

The Heritage Continues

Lesson #19: NAVIDAD (Christmas)

TIME

Three sessions (60 minutes, 30 minutes, and 60 minutes)

MATERIALS FROM THE TRUNK

Book - *Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico*

Object - Piñata (Please note that this piñata is smaller than most. It was chosen because it fit into this trunk. It has been included in the trunk as an example of a piñata. Please do not use it for a piñata party.)

OTHER MATERIALS

FOR MAKING A PIÑATA: balloons, newspaper strips about 3/4" to 1" wide, half glue and half water mixture or a flour/water paste for making paper-mache, construction paper or cone-shaped paper cups, shallow container for holding glue or paste, string, masking tape, tissue paper, scissors, clean-up supplies.

FOR THE PIÑATA PARTY: a piñata that can be broken, wire, heavy string or rope to hang the piñata, "goodies" for filling the piñata, blindfold, stick for hitting the piñata.

TEACHER PREPARATIONS

Cut the newspapers and tissue papers into strips.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- 1) define celebration
- 2) compare one aspect of their culture with that of another
- 3) create an object symbolic of both the Mexican and Mexican American cultures

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Mexican Christmas ritual of *Las Posadas* (The Lodgings) is still celebrated in many Mexican American communities. This holiday begins on December 16. It is a Christmas play of Spanish heritage that began hundreds of years ago in southern Europe.

This event portrays how Joseph and Mary searched for a place for the Christ Child to be born. The word *posada* means "inn" or "place of lodging." Mary and Joseph could not find an inn where Mary could give birth, so they wandered until they found a stable with a manger. Participants carry small figures of Mary and Joseph as they go from house to house in a song-filled, candlelit procession as they reenact Mary and Joseph's search for a place for Jesus to be born. At first they are refused admittance. When they reach the house where the Nativity scene will be kept for the night, they have a big celebration that may include a piñata, Mexican hot chocolate, *pan dulce* (sweet bread), cookies, and guitar-strumming

musicians.

Las Posadas is celebrated by many Mexican Americans, although the details may differ. Many parts of Christmas in America have taken on Hispanic customs. Across the United States people say, "Feliz Navidad" (fay-LEES nah-vee-DAHD), which is Spanish for "Merry Christmas." It is not unusual for different kinds of churches and communities across the United States to celebrate Las Posadas by having people dress up as Mary and Joseph and ride on a donkey. Luminarias, containers or bags filled with lighted candles, often are used to decorate for Las Posadas or Christmas activities.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PIÑATA

Piñatas today are found at posadas, birthday parties, weddings, or anywhere there is a festivity. They are filled with toys and candies and covered with gaily colored strips of tissue paper. They are hung high near the ceiling. A game is played with the piñata. The object of the game is to break the piñata. One person is blindfolded and tries to open the piñata by hitting it with a stick. Each person takes a turn being blindfolded until the piñata bursts open, and the toys and sweets spill out.

Piñatas didn't originate in Mexico. They began in Italy and were first called *Pignattas*. During the European Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the pignattas were made of clay and shaped like an ice cream cone. This cone shape was called a *pigna*. Later the single cone became three cones put together like a star. The star symbolized the three kings of the Christmas season, and the goodies inside the gifts they brought to baby Jesus. Each point represents one of the three kings. Piñatas were first used in Mexico during the Feast of the Three Kings. Young children were told that the three kings were the ones who put candy and toys in the piñatas.

VOCABULARY

- **Celebration** = Ceremonies and other activities that observe or honor a special day or event.
- **Culture** = The arts, beliefs, and customs that form a way of life for a group of people at a certain time.
- **Jacaranda Tree** = A tropical American tree with blue flowers.
- **Piñata** = A decorated container filled with candies, toys and other "goodies"; hung; and then broken as part of a party game.
- **Posada** - A reenactment of the biblical story of Mary and Joseph's search for a place for Mary to give birth.

ACTIVITY

SESSION ONE:

- 1) Ask the class what they think the words celebration and culture mean.

Celebrations are ceremonies and other activities practiced to observe or honor a special day or event. Culture is the arts, beliefs, and customs that form a way of life for a group of people at a certain time.

Read the book *Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico* to the class. Have them think about their definition of celebration and culture while the book is being read.

- 2) After reading the book pose the following questions to the class:

What was the reason for the celebration?

A religious celebration/Christmas.

What form did the celebration take?

a posada

What was included in the posada?

Special food and clothing, a shopping trip to the market, preparing the piñata and for the party, etc.

Are there visible signs of Mexico's culture in the book? If so, what are they?

Yes. The market, piñatas, food, the celebration, signs in Spanish, etc.

Are there signs of a mixture of cultures? If so, what are they?

The Dairy Queen on page 25. Stating that "village costume" was worn tells the reader that this "traditional" clothing is special, it is not everyday clothing.

Ask if anyone in the class has ever participated in a posada. Ask them to share their experiences with the class.

- 3) Every culture has its own celebrations. Begin a discussion with the class about how this celebration is similar to celebrations the class is familiar with.

It involves food, fancy or special clothing, traditions, getting together with friends and family, and a religious holiday.

Ask the class if they have ever participated in an event or celebration that had characteristics of the Mexican posada or the piñata party.

Piñatas are used at birthday parties. Christmas processions or nativities have some similarities to Las Posadas. Christmas caroling is another activity that takes groups door to door during the Christmas season.

- 4) Use the previous discussions to talk about how various cultures can have both differences and similarities, and how cultural traditions may change with immigration to the United States.

Use the students' experiences with celebrations similar to the

posada or piñata party as examples.

Show the class the piñata. One part of the Mexican tradition that has immigrated to the United States is the piñata. Explain the history of piñatas and the fact that today they are used for many celebrations besides Christmas.

Piñatas didn't originate in Mexico. They began in Italy and were first called Pignattas. During the European Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the pignattas were shaped like an ice cream cone. This cone shape was called a pigna. Later the single cone became three cones put together like a star. The star symbolized the three kings of the Christmas season, and the goodies inside the gifts they brought to baby Jesus. Each point represents one of those three kings. Piñatas were first used in Mexico during the Feast of the Three Kings. Young children were told that the three kings were the ones who put candy and toys in the piñatas.

- 5) Have each student make a piñata. Piñatas come in many shapes, but one of the easiest to make is the star.

Inflate a balloon. Tie a string around the end of the balloon to hang the piñata with to dry.

- 6) Dip newspaper strips in either the glue/water mixture or flour/water paste. Use fingers to remove excess liquid or paste.
- 7) Cover the inflated balloon with one coat of newspaper strips. Leave an opening at the top to use later to fill the piñata. Let it dry overnight.

SESSION TWO:

- 1) Attach paper cones, or cones made from construction paper, with tape. Repeat steps #6 and 7 above for a second layer. Let it dry overnight.

SESSION THREE:

- 1) When the layers of paper are completely dry and hard, pop the balloon and remove it.
- 2) Punch two holes at the opening of the piñata to tie a string for hanging the piñata.
- 3) Decorate the piñata with colorful strips of tissue paper. Be creative when using the tissue paper. It may be cut into fringed or unfringed strips and glued on or cut or torn into small squares that can be attached by placing a dab of glue at the center of each square.

- 4) Have a piñata party by filling one piñata with "goodies" and taking turns trying to break it. The piñata needs to be hung so it can be raised and lowered while blindfolded participants are trying to hit it.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

- 1) See the complementary lessons in this manual: all lessons included in "The Heritage Continues" section.
- 2) Explore other aspects of the Christmas holiday celebration through books such as *Carlos, Light the Farolita* by Jean Ciavonne and *The Farolitos of Christmas* by Rudolfo A. Anaya.
- 3) Have the students write about their favorite holiday traditions. They may want to speak with family members to discover how this tradition originated and how it has changed over the years.