

Henrietta Snype and Eartha Lee Washington

1. Basketmaking materials (02:31)

<Video begins with views of marshland>

E.L. Washington: The-the-a sweetgrass, a-the thing about it-you gotta know what it is really. It's tricky. Well, the sweetgrass is easy to pull if you get to where you can find some. There's a difference between the sweetgrass too. There's the soft, there-is-one is just soft and there's a coarser one and then of course the bulrush.

H. Snype: The sweetgrass have the more art look. I mean the bulrush give it the pretty coloring, but the sweetgrass is the most, thing that is so scare.

<Camera shows H. Snype and E.L. Washington sitting together>

You can just walk right up here and you can always find bulrush, but you can't always just walk up and say 'well there's some sweetgrass.' It seems like sweetgrass-it's like finding gold. 'Cause uh, sweetgrass is like, it's scarce. But bulrush, you can find that-it's you don't have to get in your car and travel for miles and miles and miles to look for bulrush. 'Cause right here you got enough bulrush here to last you a lifetime.

<Camera shows marshland and people gathering basket materials>

But where would you find enough sweetgrass to last you a lifetime? To keep the art going?

E.L. Washington: And really, the sweetgrass is the basket itself. You know, if the sweetgrass is gone, there wont be any sweetgrass baskets. You know, the bulrush, just like she said, will add the coloring, but that-

H. Snype: -That-that's just my feelings. I mean I feel like-

E.L. Washington: It-it's not the sweetgrass basket.

<Camera shows a close up of H. Snype>

H. Snype: It's like gold. It's like you got gold and silver on one side, but, to me, sweetgrass is gold. 'Cause the bulrush, you can find it all over. You can go inside any swampy area and find uh...

E.L. Washington: The bulrush.

H. Snype: Bulrush. And there's plenty of it. It's not like, "hey, look, don't take all away from me because there's not enough." But there's enough to go around. I mean, you can-you got enough bulrush to last you a lifetime. And you don't have to go to bed and wonder, "well wonder where I'm gonna get some bulrush tomorrow." You can always find bulrush, but you can't always find sweetgrass. It's very scarce. It's like gold.

<Camera zooms out to show the H. Snype and E.L. Washington>

And, to me, like putting sweetgrass in a basket, my theory is that, that basket has more meaning to it, because, if it's got sweetgrass in it, it's got more meaning to it because, it is the thing that is so scarce, while the bulrush, it highlights the coloring, just make it look real pretty, but the sweetgrass is the key.

<Camera zooms back in on H. Snype>

Because that's when you started out-you started out bulrush...for me, I just learned how to really use it-

E.L. Washington: Just kinda, recently.

H. Snype: -bout four years ago, for myself. But, um, sweetgrass is really the traditional, um, material that we use. But you know, I'm not-I don't have anything against bulrush, but it's-to me sweetgrass is like pure gold.

<Camera zooms back in on E.L. Washington>

They used to make a lot of that. Fruit basket and rain tray and coaster, they were the three ideal basket at that time.

H. Snype: And your bread basket, is one of the first basket that we use.

<Camera zooms back out>

If you learn to make a bread basket, you have really achieved a big goal.

E.L. Washington: And...But um, I...Anyone who want to get into basket weaving, they should. It's a rewarding-when you look at something you created, it's always rewarding.

<Camera shows close up of E.L. Washington>

And 'special something like this. Not too many people have the talent for this and like Henrietta says, it's really dieing out and we shouldn't let it. We shouldn't. Because I just gotta feeling that years to come, somebody is gonna come and want to know about this basket and they would die inside if they can't get one.

<Camera shows close up of H. Snype>

H. Snype: I hope in the near future that they could come up with a solution, that can-we-all the weavers can kinda just get together and just like go there and just get the supply that we really need, so this art wont be a dieing art, just because of the shortage of the sweetgrass.

<Camera zooms back out>

And the palmetto, we can get that here locally.

<Camera shows close up of E.L. Washington>

E.L. Washington: And uh, far as the material, if the material die out, we wont have to worry about anybody training anyone to do it because there wont be anything to work with. It'll just be dead anyway without it and it will be a shame.

<Camera shows close up of E.L. Washington's hands, weaving>

A great shame, because it's a grand art.

<Camera zooms back out>

H. Snype: And you really have to appreciate this work to really like it, you know, you have to really appreciate it-

E.L. Washington: -I have an appreciation for it-

H. Snype: -Just don't look at it and say, "Oh, that's a basket."

<Camera zooms in on H. Snype>

It's an art, it's your heritage, and it's a tradition. So it's something that we like doing.