not grow rice, but used coiled baskets to winnow other kinds of grain.

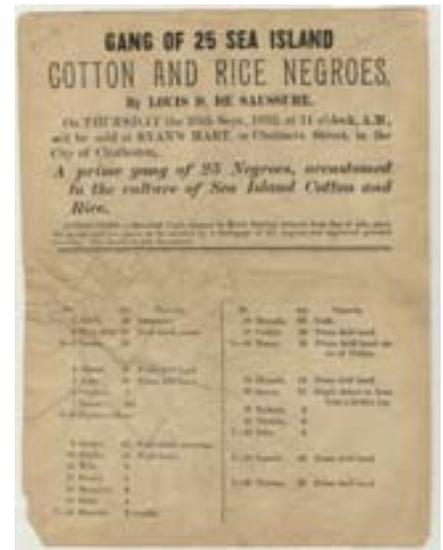
The vast majority of people in the Lowcountry were of African descent, and most of them lived in compact settlements on large estates called plantations (fig. 16). Rice plantations operated on the “task” system; enslaved workers were assigned daily quotas of work according to their age and fitness. A typical task might be to hoe a quarter acre. When the task was completed, men and women could tend their own gardens, raise pigs and poultry, catch fish, or make baskets.

Their labor and knowledge transformed the landscape and economy of the Lowcountry, making rice the colony’s first major export crop. From the first planting of rice in the late 1600s, well into the 20th century, wide, coiled winnowing trays called fanners were used to separate the grain from its husk (fig. 17).

*Opposite:*

**Fig. 16**

Built in 1686, only sixteen years after the founding of the colony, Medway is the oldest house on record in South Carolina. Its plan and location are typical of plantation houses constructed in the Lowcountry over the next hundred years. Goose Creek, South Carolina, 1974. Photo: Greg Day.



**Fig. 15**  
Notice of a slave auction, Charleston, South Carolina, September 25, 1852.

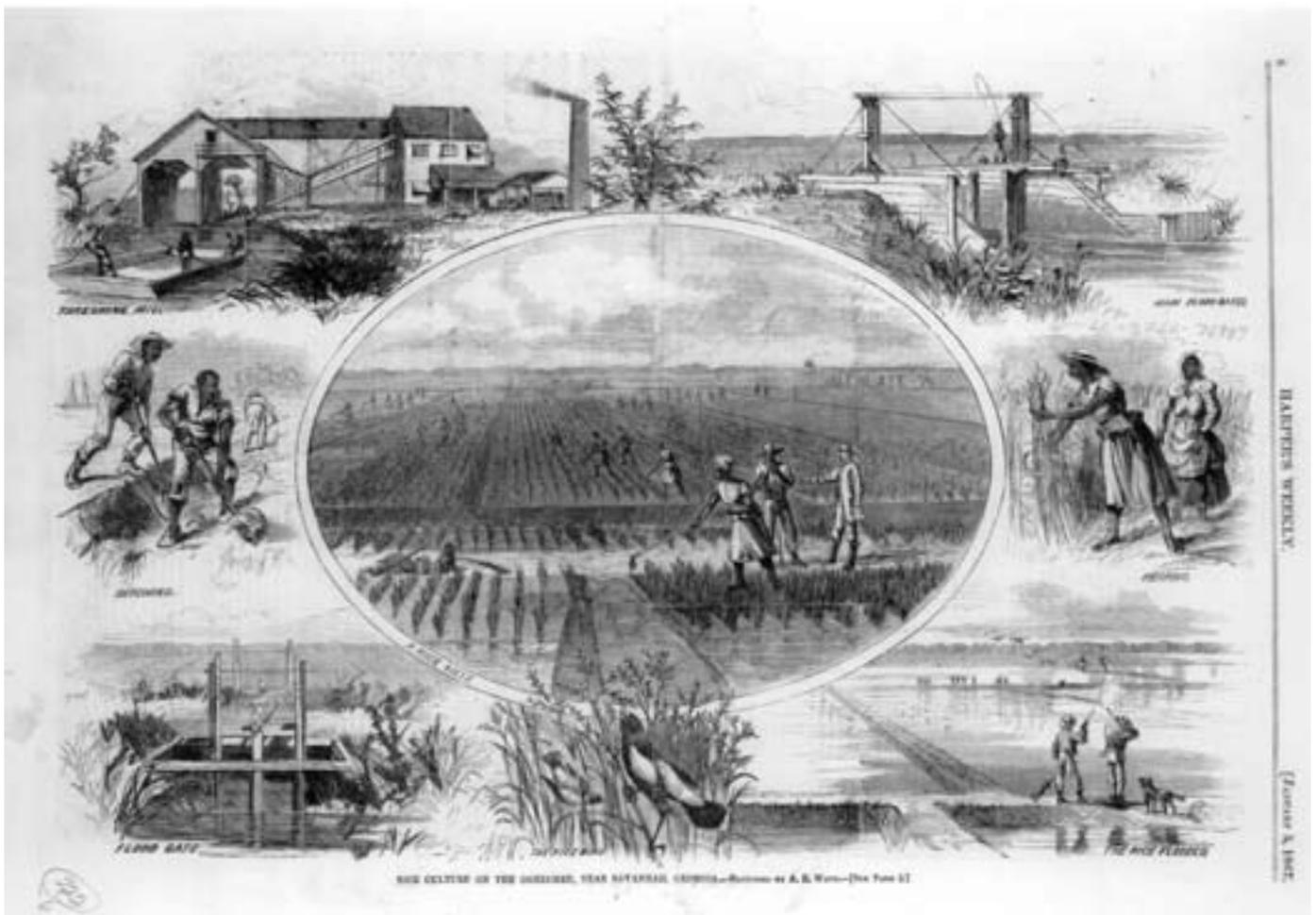


**Fig. 17**  
Fanning rice at Wedgefield Plantation, Georgetown County, South Carolina, ca. 1890. Photo: Library of Congress.

### Tidal Rice

In the 1750s, Lowcountry planters began moving their rice operations from inland swamps to tidal rivers. With an expenditure of energy that rivaled the labor required to construct the pyramids of Egypt, enslaved workers built a system of earthen embankments, canals, sluiceways, and gates, transforming the rice plantations into what one planter called a “huge hydraulic machine” (fig. 18).

Fig. 18  
Alfred R. Waud, “Rice Cultivation on the Ogeechee, near Savannah, Georgia” from *Harper’s Weekly*, January 5, 1867.



In the 1830s, planters from South Carolina and Georgia moved with their field hands west to what was then the American frontier—Alabama and Mississippi. Wilcox County, Alabama in particular, was settled by people from the area of Camden, South Carolina. The Diaspora of the African basket did not stop once it got to the South Atlantic coast but continued as people moved north, south, west, and even east. After the Civil War, free men and women worked for wages, a share of the crop, or land. Many black families were able to purchase 10- to 50-acre plots and began to farm for themselves (fig. 19).

**Fig. 19**  
"Cultivating rice, South Carolina,"  
stereograph, circa 1900. Collection  
of Gene Waddell.





## 5 Rice and Baskets Post Civil War to the Present

### Charleston Renaissance

At the end of the Civil War, coastal rice plantations lay in ruins. Efforts to revive production persisted for 50 years, until a series of hurricanes between 1893 and 1916 dealt a death blow to the rice industry. Fueled by nostalgia for a lost civilization, descendants of the plantation elite memorialized the world of their parents in paintings, prints, and drawings, prose, poetry, and drama. What was recalled as a golden era by some, however, signaled memories of hardship and suffering for others.

In the 1920s and '30s, the figure of a stately woman balancing a basket on her head in African fashion became an icon for a group of artists and writers whose work has come to be known as the Charleston Renaissance. Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, Elizabeth O'Neill Verner (fig. 20), Alfred Hutty, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, and others established an art scene that can be compared to the Harlem Renaissance in New York City and the Southern Literary Renaissance based around Nashville, Tennessee. Their salons and societies, exhibitions and publications made Charleston a mecca for visiting painters, including Edward Hopper, Childe Hassam, and Andrew Wyeth, and photographers such as Doris Ullman, Bayard Wootten, and Walker Evans.

### Markets and Missions

After the Civil War, African-American farmers in the Charleston area carried vegetables and fruit to city markets in coiled bulrush baskets balanced on the head. So striking was this custom that a genre of street vendor photography emerged, notably in the work of George W. Johnson (figs. 21–22). Tourists sent home postcards with images of vegetable vendors carrying produce in head-tote baskets. What was a common way of transporting goods in Africa became a symbol of African-American life in the post-plantation South.

Christian missionaries came south after the war to start schools for freed people. Some introduced craft production into their curricula and encouraged students to make useful objects. Basket makers created a form, still popular today, that imitated the bags in which Quaker missionaries carried their Bibles. In Africa, in the same period, mission schools also emphasized vocational training. Students learned to fabricate basketry teacups and saucers, ladies' hats, handbags, and copies of American Indian baskets. Purses with handles were a novelty and for some people a sign of modernity.



Fig. 21  
Vegetable woman, Charleston, South Carolina, ca. 1910. Photo: George W. Johnson. Gibbes Museum of Art/ Carolina Art Association.



Fig. 22  
Street Vendors, Charleston, South Carolina, 1879. Collection of Gene Waddell.

*Opposite:*  
Fig. 20  
*In the Shadow of St. Michael's, Charleston, South Carolina, Elizabeth O'Neill Verner, ca. 1928, Etching on paper, Gibbes Museum of Art/ Carolina Art Association.*



**Fig. 23**  
Basket-making class of Alfred Graham, Penn School, St. Helena Island, South Carolina, ca. 1905. Photo: Leigh Richmond Miner. Penn School Collection/Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

**Fig. 24**  
George Browne instructing students in Penn’s basketry shop, St. Helena Island, South Carolina, ca. 1920. Photo: Leigh Richmond Miner. Penn School Collection/Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

### **Penn School and the Gospel of Industrial Education**

Founded by northern missionaries during the Civil War, Penn School on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, launched a program of “industrial education” around 1900. Teaching boys to make “native island basketry” was seen as a way to help farm families earn money and stay on the land. Penn School baskets found buyers across the country, particularly among the school’s supporters in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Promotional materials noted Penn’s intention to preserve a craft with African roots. Basket making, said the *Annual Report* of 1910, “was brought from Africa in the early slave days.” In the 1920s, teachers from 46 African mission stations visited St. Helena. Calling the island “a laboratory, a demonstration of the strongest and best of the great sweeping currents of the world’s life,” one visitor declared her ambition to copy the Penn experiment in Angola. Penn’s connection to Africa was direct. Alfred Graham, the school’s first basketry instructor, learned the craft from his African-born father. Graham in turn taught his grandnephew, George Browne, who ran the basket shop from 1916 until 1950 (figs. 23–24).

During the 1960s, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders met at Penn to plan strategy. Today, Penn Center houses a museum and conference center, and sponsors programs to tutor public school students and promote and preserve Sea Island history and culture.

### **The Last of the Sea Island Basket Makers**

Around 1916, Charleston merchant Clarence W. Legerton began to sell baskets at his store and through a mail order catalog. He commissioned

baskets from basket sewers who lived near Mt. Pleasant, across the Cooper River from Charleston. Acting as agent for the basket makers, Sam Coakley would relay orders for baskets and every other Saturday sewers would bring their wares to his house. Under Legerton's patronage, sweetgrass basket makers earned a reliable, if modest, income. People who had never made baskets before, or who used to sew them but had stopped, were encouraged to learn from one of the older basket makers.

Bulrush baskets, on the other hand, found a very limited market. Advertised as antiques, traditional work baskets appealed to white Southerners nostalgic for the old days and to souvenir seekers looking for relics of the past. Only a handful of Sea Islanders continued to make old-style baskets. With the death of Jannie Cohen of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, in 2002, the bulrush basket went out of production. Only on Sapelo Island, Georgia, where Allen Green taught several students, has the Sea Island basket been granted a new lease on life.

### **Before the Storm**

Selling baskets through merchants such as Clarence Legerton in Charleston, and directly to customers on basket stands built alongside Highway 17, families could supplement their incomes in a cash-poor economy. In the 1970s, photographer Greg Day and his colleague Kate Young spent time in the basket-making community, documenting a way of life on the verge of change (fig. 25). Casting for shrimp with a net made exactly the way nets are still made in Africa, harvesting oysters and roasting them over an open fire, scraping bristles off a freshly slaughtered hog, dancing at a juke joint on a Saturday night—these rural pastimes would soon be displaced by suburban sprawl.

On September 21, 1989, Hurricane Hugo struck the Lowcountry, laying waste to coastal settlements and knocking down the basket stands that had been fixtures on the roadside since 1930. While the stands were easily rebuilt, the storm had the effect of clearing the way for new shopping malls and gated subdivisions. At the same time, the very people threatened with displacement were achieving recognition and status as a distinct American culture, called Gullah or Gullah/Geechee. Once identified with the creole language spoken by African-Americans in the Lowcountry, today the term "Gullah" refers to a whole range of customs and beliefs, cuisine, domestic architecture, and arts and crafts, including sweetgrass baskets.



**Fig. 25**  
Mary Jane Manigault, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, 1974. Photo: Greg Day.



Fig. 26  
Egg basket  
Elizabeth Mazyck, South Carolina  
2002  
American Museum of Natural History

## 6 The Sweetgrass Revolution

With the completion of the Cooper River Bridge in 1929 and the paving of Highway 17, the major coastal artery that passes through Charleston, basket makers began hanging their work on roadside stands and selling directly to tourists and local customers, a tradition that continues to this day (figs. 26–27). Freed from middlemen, basket sewers could charge the retail price for their baskets. Using sweetgrass, a finer and more flexible fiber than bulrush, they produced an ever broader range of forms. To provide color contrast, they laid longleaf pine needles on the outside of their rows, and for accents tied the needles in knots.

For the next generation, the traffic that brought customers was a harbinger of change. People have adapted to a faster pace of life and a money economy, first by working at jobs in homes, hospitals, hotels, restaurants, and public schools, and more recently, by branching out into other professions and callings. Once a quiet village, Mt. Pleasant is now a Sun Belt mecca. Shopping malls, office complexes, and condominiums are busily swallowing fields and woodlands. Resorts and subdivisions are steadily destroying sweetgrass habitats or cutting off access to basket-making materials. Each year basket makers have to travel farther to Georgia or northern Florida to gather the grass (fig. 28).

**Fig. 27**  
Foreman sisters' stand, Highway 17, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, 1994. Photo: Dale Rosengarten.

**Fig. 28**  
Raymond Manigault gathering sweetgrass. Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, 1974. Photo: Greg Day.





## 7

### African Baskets Today

Today in Africa, which encompasses 54 countries and thousands of languages, a wide variety of basket traditions coexist. While methods are time-honored and stable, materials can be new and changing. As natural resources become scarce, African basket makers adapt by incorporating modern materials into their work. In Senegal and The Gambia, for example, plastic strips from a nearby mat factory, or unraveled synthetic threads from imported flour, onion, and rice bags are used to bind rows of grass in coiled baskets (fig. 29). In the cities of South Africa, some people now make baskets with no natural fiber at all, creating fabulous multicolored platters from copper and plastic-coated telephone wire (fig. 30). Traditional forms like calabash covers and lids for ceramic beer pots continue to be made, but look very different adorned with brightly colored beads, wire, metal, or synthetic fiber (fig. 31).

In South Africa, as in the American South, the most talented basket makers sell their works to collectors who prize them as art objects. Basketry cooperatives bring income to local communities and teach the ancient craft to young people and to rural women whose husbands have gone to work in the cities.



**Fig. 29**  
Footed basket bound with strips  
of plastic  
Mandinka. Gambia  
Late 20th century  
Museum for African Art

*Opposite:*  
**Fig. 30**  
Wire Basket  
Ntumbifuthi Magwaza, South Africa  
Ca. 2004  
American Museum of Natural History



Fig. 31  
Beer pot lid (*imbenge*)  
Zulu, South Africa  
20th century  
Collection of Kim Sacks



## **LESSON PLANS**

# Lesson Plans for Elementary (grades 3–5)

## Title of Lesson Plan:

The Role of Rice in History

## Subject Areas:

World History, Literacy, Visual Arts, Science

## Time Required:

4 class periods

## Procedure:

Using Sections 1 – 7, introduce the role of rice farming in African and American history. Present the key concepts of the transatlantic slave trade and the economic role it played in Africa, America, and Europe. In this lesson students will build on prior knowledge to help define the people and economic forces shaping American and African history.

## Part 1: Introduction to *Grass Roots*

Show the film, *Grass Roots: The Enduring Art of the Lowcountry Basket*. For Film Notes and Analysis Sheet see the section in the APPENDIX.

## Part 2: Create KWL chart

With the class create a KWL chart (What We Know-What We Want to Know-What We Learned):

- Complete first two columns with class.
- Divide class into groups.
- Give each a folded piece of large construction paper.
- In first column, each group makes a list of things they already KNOW about the history of the transatlantic slave trade.
- Bring the class back together and make a class chart, adding each group's input.
- Show the class figures from the APPENDIX then have groups compile a list of questions about the images.

## Part 3: Illustrate key points from Sections 1 to 7.

Have advanced students read excerpts from sub-sections aloud before discussions.

- After reading the **Techniques and Materials** sub-section of Section 1, discuss the importance of the basket makers' environment to their craft. Have students draw similar parallels between their immediate environment and crafts that they are familiar with.
- In connection with the sub-section **Vessels of Memory** in Section 1, ask if students have special family heirlooms at home. Are any of these heirlooms coiled baskets?

- After reading the sub-section **Rituals of Rice** in Section 2, ask students if their families prepare special foods in conjunction with birth, wedding, or death ceremonies.
- After reading the sub-section **The Lowcountry Plantation** in Section 4, ask if anyone in the class has ever been to a farm, plantation, or seen an exhibit about plantations.
- Based on the sub-section, **Penn School and the Gospel of Industrial Education** in Section 5, have students write about how schools help to develop job skills. Then have students examine local newspapers and report on television stories related to schools, jobs, and job training.

#### **Part 4: Wrap up**

Divide again into groups and have students make bullet point statements regarding what they learned about the history of rice agriculture in Africa and America.

Whole group: Complete the KWL chart created in Part 2 and discuss the student generated questions. Make sure to address questions not answered by the section specific exercises.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

What role did rice play in West African history?

How did the transatlantic slave trade change the lives of Americans in the South and Africans in Africa?

What do baskets teach us about people and historic events?

What questions can we ask about baskets and the ways they are made?

#### **Vocabulary for This Lesson**

**griot** - a West African poet, praise singer, and wandering musician, considered a repository of oral tradition.

**heirloom** - a valued possession passed down in a family through succeeding generations.

**Lowcountry** - the coastal region stretching from North Carolina to Florida.

**masquerade** - to change or modify oneself so as to prevent recognition of one's true identity or character. To represent oneself in a given character or as other than what one is.

**missionary** - one who attempts to persuade or convert others to a particular program, doctrine, or set of principles.

**patrilineal** - tracing ancestral descent through the male line.

**patrilocal** - relating to residence with a husband's kin group or clan.

**plantation** - a large estate or farm on which crops are raised by resident workers or enslaved people.

**renaissance** - a revival of intellectual or artistic achievement and vigor.

**sweetgrass** - a North American native, perennial grass found growing in the coastal dunes extending from North Carolina to Texas.

# Lesson Plans for Junior High / Middle School (grades 6–8)

## Title of Lesson Plan:

Rice, Migration and Baskets

## Subject Area:

World History, Visual Arts, Language Literacy, Science

## Time Required:

4 class periods

## Procedure:

Using Sections 1 – 7, introduce the role of rice farming in African and American history. Present the key concepts of the transatlantic slave trade and the economic role it played in Africa, America, and Europe. In this lesson students will build on prior knowledge to help define the socioeconomic forces shaping American and African history. Africans brought many elements of their cultures to the Americas. Along with their skills in rice cultivation they also brought recipes using rice.

## Part 1. Introduction to *Grass Roots*:

Show the film, *Grass Roots: The Enduring Art of the Low-country Basket*. For **Film Notes and Analysis Sheet** see the section in the APPENDIX.

## Part 2. Role of Rice in History:

Have students read aloud Sections 1 to 7 and take notes for future activities.

## Part 3. Foods of West Africa:

A common West African and Gullah recipe is Jollof Rice which can be made with onion, tomato, ginger, pepper, vegetables, rice, and meat. Eggplant is a common addition.

## Jollof Rice Recipe

### Ingredients:

1 ½ lbs. rice	2 bouillon cubes
1 c. cubed beef	Salt to taste
½ c. cooking oil	1 tsp. chopped garlic
14 oz. stewed tomatoes	1 tsp. thyme
1 large onion, sliced	½ tsp. curry powder
1 medium red bell pepper	
8 oz. carrots and green beans for garnishing	

### Directions:

Parboil rice and drain excess water. Clean and boil beef in a covered pan for about 12 to 15 minutes. Blend the pepper, stewed tomatoes, and ¼ of the onion. Heat the oil in a large cooking pot until sizzling hot. Add the chopped ¼ onion and garlic. Pour in the blended ingredients. Add bouillon cubes, thyme, curry, and salt to taste. Add cubed beef. Pour and stir the rice into the pot and cook on low heat for about 15 minutes or until cooked. Cover tightly and stir at intervals to blend the flavors. Parboil sliced raw carrots and peas. Garnish rice with carrots and peas just before serving.

Makes 4 to 6 servings. Recipe adapted from Ogunsanya, Dokpe L. (1998). "My Cooking" West-African Cookbook. Austin, Tx.: Dupsy Enterprises.

Have students bring in and share rice recipes from home.

**Part 4. Role of Rice in West African History, Give One-Get One:**

Have the students make a grid of three boxes by eight. Have students use their notes to put their own ideas in the top three boxes. Then, on teacher's cue, they move about the room asking the other students for one of their ideas from the film, the read alouds, or West African foods. At the same time they give one of theirs. This is done until all boxes are filled. Students would be informed that assessment would be based on what was collected, not their own ideas. So students need to check the accuracy of information from their colleagues. Below is a model.

Student Name		Date
<b>GIVE ONE - GET ONE</b>		
<b>TOPIC</b>		

**Vocabulary for this lesson**

- caravan** - group of travelers journeying together.
- colonize** - to occupy an area and subjugate its people.
- content** - the substantive or meaningful part of an artwork.

- decode** - to extract the underlying meaning.
- encode** - to put a message into code by changing or modifying its format.
- form** - the shape and structure of a work of art.
- griot** - a West African poet, praise singer, and wandering musician, considered a repository of oral tradition.
- intent** - the essence of a work of art.
- Islamic world** - the parts of the globe with a high concentration of Muslims. These regions include: North Africa, the Middle East, and South East Asia.
- mansa** - spiritual and political leader, village head.
- Mecca** - city in western Saudi Arabia; the birthplace of Muhammad.
- middleman** - a trader who buys from producers and sells to retailers or consumers.
- missionary** - one who attempts to persuade or convert others to a particular program, doctrine, or set of principles.
- mosque** - Muslim house of worship.
- Muslim** - one who believes in and practices the Islamic faith.
- Niger River** - major river of West Africa; third longest river in Africa at 4200 Kilometers (2,609 miles), after the Nile and the Congo.
- nomad** - a member of a group of people who have no fixed home and move according to the seasons from place to place in search of food, water, and grazing land.
- patrilineal** - tracing ancestral descent through the male line.
- patrilocal** - relating to residence with a husband's kin group or clan.
- pilgrimage** - a journey to a sacred place or shrine or a search, especially one of moral significance.
- polygamy** - having more than one spouse at one time.
- renaissance** - a revival of intellectual or artistic achievement and vigor.
- trans-Saharan trade** - trade across the Sahara between Mediterranean countries and West Africa.

# Lesson Plans for High School (grades 9–12) Part 1

## **Title of Lesson Plan:**

Role of Rice in History

## **Subject Areas:**

World History, Literacy, Science (Botany and Ecology)

## **Time Required:**

6 class periods

## **Procedure:**

In this lesson you will present the key concepts in the transatlantic slave trade and the economic role it played in African, American, and European history. From this general discussion you will demonstrate the triangular trade route between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. You will also discuss the growth of African-American communities on and off plantations in the American Southeast. Using Sections 1-7, introduce the role of rice farming in African and American history. You will also enter a discussion of the botany and history of West African rice farming using the Gamble historic document. Lastly you will discuss the role of education and job skills using the sub-section **Penn School and the Gospel of Industrial Education** in Section 5.

## **Part 1. Introduction to *Grass Roots*:**

Show the film, *Grass Roots: The Enduring Art of the Lowcountry Basket*. For **Film Notes and Analysis Sheet** see the section in the APPENDIX.

## **Before Reading:**

Prepare by having the class create a K-W-L chart (What We Know-What We Want to Know-What We Learned):

- Complete first two columns with class.
- Divide class into groups.
- Give each a folded piece of large construction paper.
- In first column, each group makes a list of things they already KNOW about Africa, slavery, and plantations in colonial America.
- Bring the class back together and make a class chart, adding each group's input.
- Show the class the illustrations from the exhibit, then have groups make a list of questions they may have.

## **Part 2. Sections 1-6.**

Discuss sections as a group and compare what they know about Asian rice (*Oryza sativa*) and African rice (*Oryza glaberrima*). In the sub-section Techniques and Materials in Section 1 there are additional important terms. Using their botanical names, discuss the plant classification system of families and species.

(For more information on the comparison of Asian and African rice see <http://www.gramene.org>. The website was created by the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and Cornell University.)

## Vocabulary

**cultivar** - a plant variety or strain that has originated and persisted under cultivation or was specifically developed for the purpose of cultivation.

**flag leaf** - the mature leaf in a cereal crop plant.

**inflorescence** - the part of a plant that consists of the flower-bearing stalks.

**internode** - the portion of a stem between the level of insertion of two successive leaves, leaf pairs or leaf whorls, or branches of an inflorescence, i.e., between two nodes.

**leaf** - a lateral outgrowth from a plant stem that is typically a flattened expanded variably shaped greenish organ, constitutes a unit of the foliage, and functions primarily in food manufacture by photosynthesis.

**nipponbare** - one of a number of model rice genotypes of a specific hereditary line of Asian rice.

**node** - the level (transverse plane) of a stem at which one or more leaves and associated auxiliary bud(s) arise.

**panicle** - the grouping or arrangement in which flowers are borne on a plant.

**peduncle** - the stalk bearing a solitary flower in a one-flowered inflorescence.

**primary branch** - the extent of primary branching usually sets the tone for shape and compactness of the inflorescence (panicle).

**rachis** - the central supporting structure around which flowers are borne.

**root** - generally the underground portion of the plant which lacks buds, leaves or nodes. It absorbs water and mineral salts and usually anchors the plant to the soil.

**sedge** - grasslike plants of the family Cyperaceae, having solid stems, leaves in three vertical rows, and spikelets of inconspicuous flowers.

**spikelet** - the mode of development and arrangement of flowers on an axis branch of the grasses.

**stem** - primary plant axis that develops buds and shoots instead of roots.

## Part 3. Baga people

Have students read Section 4 and the description below of the Baga people by Captain Samuel Gamble in 1793.

Have the students analyze the Gamble description using the template below for examining an original historic document:

1. Who is Captain Samuel Gamble and what do we know about him?
2. What motive (purpose) might Captain Gamble have had in writing this document?
3. What biases or assumptions might color his views?
4. What is the degree of familiarity of Captain Gamble with the subject discussed in the document?
5. Was Samuel Gamble a direct observer of the events or was his information obtained second-hand?
6. The time frame: When was this document produced?
7. In what context was it produced? How has it come down to us? Could it have been tampered with?
8. Place: Where was this document produced?
9. Does the geographical location influence the content?
10. Was this document meant to be public or private?
11. How would the type of writing affect the content and believability of the document?
12. Is the document in the original language in which it was produced? Is the transcription accurate?
13. Audience: Who is the intended audience of this document?
14. Was the captain representing a specific group? Or addressing the document to a specific group?

Figure 4 in Section 2 is an illustration and description of Baga (Bagos) rice cultivation from the log of the slave ship, *Sandown*, by Captain Samuel Gamble, 1793–94. The log reads:

“The Bagos are very expert in Cultivating rice and in quite a Different manner to any of the Nations on the Windward Coast [Sierra Leone]. The country they inhabit is chiefly loam and swampy. The rice they fire sew [sic] on their dunghills and rising spots about their towns; when 8 or 10 Inches high [they] transplant it into Lugars [places/fields] made for that purpose which are flat low swamps, at one side ... they have a reservoir that they can let in what water they please, [on the] other side ... is a drain out so they can let off what they please ... The instrument they use much resembles a Turf spade [kayendo] with which they turn the grass under in ridges just above the water which by being confined Stagnates and nourishes the root of the plant. Women & Girls transplant the rice and are so dexterous as to plant fifty roots singly in one minute. When the rice is ready for cutting they turn the water off till their Harvest is over then they let the Water over it and let it stand three our four Seasons it being so impoverished. Their time of planting is in Sept. and reaping . . . .”

From Mouser, Bruce L. (2002). *A Slaving Voyage to Africa and Jamaica: The Log of the Sandown, 1793-1794*. Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press.

#### **Part 4. African Rice**

Have students read Section 2 and write about rituals in their own lives and important ceremonies. They should include details about expected dress, gifts, and foods. The students should define the role (or lack thereof) of religious beliefs and practices. What special art objects and music are used in the ceremonies the students describe?

This guide illustrates historic and cultural connections between Africa and America as demonstrated by baskets, basketry and basket makers as well as other culutral elements shared by Gullah speakers and West Africans. Below is a Gullah song in the West African Mende language of southern Sierra Leone. This song was recorded by Dr. Lorenzo Turner in Harris Neck, Georgia, in the early 1930s. The song was sung by a Gullah woman named Amelia Dawley.

The song is a typical Mende funeral song (*fnywa wulo*) performed by women as they pound rice into flour for a sacrifice to the dead. According to American anthropologist Joseph Opala, Mende women traditionally remain in town preparing for the sacrifice while the men are in the cemetery preparing the grave. Opala believes that this song was probably handed down from mother to daughter through the generations.

Analyze the English lyrics of the song and visualize the song’s meaning. Think about the social context and put yourself in the place of the singers. Write a paragraph giving your interpretation. Remember that opinions and thoughts are valued from everyone as the goal of this exercise is to present different perspectives about the song. Keep in mind historic context and cultural differences.

### **Gullah Version**

A wohkoh, mu mohne; kambei ya le; li leei tohmbe.

A wohkoh, mu mohne; kambei ya le; li leei ka.

Ha sa wuli nggo, sihan; kpangga li lee.

Ha sa wuli nggo; ndeli, ndi, ka.

Ha sa wuli nggo, sihan; huhan ndayia.

### **Modern Mende**

A wa kaka, mu mohne; kambei ya le'i; lii i lei tambee.

A wa kaka, mu mohne; kambei ya le'i; lii i lei ka.

So ha a guli wohloh, i sihan; yey kpanggaa a lolohhu lee.

So ha a guli wohloh; ndi lei; ndi let, kaka.

So ha a guli wohloh, i sihan; kuhan ma wo ndayia ley.

### **English**

Come quickly, let us work hard; the grave is not yet finished; his heart (the deceased's) is not yet perfectly cool (at peace).

Come quickly, let us work hard; the grave is not yet finished; let his heart be cool at once.

Sudden death cuts down the trees, borrows them; the remains disappear slowly.

Sudden death cuts down the trees; let it (death) be satisfied, let it be satisfied, at once.

Sudden death cuts down the trees, borrows them; a voice speaks from afar.

*Translations are by Momoh Koroma and Joseph Opala.*

Source: The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, <http://www.yale.edu/glc/gullah/11.htm>

### **Part 5. Penn School and the Gospel of Industrial Education**

Have students read the sub-section the **Penn School and the Gospel of Industrial Education** in Section 5.

Develop a timeline from the information in the section. Describe the changes in the role of basketry over time. Focus on the shifting economics of markets, customers, and producers.

### **Part 6. Wrap up:**

Divide again into groups to have students record what they learned about the botanical nature and historic role of rice and baskets.

Whole group: Complete the KWL chart and discuss the questions, making sure to address questions not answered by the different panels.

### **Vocabulary**

**griot** - a West African poet, praise singer, and wandering musician, considered a repository of oral tradition.

**missionary** - one who attempts to persuade or convert others to a particular program, doctrine, or set of principles.

**patrilineal** - tracing ancestral descent through the male line.

**patrilocal** - relating to residence with a husband's kin group or clan.

**polygamy** - having more than one spouse at one time.

**renaissance** - a revival of intellectual or artistic achievement and vigor.

# Lesson Plans for High School (grades 9–12) Part 2

## **Title of Lesson Plan:**

Rice and Baskets

## **Subject Area:**

Science (Botany and Ecology), Economics, Literacy, and Visual Arts

## **Time Required:**

4 class periods

## **Procedure:**

In this lesson you will guide students through discussions and exercises on the topics of the ecology of sweetgrass, and the economics of basket production. You will also discuss the role of basketry in Africa and the United States today.

## **Part 1. The Sweetgrass Revolution**

Have students read the sub-section **The Sweetgrass Revolution** in Section 6 and discuss. Using contemporary media sources, compare the national economics of the United States in the 1930s and the internationalism of world trade today.

## **Ecology of Sweetgrass:**

Sweetgrass is one example of an environmental dilemma of worldwide habitat destruction and the disappearance of a species as the result of land development. This grass is the major foundation material for constructing African-American coiled basketry in the Southeastern United States. The development of residential housing communities, shopping malls, and beach resorts are having a major impact on the basketry tradition as basket makers travel farther to gather grasses. The economics of the relationship between basket making and plant ecology is complex. Explore the problem by discussing the following issues:

1. What are some of the unique features that make up the sweetgrass habitat?

Sweetgrass grows in a coastal, non-timber forest with undulating sand dunes usually behind the first dune along the ocean, forming an important element of this ecology. It also grows on many of the barrier islands along South Carolina's coast. Coastal strands and barrier islands establish an important ecological zone protecting fragile inland habitats.

2. What are two drawbacks of tourism and development? What are some of the benefits for the local population?

Rapid growth of residential and commercial properties in coastal South Carolina are destroying and limiting access to the plants. While there are a number of benefits to increased tourism, drawbacks such as resident

displacement and depressed salaries also affect quality of life.

3. Explain the benefits of maintaining the ecosystem, the coastal dunes, of which sweetgrass is an integral part?

Sweetgrass plants are part of coastal dunes, an ecosystem which offers a protective buffer against coastal erosion and flooding, and acts as a sediment reservoir.

### Part 2. Economic Conditions in the U.S. Today

With the class create a Venn diagram entitled Economic Conditions of the U.S. in 1930 and Economic Conditions in the U.S. Today:

- Divide class into groups to describe the two periods on the two sides of their diagrams.
- Bring the class back together and make a class diagram, adding each groups input to both sides of the diagram. Have the class collectively explore what the periods had in common.

Support the discussion with the figures in the APPENDIX, and then have groups develop economic questions for further exploration (see figs. 18–26).

### Part 3. African Baskets Today

Have students read the sub-section **African Baskets Today** in Section 7. What is the future of baskets in Africa and America? As a group, conduct a photographic analysis of baskets from Africa and America (see figs. 28–32). Use words from the vocabulary list to aid specific discussion.

- Describe exactly what you see in the photo.
- What are the shapes of the baskets?
- What colors are there?
- Are the design patterns abstract or representational?
- What other details can you see?

As a group, conduct a photographic analysis of the images which depict basket makers and people cultivating rice (see figs. 3, 5, 16–18, 21–23, 26).

- Write or say what you conclude from what you see.
- What's going on in the picture?
- Who are the people and what are they doing?
- What might be the function of the objects?
- What can we conclude about the time period?

### Part 4. Wrap up:

After completing the last session, the final discussion question could be: predict what will happen next in terms of the changes in African and African-American basketry. What is the nature of your predictions?

What additional questions are raised? What are some additional sources you can use to find answers? See RESOURCE LIST.

### Vocabulary

**abstract** - not representing or imitating external reality or the objects of nature.

**awl** - a sharp pointed tool resembling an ice pick used for punching small holes in fibers and other materials.

**base** - the bottom of a basket.

**coastal dune** - a rounded hill, ridge, or mound of windblown material, usually sand on the sea coast.

**coil** - bundle of strands stitched into a circular shape.

**cultivation** - to prepare and use soil or land for growing crops.

**ecosystem** - an ecological community together with its environment, functioning as a unit.

**embellishment** - any decorative treatment done to the handle or body of the basket, nonessential to the construction of the basket.

**fanners** - an early type of coiled basketry used for winnowing grain.

**griot** - a West African poet, praise singer, and wandering

musician, considered a repository of oral tradition.

**missionary** - one who attempts to persuade or convert others to a particular program, doctrine, or set of principles.

**patrilineal** - tracing ancestral descent through the male line.

**patrilocal** - relating to residence with a husband's kin group or clan.

**polygamy** - having more than one spouse at one time.

**renaissance** - a revival of intellectual or artistic achievement and vigor.

**representational** - art that 'represents' something, a depiction of something we could see.

**splice** - the place where two pieces of grass overlap and join firmly.

**sustainable farming practices** - relates to the ability to farm in a way to maintain productivity and usefulness to society indefinitely.

**sweetgrass** - a North American native, perennial grass found growing in the coastal dunes extending from North Carolina to Texas.

**urbanization** - defined as the rapid and massive growth of, and migration to, large cities.



**APPENDIX A:**  
**Figures**



**Fig. 1**  
**Fanner basket**  
**Waccamaw Neck, South Carolina**  
**Ca. 1938**  
**Collection of Alberta Lachicotte**  
**Quattlebaum**



Fig. 2  
Rice Fanner  
Serer. Thiès, Senegal  
1998  
Private Collection



Fig. 3  
Generations of a basket-making  
family, ca. 1989. Photo: Courtesy  
Henrietta Snype.

# Rice Sugar amongst the Bagos



B

This Bagos are very expert in cultivating rice and are great at  
 diffusing it amongst to many of the Nations on the Westward Coast  
 the country that inhabits is chiefly Ben and Accra. The rice  
 they feed upon on their (Country) and raise a good husband. The  
 trees which Ben & Accra have, transport it into Sugars made  
 for their purpose which are flat low swamps, at some sides  
 they have a reservoir that they can let in water. They plant  
 thousands B is a device such as that they can let in water they  
 plant the rice amongst them and make a reservoir at some distance  
 with which they turn the great wooden iron ridges that drive  
 the water, under the heavy coffers. They water the rice in  
 the root of the plant. Women & girls transport the rice and  
 are so dexterous as to plant fifty roots in by ones and in  
 when the rice is ready for cutting they turn the water of the  
 their harvest is over then they let the water over it and  
 let it stand there a long season it being so convenient  
 their method of planting is in soft and easy

Fig. 4  
 Illustration and description of Baga rice  
 cultivation from the log of the slave ship,  
 Sandown, Captain Samuel Gamble, 1793-94.  
 National Maritime Museum, London.



**Fig. 5**  
Mandinka women displaying bundles  
of African rice (right) alongside the  
Asian species. Casamance, Senegal,  
1987. Photo: Judith A. Carney.



**Fig. 6**  
Footed basket ornamented with  
brass tacks  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Early 20th century  
American Museum of Natural History



Fig. 7  
Footed fruit bowl  
Rebecca Coakley, South Carolina  
Ca. 1984  
South Carolina State Museum



**Fig. 8**  
**Stepped Lid Basket**  
Yombe. Democratic Republic of Congo  
Early 20th Century  
American Museum of Natural History



Fig. 9  
Stepped-lid basket  
Ida Jefferson, South Carolina  
Ca. 1998  
Museum for African Art



Fig. 10  
 The journey of African rice (*O. glaberrima*) to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade. Map courtesy Judith A. Carney

Present-day West and Central Africa

Central Africa





**Fig. 11**  
**Marriage rice basket**  
**Baga, Guinea**  
**Mid-20th century**  
**Collection of Frederick John Lamp**



Fig. 12  
*Ci-wara* headdress  
Bamana. Mali  
Late 19th or early 20th century  
Museum for African Art



Fig. 13  
*A-Tshol* shrine piece  
Baga, Guinea  
Late 19th century  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



Fig. 14  
Feast ladle (*wunkirmian*)  
Dan. Liberia  
Mid-20th century  
American Museum of Natural History

S.C.  
Sept 25, 1852

# GANG OF 25 SEA ISLAND COTTON AND RICE NEGROES,

By **LOUIS D. DE SAUSSURE.**

On *THURSDAY* the 25th Sept., 1852, at 11 o'clock, A.M., will be sold at **RYAN'S MART**, in Chalmers Street, in the City of Charleston,

*A prime gang of 25 Negroes, accustomed to the culture of Sea Island Cotton and Rice.*

**CONDITIONS.** — One-half Cash, balance by Bond, bearing interest from day of sale, payable in one and two years, to be secured by a mortgage of the negroes and approved personal security. Purchasers to pay for papers.

No.	Age	Capacity.	No.	Age	Capacity.
1 Aleck,	33	Carpenter.	16 Hannah,	60	Cook.
2 Mary Ann,	31	Field hand, prime.	17 Cudjoe,	22	Prime field hand.
3—3 Louisa,	10		3—18 Nancy,	20	Prime field hand, sister of Cudjoe.
4 Abram,	25	Prime field hand.	19 Hannah,	34	Prime field hand.
5 Judy,	24	Prime field hand.	20 James,	13	Slight defect in knee from a broken leg.
6 Carolina,	5		21 Richard,	9	
7 Simon,	1½		22 Thomas,	6	
5—8 Daphne, infant.			5—23 John,	3	
9 Daniel,	45	Field hand, not prime.	1—24 Squash,	40	Prime field hand.
10 Phillis,	32	Field hand.	1—25 Thomas,	28	Prime field hand.
11 Will,	9				
12 Daniel,	6				
13 Margaret,	4				
14 Delia,	2				
7—15 Hannah,	2 months.				

Fig. 15  
Notice of a slave auction, Charleston,  
South Carolina, September 25, 1852.



**Fig. 16**  
Built in 1686, only sixteen years after the founding of the colony, Medway is the oldest house on record in South Carolina. Its plan and location are typical of plantation houses constructed in the Lowcountry over the next hundred years. Goose Creek, South Carolina, 1974. Photo: Greg Day.



Fig. 17  
Fanning rice at Wedgefield Plantation,  
Georgetown County, South Carolina,  
ca. 1890. Photo: Library of Congress.

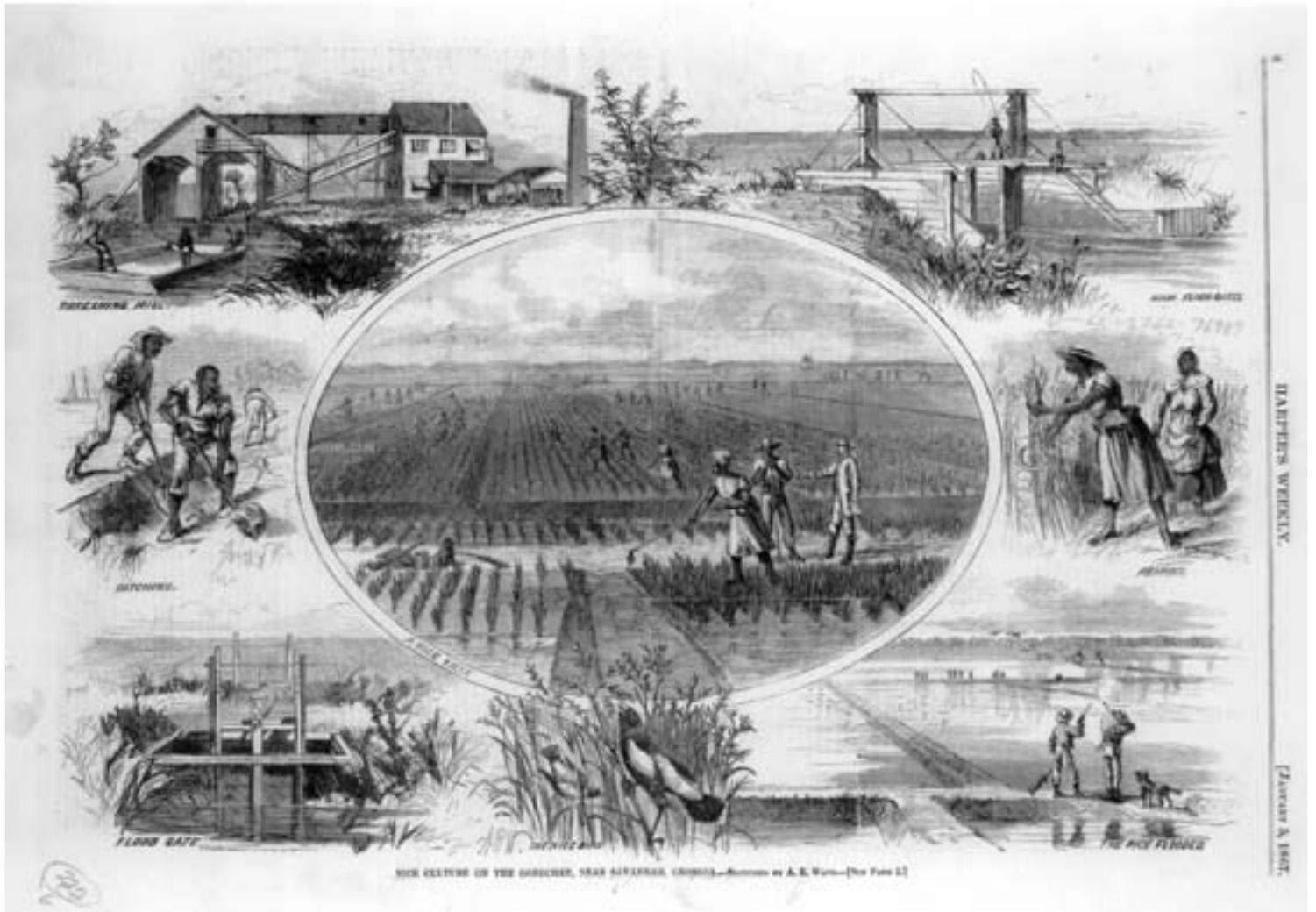


Fig. 18  
 Alfred R. Waud, "Rice Cultivation  
 on the Ogeechee, near Savannah,  
 Georgia" from *Harper's Weekly*,  
 January 5, 1867.



Fig. 19  
"Cultivating rice, South Carolina,"  
stereograph, ca. 1900. Collection  
of Gene Waddell.

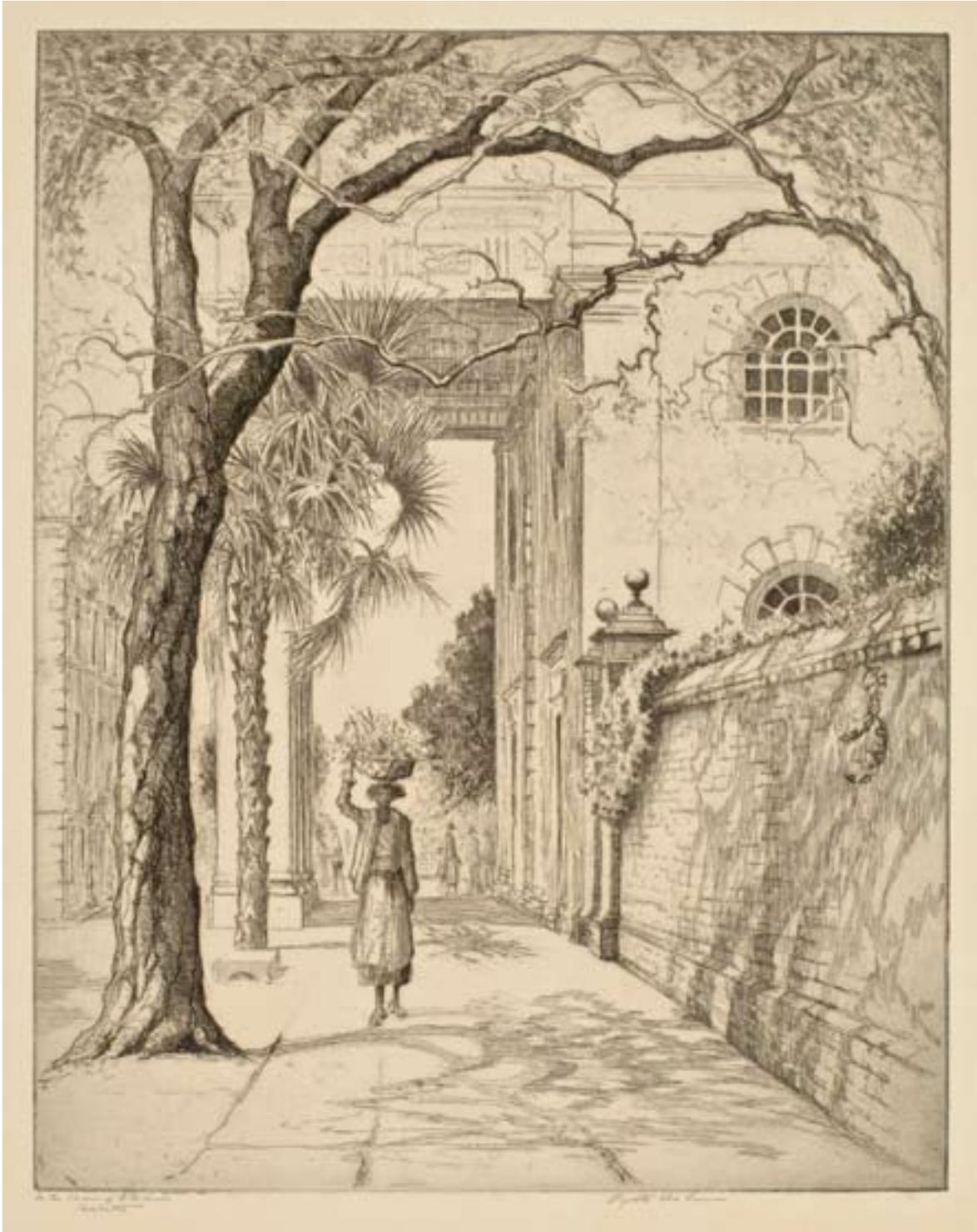


Fig. 20  
*In the Shadow of St. Michael's, Charleston, South  
Carolina*, Elizabeth O'Neill Verner, ca. 1928,  
Etching on paper, Gibbes Museum of Art/  
Carolina Art Association.



Fig. 21  
Vegetable woman, Charleston, South  
Carolina, ca. 1910. Photo: George  
W. Johnson. Gibbes Museum of Art/  
Carolina Art Association.



Fig. 22  
Street Venders, Charleston, South  
Carolina, 1879. Collection of Gene  
Waddell.



**Fig. 23**  
Basket-making class of Alfred  
Graham, Penn School, St. Helena  
Island, South Carolina, ca. 1905.  
Photo: Leigh Richmond Miner.  
Penn School Collection/Southern  
Historical Collection, University of  
North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



**Fig. 24**  
George Browne instructing students  
in Penn's basketry shop, St. Helena  
Island, South Carolina, ca. 1920.  
Photo: Leigh Richmond Miner.  
Penn School Collection/Southern  
Historical Collection, University of  
North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Fig. 25  
Mary Jane Manigault, Mt. Pleasant,  
South Carolina, 1974. Photo: Greg  
Day.



Fig. 26  
Egg basket  
Elizabeth Mazyck, South Carolina  
2002  
American Museum of Natural History



Fig. 27  
Foreman sisters' stand, Highway 17,  
Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, 1994.  
Photo: Dale Rosengarten.



Fig. 28  
Raymond Manigault gathering sweetgrass. Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, 1974. Photo: Greg Day.



Fig. 29  
Footed basket bound with  
strips of plastic  
Mandinka. Gambia  
Late 20th century  
Museum for African Art



Fig. 30  
Wire Basket  
Ntumbifuthi Magwaza, South Africa  
Ca. 2004  
American Museum of Natural History



Fig. 31  
Beer pot lid (*imbenge*)  
Zulu, South Africa  
20th century  
Collection of Kim Sacks



Fig. 32  
Baskets for sale, Thiès, Senegal, 1998.  
Photo: Enid Schildkrout.



**Fig. 33**  
Sister Elizabeth Coakley's basket stand,  
Hwy. 17, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, 1990.  
Photo: Dale Rosengarten.



**APPENDIX B:**  
**Film Notes**  
**Order Form**  
**Resource List**

## Film Notes and Analysis Sheet

### ***Grass Roots: The Enduring Art of the Lowcountry Basket***

The film explores the history and current state of America's oldest African-inspired art. Shown in the film are the skill, knowledge, and artistry embodied in the tradition of coiled grass basketry. We follow the basket makers as they harvest materials, create their baskets, and discuss the meaning of their work.

#### **Step 1. Pre-viewing**

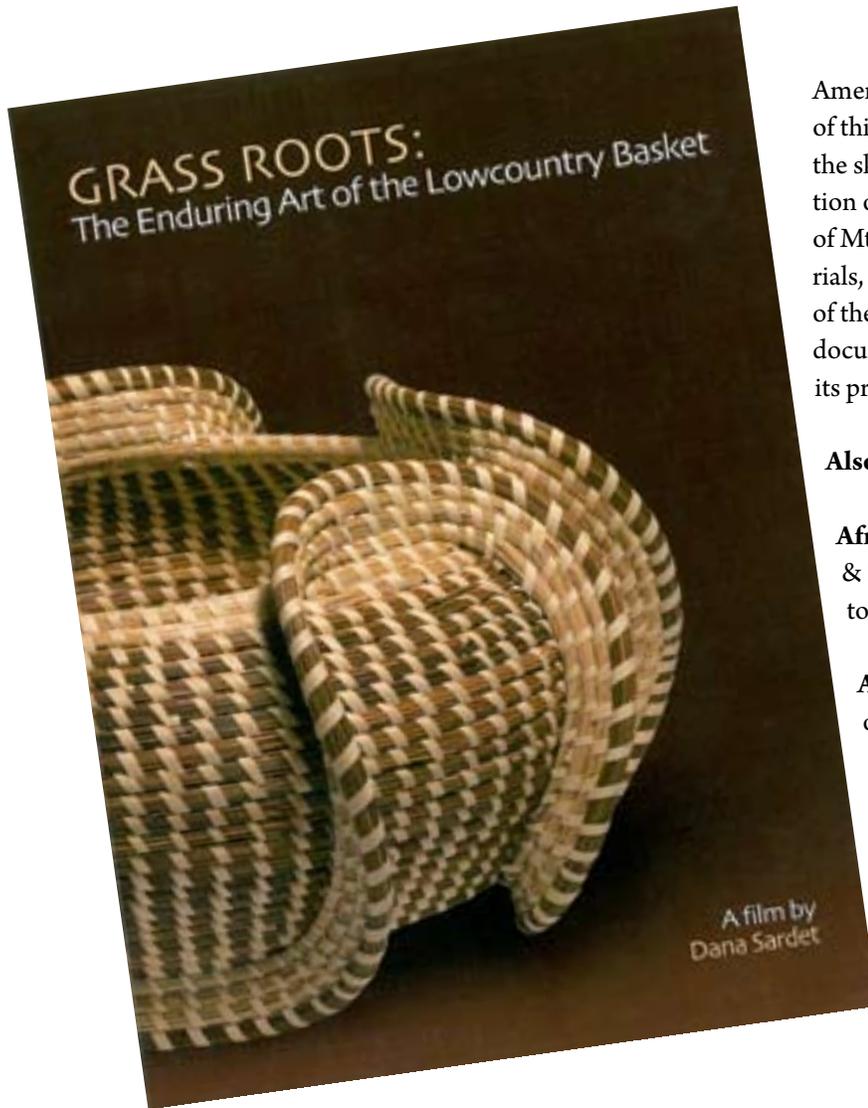
- A. Discuss the title of the film.
- B. What do the words mean?
- C. What is the nature of the country where the film takes place?
- D. What do you think you will see in this motion picture?
- E. List three concepts or ideas that you might expect to see based on the title of the film.
- F. List some people you might expect to see based on the title of the film.

#### **Step 2. Viewing the film (go over with the students these criteria before showing the film)**

- A. What type of film is it? Animated Cartoon, Documentary Film, Newsreel, Propaganda Film, Theatrical short subject, Training film, Combat film, other. Choose one and defend your choice.
- B. Physical qualities of the motion picture (circle all that apply): Music, Narration, Special effects, Color, Live action, Background noise, Animation, Dramatizations.
- C. What is the mood or tone of the film?

#### **Step 3. Post-viewing**

- A. What are the central messages of this film?
- B. Is the film effective in communicating its message?
- C. What are the film's strengths and weaknesses?
- D. How do you think the filmmaker wanted the audience to respond?
- E. Does this film appeal to the viewer's reason or emotion? How does it make you feel?
- F. Write a question to the filmmaker that is left unanswered by the motion picture.
- G. How do you think the filmmaker wanted the audience to respond?



America's oldest African-inspired art is the subject of this exciting new film—a visual feast that captures the skill, artistry, and history embodied in the tradition of coiled grass basketry. We follow basket makers of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, as they harvest materials, create their baskets, and talk about the meaning of their work. From field to market, this half-hour documentary explores the current state of the art and its prospects for the future.

**Also included, 2 short video clips:**

**African Rice & Baskets** takes us to Sierra Leone & Senegal, rice-growing regions where villagers today make colorful coiled baskets.

**A Different Day** provides an eyewitness account of basket making at the Penn School on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, in the early 20th century. Illustrated with period photographs by Leigh Richmond Miner.

**27 minutes**

**Price: \$20** (includes shipping & handling)

## Order Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Institution \_\_\_\_\_

Payment by:

Address \_\_\_\_\_

CHECK

CREDIT CARD:  VISA  MASTER  AMEX

\_\_\_\_\_

Card no. \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. date \_\_\_\_\_

Grade/Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill in information, enclose check and mail to:

Museum for African Art

36-01 43rd Avenue

Long Island City, N.Y. 11101

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

OR fax to 718-784-7718 with credit card information.

## Resource List

(\* Recommended)

### Children's Books – Fiction

- \* Clary, Margie Willis. (1995). *A Sweet, Sweet Basket*. Orangeburg, S.C.: Sandlapper Publishing Co.
- Raven, Margaret Theis. (2004). *Circle Unbroken*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Wood, Peter H. (2003). *Strange New Land: Africans in Colonial America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

### Children's Books – Nonfiction

- Branch, Muriel Miller. (1995). *The Water Brought Us: The Story of the Gullah-Speaking People*. New York: Cobblehill and Dutton Juvenile.
- \* Diouf, Sylviane A. (2000). *Kings and Queens of West Africa*. London: Franklin Watts.
- Garner, Lynne. (2008). *African Crafts: Fun Things to Make and Do from West Africa*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- Ham, Anthony et al. (2006). *West Africa, Multi Country Guide*. Footscray, Australia: Lonely Planet.
- \*Littlefield, Daniel C. (1995). *Rice and the Making of South Carolina: An Introductory Essay*. Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Department of Archives and History.
- \* O'Halloran, Kate. (1997). *Hands-on Culture of West Africa*. Portland, Me.: Walch Publishing.

### Adult Resources

- Appiah, Kwame A. & Gates, Henry Louis (Eds.). (1999). *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Campbell, Edward D. C., Jr. & Rice, Kym S. (Eds.). (1991). *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South*. Richmond, Va.: Museum of the Confederacy & Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press.
- Carawan, Candace & Carawan, Guy (Eds.). (1994). *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?: The People of Johns Island, South Carolina - Their Faces, Their Words, and Their Songs*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press.
- Carney, Judith A. (2001). *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Easterby, J. H. (Ed.). (2004). *The South Carolina Rice Plantation as Revealed in the Papers of Robert W. F. Allston*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press.
- Lamp, Frederick. (1996). *Art of the Baga: A Drama of Cultural Reinvention*. New York: The Museum for African Art and Prestel.
- Morgan, Philip D. (1998). *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Low-country*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press.
- National Park Service. (2005). *Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study and Final Environmental Impact Statement*. Atlanta, Ga.: NPS Southeast Regional Office.

\* Rosengarten, Dale, Rosengarten, Theodore & Schildkrout, Enid. (Eds.). (2008). *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art*. New York: Museum for African Art.

Rosengarten, Dale. (1986). *Row Upon Row: Sea Grass Baskets of the South Carolina Lowcountry*. Columbia, S.C.: McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina.

Vlach, John M. (1991). *By the Work of Their Hands: Studies in Afro-American Folklife*. Charlottesville, Va.: The University of Virginia Press.

\* Vlach, John M. (1990). *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press.

Zahan, Dominique & Roberts, Allen F. (2000). The Two Worlds of Ciwara. *African Arts*, 33:2.

## African Crafts

Brain, Robert. (1980). *Art and Society in Africa*. London: Longman Group.

Cunningham, A. B. & Terry, M. E. (2006). *African Basketry: Grass Roots Art from Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Fernwood Press.

\* Jefferson, Louise E. (1973). *The Decorative Arts of Africa*. New York: Viking Press.

Sieber, Roy. (1980). *African Furniture and Household Objects*. Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press.

Silva, Sónia. (2003). *A Vez dos Cestos / Time for Baskets*. Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Etnologia.

## Videos & Music

California Newsreel (Producer). (1998). *The Language You Cry In*. San Francisco, Ca.: California Newsreel.

Carrier, Tim (Producer). (1988). *Family Across the Sea*. Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina ETV.

Center for the Documentary at the College of Charleston (Producer). (2008). *Grass Roots: The Enduring Art of the Lowcountry Basket*. Charleston, S.C.: Center for the Documentary at the College of Charleston.

\* Jones, Bessie. (1977) *Put Your Hand on Your Hip, and Let Your Backbone Slip*. New York: New World Records.

North State Public Video (Producer). (1987). *Strength of These Arms: White Rice-Black Labor*. Durham, N.C.: North State Public Video.

(Producer unknown). (1998) *God's Gonna Trouble the Water*. Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina ETV.

## Websites and On-Line Resources

\* Avery Research Center for African American History & Culture, College of Charleston: The Center maintains an archive of primary and secondary source material. The website lists descriptions of the collections and local events. It also contains links to other African and African-American resource websites. <http://www.cofc.edu/avery/>

The Charleston Museum: The museum, started in 1773, is located in the Downtown Historic District of Charleston, South Carolina. The website offers a variety of lesson plans relating to the museum's exhibitions and programs. <http://www.charlestonmuseum.org/edlessons.asp>

\*Endangered Traditions – South Carolina and the Gullah: This interactive site provides a discussion group activity for older students and is based on case study material related to land development in the South Carolina Sea Islands region. <http://www.undergroundrailroad.org/freedomquests/traditions/intro/index.html>

\*Gullah Net, Teacher resources, Gullah in the Classroom: This website offers an extensive resource list. It was created by Anita Singleton-Prather, a nationally known performer. The website includes a bibliography, teacher's resource list, and information regarding Prather's programs. <http://www.knowitall.org/gullahnet>

\* National Park Service, When Rice Was King: <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/3rice/3rice.htm>

South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium: This website is a teacher resource page connected to a larger site. The main site contains a newsletter published by the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium and is dedicated to enhancing economic opportunity and conserving the coastal and marine resources of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. [http://www.scseagrant.org/se-cosee/teacher/cl\\_lessons.htm#rice](http://www.scseagrant.org/se-cosee/teacher/cl_lessons.htm#rice)

Penn Center: The Penn School National Historic Landmark District of the Penn Center operates a history and culture program. The website provides a variety of educational resources for lesson planning and background information. <http://www.penncenter.com/>

Rodale Institute: The website includes an indoor gardening activity for raising rice. <http://www.kidsregen.org/howTo.php?section=inGarden&ID=4>

\* Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Festival: This website includes historical background on basket making. <http://www.sweetgrassfestival.org/>

\* The Gullah: Rice, Slavery and the Sierra Leone-American Connection: This website, created by Joseph A. Opala, provides extensive information on the Gullah. <http://www.yale.edu/glc/gullah/index.htm>

\* USF Africana Heritage Project: This website, a creation of the Africana Heritage Project, includes records that document the names and lives of former slaves, freed persons and their descendants. There are links to many free resources and personal family histories. <http://www.africanaheritage.com/> See also the Lowcountry Africana Website, <http://lowcountryafricana.net>.

U.S. Rice Producers Association: This website is for students and teachers and includes age-graded standardized lesson plans (requires Macromedia Flash Player). <http://www.riceromp.com/>