



# HISTORY OF THE PIÑATA

Most people think of piñatas as a fun activity for parties. The history of the piñata reveals many interesting facts that go beyond the playing of a game, although piñatas certainly have been intended for fun.

Piñatas were originated in China. Marco Polo discovered the Chinese fashioning figures of cows, oxen or buffaloes, covered with colored paper and adorned with harnesses and trappings.

Special colors traditionally greeted the New Year. When the mandarins knocked the figure hard with sticks of various colors, seeds spilled forth. After burning the remains, people gathered the ashes for good luck throughout the year.



# CUSTOM PASSED INTO EUROPE

When this custom passed into Europe in the 14th century, it adapted to the celebrations of Lent. The first Sunday became 'Piñata Sunday'.

The Italian word 'pignatta' means "fragile pot." Originally, piñatas fashioned without a base resembled clay containers for carrying water.

Some say this is the origin of the traditional pineapple shape. Also the Latin prefix 'piña' implies a cluster of flowers or fruits as in 'pineapples' and 'pine cones'.

# CUSTOM SPREAD TO SPAIN

When the custom spread to Spain, the first Sunday in Lent became a fiesta called the 'Dance of the Piñata'.

The Spanish used a clay container called la olla, the Spanish word for pot. At first, la olla was not decorated. Later, ribbons, tinsel and fringed paper were added and wrapped around the pot.





At the beginning of the 16th century the Spanish missionaries in Mexico used the piñata to attract converts to their ceremonies. However indigenous peoples already had a similar tradition. To celebrate the birthday of the Aztec god of war, Huitzilopochtli, priests placed a clay pot on a pole in the temple at year's end.

Colorful feathers adorned the richly decorated pot, filled with tiny treasures. When broken with a stick or club, the treasures fell to the feet of the god's image as an offering. The Mayans, great lovers of sport played a game where the player's eyes were covered while hitting a clay pot suspended by string.

The missionaries ingeniously transformed these games for religious instruction. They covered the traditional pot with colored paper, giving it an extraordinary, perhaps fearful appearance.



# THE DECORATED CLAY POT...

The decorated clay pot also called a cantaro represents Satan who often wears an attractive mask to attract humanity. The most traditional style piñata looks a bit like Sputnik, with seven points, each with streamers. These cones represent the seven deadly sins, pecados – greed, gluttony, sloth, pride, envy, wrath and lust. Beautiful and bright, the piñata tempted. Candies and fruits inside represented the cantaros (temptations) of wealth and earthly pleasures.





# FAITH, HOPE & CHARITY

Thus, the piñata reflected three theological virtues in the catechism (religious instruction or catechism.) The blindfolded participant represents the leading force in defying evil, 'Fe', faith, which must be blind. People gathered near the player and spun him around to confuse his sense of space. Sometimes the turns numbered thirty three in memory of the life of Christ.



*The voices of others cry out guidance:*

*¡Más arriba! More upwards!*

*¡Abajo! Lower!*

*¡Enfrente! In front!*



# FAITH, HOPE & CHARITY



Secondly, the piñata served as a symbol of 'Esperanza', Hope. With the piñata hanging above their heads, people watched towards los cielos (sky or heaven) yearning and waiting for the prize. The stick for breaking the piñata symbolized virtue, as only good can overcome evil. Once broken, the candies and fruits represented the just reward for keeping faith.

Finally, the piñata symbolized 'Caridad', Charity. With its eventual breaking, everyone shared in the divine blessings and gifts. The moral of the piñata: ALL ARE JUSTIFIED THROUGH FAITH.



# TODAY...

Today, the piñata has lost its religious symbolism and most participate in the game solely for fun. Piñatas are especially popular during LAS POSADAS. During these festivities, people traditionally sing songs while breaking the piñatas.



*Dale, dale, dale,  
no pierdas el tino,  
porque si lo pierdes,  
pierdes el camino.*

*Hit, hit, hit.  
Don't lose your aim,  
Because if you lose,  
you lose the road.*



WHAT DO YOU  
KNOW ABOUT  
PIÑATAS?

- Which is the reason the Spanish missionaries used the piñata?
- The Italian word 'pignatta' means?
- The decorated clay pot also called a cantero represents...
- The seven points of the piñata means...
- Candies and fruits inside the piñata represent...
- The blindfolded participant represents...
- Which is the reason people gathered near the player and spun him around?
- The stick for breaking the piñata symbolized ...
- Once the piñata is broken, the candies and fruits represent...
- Las piñatas are especially popular during...

1. To have fun with kids only
2. To attract converts to their religious ceremonies
3. "fragile pot"
4. La olla
5. Satan
6. World
7. Church
8. 7 continents
9. Weddings
10. Las Posadas
11. Deadly sins
12. Happiness
13. Temptations
14. Faith
15. To confuse his sense of space
16. To help
17. To confuse
18. Virtue
19. The just reward for keeping faith
20. Sadness



## DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE PIÑATA REPRESENTS?

The Decorated Clay Pot

SATAN

The seven peaks

THE 7 DEADLY SINS

Sweets & fruits

GRACE FROM GOD FOR BEING FAITHFUL

The stick for hitting

VIRTUE

The bandage of the eyes

FAITH IN GOD



# HOW TO MAKE A PIÑATA



Piñata Making Video (English)  
<https://youtu.be/X5rh8dlQ5dA>

Piñata Making Video (English)  
<https://youtu.be/44JYARhkFe8>

Como hacer una piñata en casa (Español)  
<https://youtu.be/viJeJvTiaU8>  
<https://youtu.be/oPxSwh6je2g>

Rompe la piñata song in Spanish  
[https://youtu.be/9RUsk\\_uYCul](https://youtu.be/9RUsk_uYCul)