

CELEBRATING THE

Piñata

The Origins and Meaning of a Well-Loved Party Tradition

The tradition of the piñata is a well-known part of birthday parties and Las Posadas, especially in Mexico. But did you know that piñatas as we know them today may have gotten their start in China?

As far back as the 14th century, hollowed out figures were fashioned to resemble cows and other animals. The figures were filled with seeds and strung up with harnesses. Once broken, the seeds were released, signifying a successful harvest and prosperity in the coming year.

It's said that Marco Polo observed this tradition during his travels and brought it to Europe. There the name piñata was introduced, derived from the Italian word *pignatta*, meaning clay cooking pot.

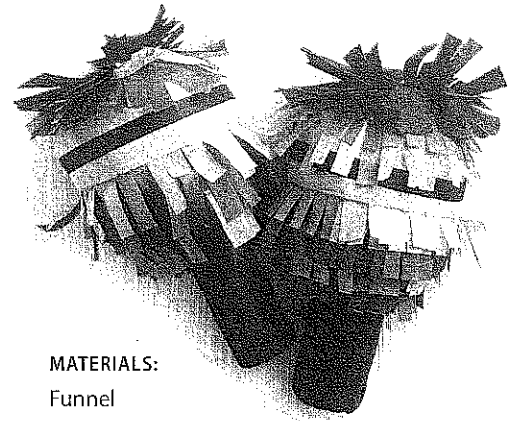
Meanwhile, on the other side of the globe, a similar tradition was already being practiced by the Aztecs.

To celebrate the birthday of Huitzilopochtli, a mythical Aztec symbol of war, priests suspended a clay pot filled with treasures before a statue of the figure. The clay pot was then broken, releasing the treasures.

During the early 16th century, the traditional piñata was adopted by Spanish missionaries who covered clay pots with colored paper and added seven points, creating a star-shaped piñata. The treasures inside the piñata symbolized the reward of leading a virtuous life.

Over time, the tradition of the piñata spread throughout what is now Mexico and evolved into the fun, festive game enjoyed by so many today.

Make your own piñata maracas!



MATERIALS:

- Funnel
- Dried Beans
- Balloons
- Cardboard Tubes (such as toilet paper rolls)
- Scissors, Tape and Glue
- Tissue Paper
- Paper Mache* and Strips of Newspaper
- Sharp Pin or Needle

** To make paper mache, mix one cup of flour and 4 cups of water. Boil the mixture, stirring frequently, until it thickens. Remove from stove and put in a separate bowl. Stir in 4 ice cubes.*

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Use a funnel to pour a small handful of beans into the balloon.
- Blow up the balloon (Be careful not to swallow any beans!).
- Using scissors, cut 1/2 inch slits into one end of the cardboard tube to fringe.
- Tape the fringed end of the cardboard tube onto the bottom of the balloon (make sure it is secure).
- Stuff the cardboard tube tightly with tissue paper, and put tape over the end to keep the beans contained.
- Cover with paper mache and let dry.
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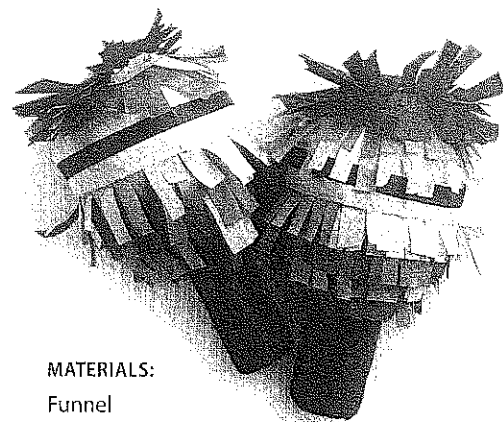
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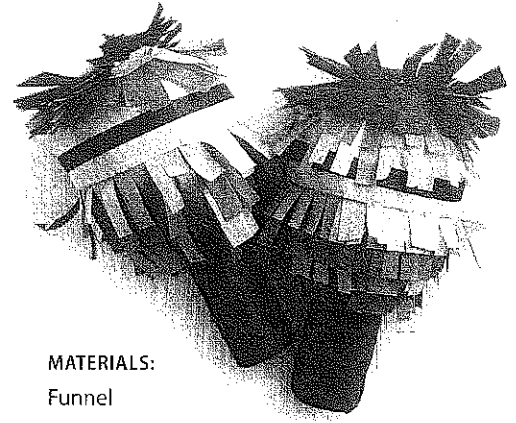
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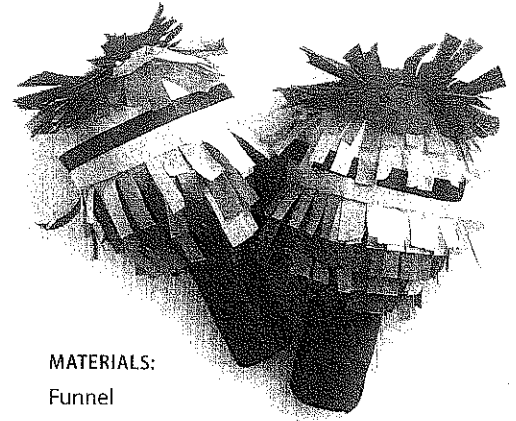
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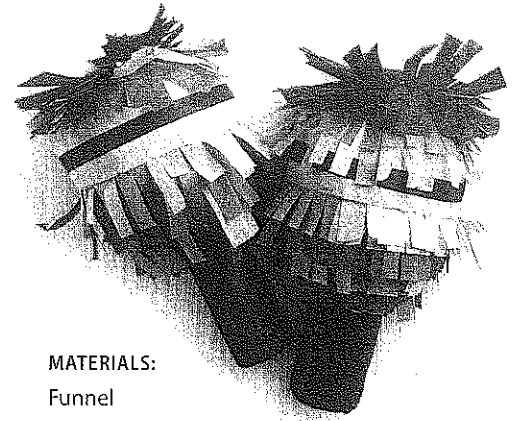
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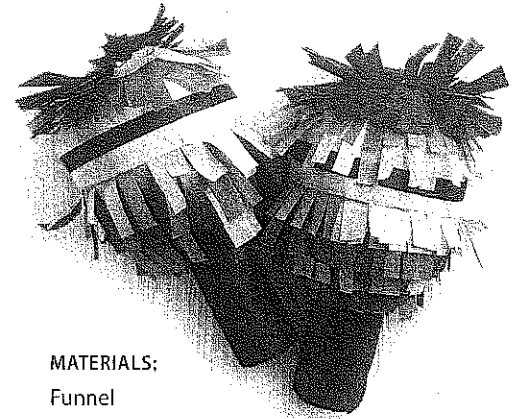
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