

Lesson Title	Gullah Geechee Basket Weaving
Grade Level(s)	8-12
Timeline	1-2 45-minute class period(s)

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How is culture reflected in the arts?

OBJECTIVES

Students will gain a better understanding of Gullah Geechee culture by constructing and weaving their own baskets.

STANDARDS

Social Studies
SS8G1b. Distinguish among the five geographic regions of Georgia in terms of location, climate, agriculture, and economic contribution.
SS8G1c. Locate key physical features of Georgia and explain their importance; include the Fall Line, Okefenokee Swamp, Appalachian Mountains, Chattahoochee and Savannah Rivers, and barrier islands.
SSUSH2b. Describe the Middle Passage, the growth of the African population and their contributions, including but not limited to architecture, agriculture, and foodways.
SSSocC1d. Describe the components of culture to include language, symbols, norms, and values; also include material and non-material culture.
SSWG2a. Examine how ethnic compositions of various groups has led to diversified cultural landscapes, including, but not limited to, architecture, traditions, food, art, and music.

Visual Art
VA8.CR.2b. Produce three-dimensional artworks using a variety of media/materials (e.g. clay, papiermâché, cardboard, paper, plaster, wood, wire, found objects, fiber).
VA8.CN.1b. Articulate reasons for making art throughout history, including the mutual influence of history, culture, and art.
VA8.CN.3c. Make interdisciplinary connections, expanding upon and applying art skills and knowledge to enhance other areas of learning.
VAHSAD.RE.1b. Investigate and discuss how the issues of time, place, and/or culture are reflected in works of art.

BACKGROUND

The Gullah Geechee culture can be found along Georgia and South Carolina’s Sea Islands. [Watch this video](#) from VICE News to help students develop a better understanding of the Gullah Geechee people, culture, and history.

Alternatively, students can read about the Gullah Geechee culture with [this article](#) from the New Georgia Encyclopedia.

MATERIALS

- Internet connection
- Computer or smart device
- Plant material such as pine straw or sweetgrass
- Plant fiber such as palmetto
- A pointed instrument, traditionally a sharpened spoon handle

OR

- Thin cardboard
- Assorted yarn
- Glue
- Felt
- Scissors
- Clothespins

VOCABULARY

Gullah Geechee people: descendants of Africans who were enslaved on the rice, indigo, and Sea Island cotton plantations of the lower Atlantic coast

sweetgrass: a slender fragrant perennial grass that typically grows in moist soils and is used especially in basketry

PROCEDURES

1. Ask students why people have traditions. Ask them to identify a family or cultural tradition they observe. (This could be cooking a special meal on Thanksgiving, setting off fireworks on the Fourth of July, attending tailgates for sporting events, dressing up to attend church, synagogue, mosque, etc, carving pumpkins for Halloween, etc.)
2. In a small group discussion or in a written assignment, have students explain their tradition and why it is important to them.
3. Explain that many traditions we have in the United States have been influenced by other cultures, including African cultures. One tradition that still remains is making sweetgrass baskets in the Gullah Geechee culture.
4. Introduce sweetgrass basket making with [this video](#) from GPB News. For younger students, introduce this topic with the picture book [Circle Unbroken by Margot Theis Raven](#).

Due to access to certain materials, below are two ways students can create their own baskets.

VERSION ONE: Cardboard Basket Weaving

These instructions come from triedandtrueblog.com.

Materials needed:

- Thin cardboard
- Assorted yarn
- Glue
- Felt

- Scissors
 - Clothespins
1. Using a sheet of cardboard (cereal boxes work well), have students trace the outline for their basket [using this template](#). You may have students work independently or in pairs.
 2. Cut a circle of felt and glue it to what will be the bottom of the basket.
 3. Tie the yarn end to one of the cardboard spokes and begin to weave in and out of each panel.
 4. Continue weaving until you're ready to add another color. You can switch out the yarns by just tying one to the other and continuing weaving around the bowl.
 5. Once the yarn has been woven to the top, wrap the yarn around the top several times and hold in place with clothespins.
 6. To secure the loose yarn at the top of the basket, insert a needle with yarn through the bottom of the basket. Work the needle and yarn to the top of the basket and begin weaving around the edge, in and out of the circles at the top.
 7. Have students display their baskets in the classroom or media center for others to view.

VERSION TWO: Pine Straw and Palmetto Basket Weaving

Materials needed:

- Plant material such as long pine straw
- Plant fiber such as palmetto
- A pointed instrument, traditionally a sharpened spoon handle

[This video](#) offers a good tutorial on how to make a pine needle basket.

The instructions below come from eHow.com.

1. Tear a saw palmetto leaf into long strips about 1/4 inch wide. Take a bundle of pine straw and align the ends of the fibers at one end of the bundle. Wrap one of the palm leaf strands around the end of the bundle and then fold the bundle back on itself. This is the beginning of the bottom of the basket.
2. Begin to coil the bundle of pine straw around the centerfold. Every 1/2 inch or so, poke a hole in the bundle row below with the pointed instrument. Thread the end of the palm strip through this opening in the bundle. Bring the palm strip back over the top of the new row you are adding. Poke another hole in the row below and thread the palm through, securing the top bundle in place.
3. Continue coiling around the circle, poking holes in the bundle below the row you are working on, adding new rows of pine straw bundles and securing them with the palmetto strands. When the bundle begins to get thin because you have come to the end of one of the strands in the bundle, add another piece of pine straw by poking it into the bundle. Continue splicing in new pieces of sweetgrass as you go.
4. Cut a new strip of saw palmetto when the first one is used up. Leave a bit of the previous piece sticking out, which you will darn in later. When the basket bottom is big enough, begin shaping the basket sides by adding new bundles at right angles to the previous rows of the spiral. Work up the sides of the basket by continuing to add new bundles and stitch them down with saw palmetto fibers.
5. Continue adding new coils until the basket is the height you desire. Stop adding new fibers to the pine straw coil, so that it gradually becomes smaller and smaller and finally dwindles to nothing.
6. Have students display their baskets in the classroom or media center for others to view.

ASSESSMENT/CLOSING

1. To wrap up this activity, have students respond to the following questions as their ticket-out-the-door. Responses can be submitted electronically or on paper.
 - a. In which region of Georgia do the Gullah Geechee people reside?
 - b. From which physical feature of Georgia do they get the sweetgrass for basket weaving?
 - c. From where did the Gullah Geechee tradition of weaving sweetgrass baskets originate?

EXTENSION/INQUIRY

Many cultures are often reflected in how baskets or bowls are constructed and designed. Research three unique cultures from different parts of the world. How are their baskets or bowls constructed? What materials are used? What designs are present? How do these elements reflect the culture, such as the food these people eat, their religious beliefs, geographical location, etc.? How are the bowls or baskets different from or similar to the Gullah Geechee sweetgrass baskets?

Ideas for cultures to research: Ancient Mayan, [Mississippian Indians](#), Egyptian, Moroccan, Vietnamese, Ancient Roman, Zulu

For in-depth inquiry examples, visit c3teachers.org.

MODIFICATIONS

1. For students needing modifications, use the first basket weaving option. Provide a pre-cut template for the base of the basket.
2. Provide additional time to complete the basket as needed.
3. For the ticket-out-the-door, allow students to orally respond to the questions rather than write their answers.

RESOURCES

[A Vanishing History: Gullah Geechee Nation | VICE News](#)
[Geechee and Gullah Culture | New Georgia Encyclopedia](#)
[Basket Weaving | GPB News](#)