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# Circle Unbroken

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Raven, Margot Theis. *Circle Unbroken*. Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003. ISBN 0374312893. \$16.00. 48 pp.

Reviewer: Sandy Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Sweetgrass baskets--Juvenile fiction; Gullahs--Juvenile fiction; Grandmothers--Juvenile fiction; African Americans--Juvenile fiction; Family history--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Grandma takes her granddaughter in her lap and, as she teaches her granddaughter the ancient craft of sweetgrass basket weaving, tells her the history of their family. Her ancestors originated in Africa and were brought to America as slaves to the Sea Islands off the Southern Carolina coast. Grandma emphasizes that the basket represents a circle of unbroken family loyalty and love. The basket's reeds are overlapped and weaved with amazing expertise; when the dexterous "fingers talked just right" "the basket held the rain." The skillfully woven baskets not only held physical rain, but they held the despair and pain experienced by the family through slavery, war, and cultural change.

This is a tender story of love and family set in a unique place. At the end of the book, Raven provides detailed paragraphs of the origin of sweetgrass baskets and a selected bibliography for further reading about the ancient Gullah culture and the art of basketry. The illustrations by Lewis are realistic and very expressive; his research the subject of the book so that the text and pictures would complement each other. If you're a writer interested in telling your own family story, this book gives a good example of how even a small amount of information about one's ancestry can be used to create a beautiful family story.