

Piñatas: From Sins to Sweets

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. Friar: (noun) /'fraɪər/ a member of a religious order of men, especially the four mendicant orders (Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans).
Example: The young man decided to become a friar after his father passed away.
2. Evangelize: (Verb) /ɪ'vændʒəlaɪz/ To preach the gospel to (someone).
Example: The priest went to the remote village to evangelize the people there.
3. Lust: (Noun) /lʌst/ A strong desire for sexual gratification.
Example: He felt a strong lust for her.
4. Gluttony: (Noun) /'glʌtəni/ Indulging in excessive eating or drinking.
Example: She indulged in gluttony during the holiday season.
5. Greed: (Noun) /gri:d/ An intense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth, power, or food.
Example: His greed for money led him to make unethical decisions.
6. Sloth: (Noun) /sləʊθ/ Reluctance to work or make an effort; laziness.
Example: He was fired from his job due to his sloth.
7. Wrath: (Noun) /ræθ/ Extreme anger.
Example: She felt wrath towards her ex-boyfriend.
8. Virtuous: (Adjective) /'vɜ:tʃuəs/ Having or showing high moral standards.
Example: The virtuous woman always helped those in need.



María de Lourdes Ortiz Zacarías has been making piñatas since she was a child, in a family-run business alongside her late mother, who learned the craft from her father. Business is steady all year, mainly with birthday parties, but it really picks up around Christmas. That's

because piñatas are linked to Christian traditions in Mexico. Traditional piñatas are a sphere with seven spiky cones and have a religious origin. Each cone represents one of the seven deadly sins. Hitting the paper-mache shape with a stick is a symbolic blow against sin, with the added benefit of releasing the candy within.

Piñatas have a rich history that dates back centuries. Some say piñatas can be traced back to China, where paper was first invented. But in Mexico, they were apparently brought by the Spanish conquerors, but they may also replicate pre-Hispanic traditions that involved filling clay jars with cocoa seeds — which chocolate is made from — and then breaking the jars. The tradition of piñatas has since spread to other countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Peru, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, where they are mainly used at children's parties.

Piñatas weren't originally filled with candy, however. A few decades ago, piñatas were clay pots covered with paper and filled with sugar cane, fruits, and peanuts. Nowadays, piñatas come in various shapes and sizes, and are often filled with candy, small toys, or other goodies. María de Lourdes Ortiz Zacarías' family makes new designs for most of the year — including popular figures like Barbie and Spider-Man — but around Christmas they return to the seven-pointed style, because of its longstanding association with the holiday.

In the town of Acolman, Ortiz Zacarías' 18-year-old son is the fourth generation to take up the centuries-old craft. He said, "This is a family tradition that has a lot of sentimental value for me." Piñatas are a beloved part of Mexican culture, and are often used to celebrate special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, and Christmas. The piñata's history in Mexico dates back to the same time as the Christmas Posadas in Acolman de Nezahualcoyotl, in the present state of Mexico, near the archaeological site of Teotihuacan. A posada is a Mexican Christmas tradition that reenacts Mary and Joseph's search for lodging in Bethlehem. In 1586, the Augustinian **friars** in Acolman received authorization from Pope Sixtus V to hold what were called "misas de aguinaldo" (special masses that took place before Christmas) which later became the posadas. It was at these masses that were held in the days leading up to Christmas that the friars introduced the piñata. They used the piñata as an allegory to help them in their efforts to **evangelize** the native people of the region and teach them about the principles of Christianity.

The original piñata was shaped like a star with seven points. The points represented the seven deadly sins (**lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath**, envy, and pride) and the bright colors of the piñata symbolize the temptation to fall into these sins. The blindfold represents faith and the stick is virtue or the will to overcome sin. The candies and other goodies inside the piñata are the riches of the kingdom of heaven, that the **virtuous** who are able to overcome sin will receive. The whole exercise is meant to teach that with faith and virtue one can overcome sin and receive all the rewards of heaven. Nowadays in Mexico piñatas are an important part of birthday parties and other parties for children. People don't really think about the meaning behind the piñata when they play it, it's just a fun thing for children to do (and sometimes for adults as well!). At birthday parties, breaking the piñata is usually done just before cutting the cake.

DISCUSSION

1. If you could go back in time to any historical era and bring a piñata filled with goodies, where and when would you go, and what shape would your time-traveling piñata take?
2. If you were to design a piñata based on a movie or TV show character, who would it be, and what surprises would it hold?
3. If piñatas could talk, what do you think they would say about their experiences during celebrations?

4. If the original piñata represented the seven deadly sins, what kind of piñata would represent the virtues you value the most?
5. If breaking a piñata became an official sport in the Olympics, what skills would be crucial, and who do you think would be the gold medalist?
6. If you discovered a new planet populated by friendly piñata creatures, what shape would the planet's piñata moon have, and what treats would it rain down?
7. If you were in charge of a piñata parade, what theme would it have, and which famous personalities or characters would make cameo appearances as piñatas?
8. If piñatas had their own language, what do you think the word for "candy" would be, and how would they express joy or surprise?
9. If breaking a piñata granted you a superpower, what power would it be, and how would you use it in everyday life?
10. If a piñata could offer you one piece of life advice, what do you think it would be, and how would you apply it to your daily routines?