

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Advisory: \_\_\_\_\_ Group: \_\_\_\_\_

## Basket Beginnings... A Basic History

**Directions:** Read the basic history of baskets and answer the questions using RAVE.

The weaving of baskets is as old as the history of man. Traces of baskets have been found as far back as the Egyptian pyramids and were found in almost every country in the world. As soon as people were able to plait (braid) fibers together, they began to experiment with structures for woven (interlaced materials) containers. These ancient baskets were used for a variety of reasons based on the geographical needs of the weavers. Baskets were needed as containers for everything imaginable- food, clothing, seeds, storage and transport.

1. Baskets are an art form that appeared all of the world without cultures speaking to each other. What are 2 factors influenced the creation of baskets?

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2. What do we use to store things instead of baskets today?

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The first basket may have been nothing more than a mesh of fibers drawn around a water gourd (hard shelled fruit that cannot be eaten). The gourd was a good container to hold liquids, but it was fragile (easily broken). As a result, people learned to strengthen it by interlacing grasses and twigs around it. If the gourd broke, its covering remained and became a useful basket.

3. What was the purpose of creating a basket to hold a gourd?

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When the trading and selling of goods between distant lands became common, items to be traded or sold were stored in baskets to accommodate (to provide what is needed) the many forms of transportation. Because these baskets traveled across seas and continents, weaving styles and designs were distributed throughout the world and shared across cultures; some were adopted for practical use, others coveted for their craftsmanship and attractiveness.

4. How did trading goods between countries influence the styles and designs of baskets?

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There are two main techniques for creating baskets. Coiling is a technique of winding up the fiber like a snake while stitching it every quarter to a half of an inch. The inner coiled material was usually grasses and the sewing material might be a stronger grass or stripped down tree fibers. The Native Americans of the Southwestern states of the US have long perfected coiling with grasses. Their wrapping usually covers the inner grasses completely. There is another kind of coiled basket which is woven from pine needles- the longer the better. These baskets are popular in Florida and the Northwestern US and are usually they're sewn with raffia. (Raffia is the fiber of the Madagascar palm tree- very soft, waxy and easy to sew with.)

Splint weaving is the technique of weaving with flat materials. In Asia, these are made with reed and cane, the products of the vine *calamus rotang*, which grows in the rainforest of Indonesia. The vines are cut, transported by barge to ports where they are then exported to China for processing into the smooth coils of cane and reed. The cane is from the bark and the reed is from the core of the vine. So, in much the same way that trees become lumber, *calamus rotang* becomes reed and cane. It does not harm the rain forest to harvest these fibers. They grow up into the trees and are pulled out of the trees without cutting down the trees. Splint weaving in Europe and the Americas is done today with reed and cane, but also with the traditional fibers of years past: oak, ash and hickory. Trees are cut down, soaked in water, then finally split open and "peeled" from the inside to make weavable strips.

5. Why is weaving baskets environmentally friendly (good for the earth)?

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6. (extra credit) What is the biggest difference between making a basket and the other projects we have done all year?

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