

MEXICO

Lessons for Mission Minded Kids

Lesson 5

Mexican Fiesta Days



Mexico

Lesson 5: Mexican Fiesta Days

Goals for Lesson 5:

- Children will experience different aspects of a Mexican Fiesta and be able to compare Mexican celebrations to American holiday celebrations.
- Children will understand that the Light of Jesus can shine through our everyday traditions and can be part of family celebrations in every part of the world.
- Children will be able to apply the light of Jesus shining from our hearts to the lights of Christmas, and the beauty they create in the world.

Verse for Mexico:

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

Before Class:

- Read through lesson and decide what you will use according to your age group and time allotted.
- If you will be serving cookies and hot chocolate, plan how and when you will make and serve them. Make copies of the recipes for the children to take home to make with their families.
- If you will be making your own piñata, begin the process about two weeks in advance, to allow time to make and dry the shell, and then fill it and decorate the outside. If you prefer, purchase a piñata and fill it as desired. Hang the piñata in your room before class, and prepare a blindfold, bags for the goodies, and the stick you will use to hit the pinata.
- Collect the keychain flashlights from the first lesson (light show), or purchase more glow sticks for the children to use in the prayer posada.
- If you will be making the poinsettias or the *farolitos* (luminarias), prepare materials as necessary.
- Make copies of the Mexican Hat Dance and Cinco de Mayo pages to use in class or take home. Gather scissors, colored pencils, crayons or markers to use in class.
- If you will use the song, either practice singing it in Spanish ahead of time, or find someone in your church or community who can speak Spanish and who would be willing to sing it with your students. Make copies to send home with the children. You may also be able to find someone to help teach the Mexican Hat Dance to the children.

Lesson Plan: *This lesson has a lot of flexibility. You may want to allow for extra time, extra space, or extra helpers in order to make the most of your fiesta.*

- Begin your fiesta with a short prayer of thanksgiving and praise. (5 min.)
- Read or tell the story part of the lesson, explaining and discussing as necessary. (15-20 min.)
- Have children form a large circle around the perimeter of the room. Give each child a glow stick or a key-chain flashlight. Darken the room as much as possible and have the children shine their lights. Continue with the “Prayer Posada” as outlined. (10-15 min.)
- At this time, you may want to divide your class into groups and your room into different stations. Each station should be supervised by an adult. Stations could include the making of a construction paper poinsettia, the making of a “farolito”, the making of Cinco de Mayo finger puppets, and coordinating activity sheet, and the practicing of the Mexican Hat Dance, and coordinating color sheet. If you are short on time, you could send some of these activity sheets home with the children, or just skip them entirely. (30-45 min.)
- If you plan to use the piñata, gather the children around it and give rules for safety and for the fair dividing of the goodies when it breaks. (10-15 min.)
- If you are going to serve the hot chocolate and cookies, have the children sit down to be served. While the children are eating, talk with them about their own holiday celebrations and how they differ from the Mexican celebrations they talked about today. Talk to them about how they can let their light shine during the holidays they celebrate with their family and friends. Remind them that when they see the Christmas lights this season, they should remember the “posada” and pray for the people of Mexico to be able to see the Light of Christ and accept Him as their Savior. (10-15 min.)

Lesson 5 Story: Mexican Fiesta Days

The Mexican people love to celebrate holidays and special days together. Do you remember that each town or village is built around a town square or plaza? Large festivals, called “fiestas” are celebrated at certain times every year by the families in the village. They like to gather together in the plaza and enjoy the traditions of the past, as well as more modern additions.

Easter is always a long, exciting celebration. Schools are closed for two weeks. The week before Easter Sunday is called “*Semana Santa*” (Say-MAH-nah SAHN-tah) or Holy Week. Church services, processions around the plaza as well as much food and visiting among families. Spanish missionaries came to Mexico hundreds of years ago to convert the native Indians to Catholicism.

On the fifth day of May, Mexican’s celebrate their strength and unity as a nation. On this day in 1862, a tiny, ill-outfitted army of Mexican men fought fiercely against a much larger, well-trained French army. The Mexicans bravely defended their small town of Puebla, showing the world that they would fight to keep their country and their freedom. Ever since, the Mexican people have celebrated this day with fireworks, cannons, music and dancing, to remind each other of the importance of “*Cinco de Mayo*” (SEEN-ko day MY-yo), or the Fifth of May, in their nation’s history.

Cinco de Mayo has become popular in many parts of the USA as well, due to the influence of Mexican people who have traveled or moved to this country. Here, it is mostly celebrated by eating foods considered typical of Mexico.

Every 16th of September, Mexicans celebrate Mexico's independence from Spanish rule. In the early hours of September 16, 1810, Father Hidalgo and a group of conspirators rang the bell of his small church and called everyone to fight for liberty. Today, the story is re-enacted in every village plaza in Mexico. Flags wave from every structure. Lighted decorations are put up, and people of all ages join in Mexico's biggest fiesta.

Perhaps the most special holiday celebration centers around Christmas. *Las Posadas* (Lahs Poe-SAH-dahs) or “the processions” is a very important Christmas custom. Remembering Mary and Joseph’s trip to Bethlehem, communities participate in a nightly procession through the town, searching for shelter. This happens each night from Dec. 16th through the 24th. Carrying candles and singing, groups of people walk from house to house asking for lodging. Each time, the answer is, “No, there is no room in the inn”, until the last innkeeper finally answers, “Yes, I can give you lodging”. Then the whole group enters and eats and celebrates. On Christmas Eve, a large party is held at the end of the procession, with lots of special foods, plays of the Nativity, called *pastorelas* (Pahs-to-ray-las) and a piñata filled with gifts and candy for the children.

Christmas Day is a quiet time. Families go to church together and eat special foods like oxtail soup, turkey, empanadas, flan (custard pudding) and cake. Finally, at the end of the Christmas holiday, on January 6th, the children put their shoes on the windowsill to get gifts from the Three Kings.

As you can see, the Mexican people celebrate lots of holidays, just like we do. Some of their celebrations are similar, and some are very different. If you lived in Mexico, what do you think would be your favorite holiday? What are some of your favorite traditions to celebrate with your family? What is your favorite holiday food to share with family and friends? How does your family allow the Light of Jesus to shine through your celebrations?

Prayer Posada

We all love to see the twinkling lights on our Christmas Trees and on the houses in our neighborhoods during the Christmas season. In Mexico, Christmas festivities begin on December 16th with Las Posadas, nine days of nightly candlelit parades. Today, we are going to have our own “Posada”. Jesus tells us to (quote verse together with the children) “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16 These lights we are holding remind us of the Light of Jesus that shines out through our lives, so that others may see Jesus and glorify God, who is in heaven. Just like the pretty Christmas lights attract us on a dark night, we can attract others to Jesus if we do good deeds and let our lives shine for Jesus. Each time you see the Christmas lights this season, pray that the Light of Jesus would shine through the many missionaries and Christians living throughout the world, and pray that the many children and adults who have not yet seen the Light of Jesus, would be attracted to the beautiful light shining out from the good deeds of Christians, and would praise our Father in heaven.

Spend a few minutes in a circle of prayer. Pre-arrange for each adult to offer a prayer for the Light of Jesus to shine through each child present, and that the children of Mexico might be attracted to the Light shining through Christians there, and give their hearts to Jesus. Encourage your students to pray out loud, and give time between each adult prayer for any children who are willing. The sacred quiet of the moment, and the darkness and “candle” light can help even timid children to feel more comfortable in sharing their prayers out loud.

After someone has closed the prayer time, make a little “posada” around the room in a circle, holding the little lights. As you walk, quote your verse together three or four times. Depending on the nature of your verse charade, do some or all of the signs as you walk and quote.

If you or someone else is prepared to sing “Silent Night” in Spanish, this would be a good time to sing it, to finish your “posada”. Sing in Spanish, then in English, then in Spanish again, encouraging the children to sing along as much as possible.

Mexican Hat Dance

The Mexican Hat Dance is the official dance of Mexico. It tells the story of a man trying to court a woman. Since its origin in 1734, it has become popular throughout the southwestern United States and through all of Mexico as a source of pride within the Mexican culture. Here is how to do the Mexican Hat Dance.

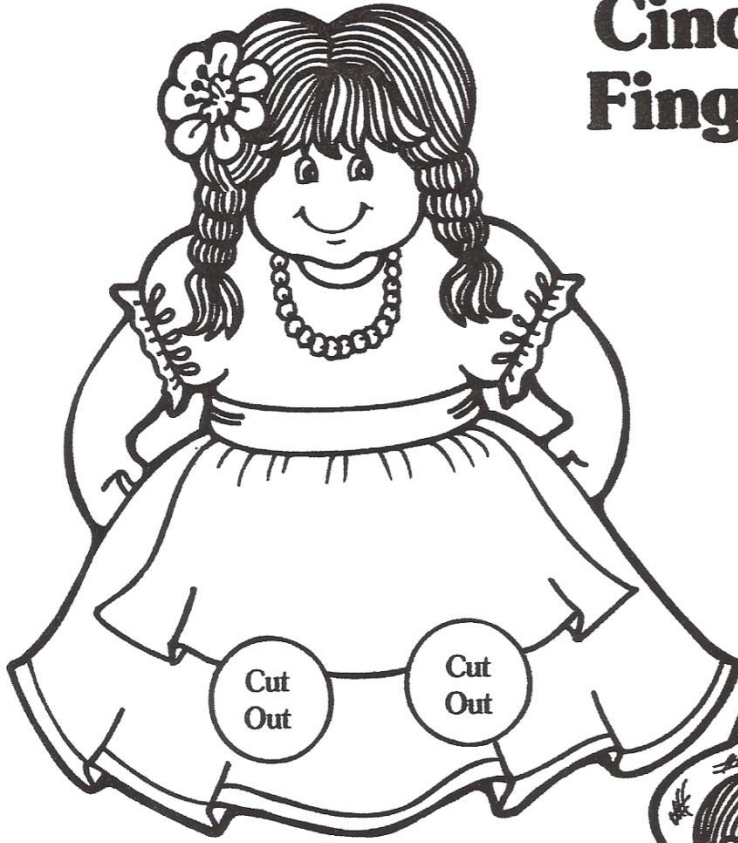
- The Mexican hat dance (or the “baile del sombrero”) can be performed by two people, by a group or just by a single dancer.
- When performing in a group, the dancers need to line up, alternating girl, then boy, then girl. They hold hands and move in a circle, in side steps around a large sombrero on the floor in the middle. The feet alternate with the right heel tapping in front, the right toe tapping in back, two steps to the side, and then the left heel tapping in front, the left toe in the back, and then two side steps. The steps follow the beat of the music and every so often, the direction changes around the hat.
- In case of a single performer, he would throw a Mexican hat (sombrero) on the ground, skip around the hat with one foot, touching the brim of the hat with the other foot and move in a circular motion, with his fists on the waist.
- This step is to be repeated several times, but every time in the opposite direction.
- The dance ends with a loud “olé” (a Spanish victory exclamation).

Mexican Hat Dance

The Mexican hat Dance is one of the favorite dances south of the border. Two children dance around a sombrero, shifting their weight from one foot to the other. Traditionally, the children's feet occasionally touch the wide brim of the sombrero.



Cinco de Mayo Finger Puppets

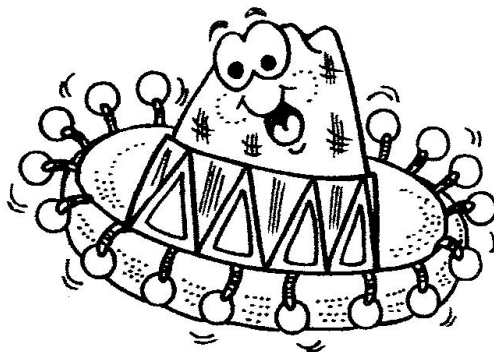


Cinco de Mayo - May 5th!

The tiny town of Puebla, Mexico, stood prepared and ready. It was the morning of May 5, 1862, and the small Mexican army waited patiently in the forts, ready to fight.

Over six thousand French soldiers had come to take the village. As the French forces moved closer to the forts, the Mexican army opened fire. This did not stop the French.

They regrouped and pushed closer until the Mexican soldiers charged on horseback and drove the French back with their swords. The Mexican cannons fired on the French. It became obvious that the mighty French soldiers, in their fancy uniforms, had been defeated by the tiny Mexican army. The Mexican army had only 2,000 men, many without weapons. The French had been too confident and thought that the taking of Puebla would be easy. They never counted on the pride and bravery of the Mexican people.



The battle of Puebla showed the world that the Mexican people would fight to keep their country and their freedom. General Zaragoza sent a report to President Benito Juarez that stated: "The Mexican army has covered itself with glory!"

Today the fifth of May, or Cinco de Mayo, is an important holiday in Mexico. It is also celebrated by Mexican-Americans here in the United States. On every Cinco de Mayo, the Mexican people stop to remember how their fathers and grandfathers fought to save the tiny town of Puebla on that great day in 1862.

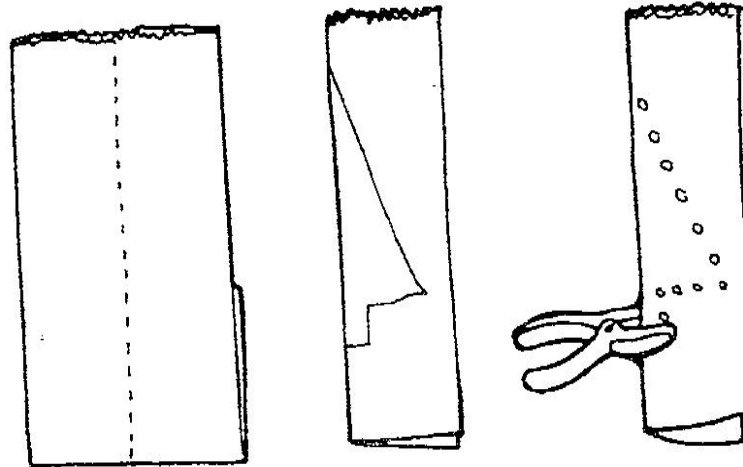
ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ABOUT CINCO DE MAYO!

1. What is the name of the town remembered on May 5th? _____
2. How many French soldiers fought the Mexican army? _____
3. What was the name of the president of Mexico? _____
4. How many men were in the Mexican army? _____
5. Why did the Mexican people fight against the French? _____
6. On what day do we celebrate Cinco de Mayo? _____

FAROLITO

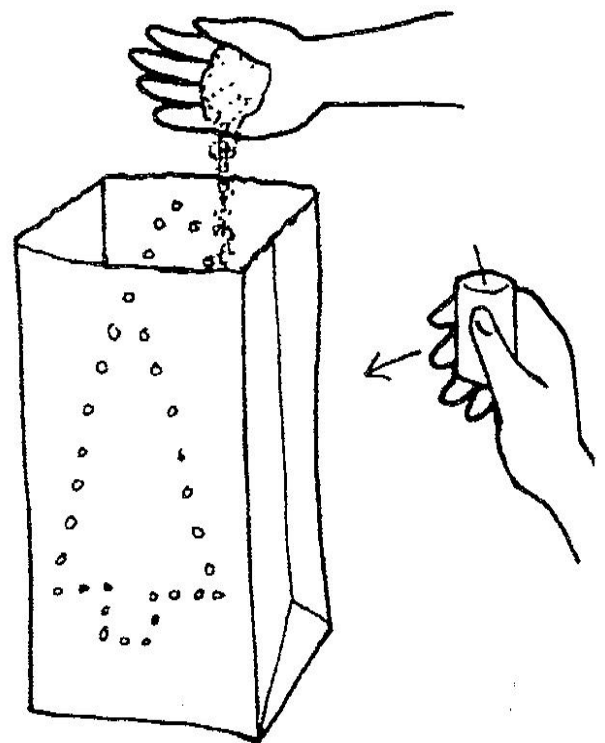
Materials:

- paper lunch bag
- hole punch
- pencil
- sand
- votive candle



Directions:

1. Choose a simple pattern shape where both sides of the pattern are the same (e.g., a simple Christmas tree or evergreen wreath).
2. Fold the bag in half lengthwise. Draw half of the pattern shape on the front of the paper bag against the fold. (See illustration.)
3. Using the hole punch, make evenly spaced holes along the design line.
4. Unfold and open the bag. Place some sand in the bottom and set the votive candle inside.
5. Set several farolitos in a row. Light the candles carefully for a beautiful display of lights and shadows. (Note: Paper bags are, of course, highly flammable. Use both discretion and caution.)



6. Instead of a candle, use a battery operated votive.



Silent Night

Silent Night, Holy Night

All is Calm, All is Bright

Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child

Holy Infant, so Tender and Mild

Sleep in Heavenly Peace

Sleep in Heavenly Peace

Noche De Paz

Noche De Paz, Noche De Amor,

Todo Duerme en Derredor.

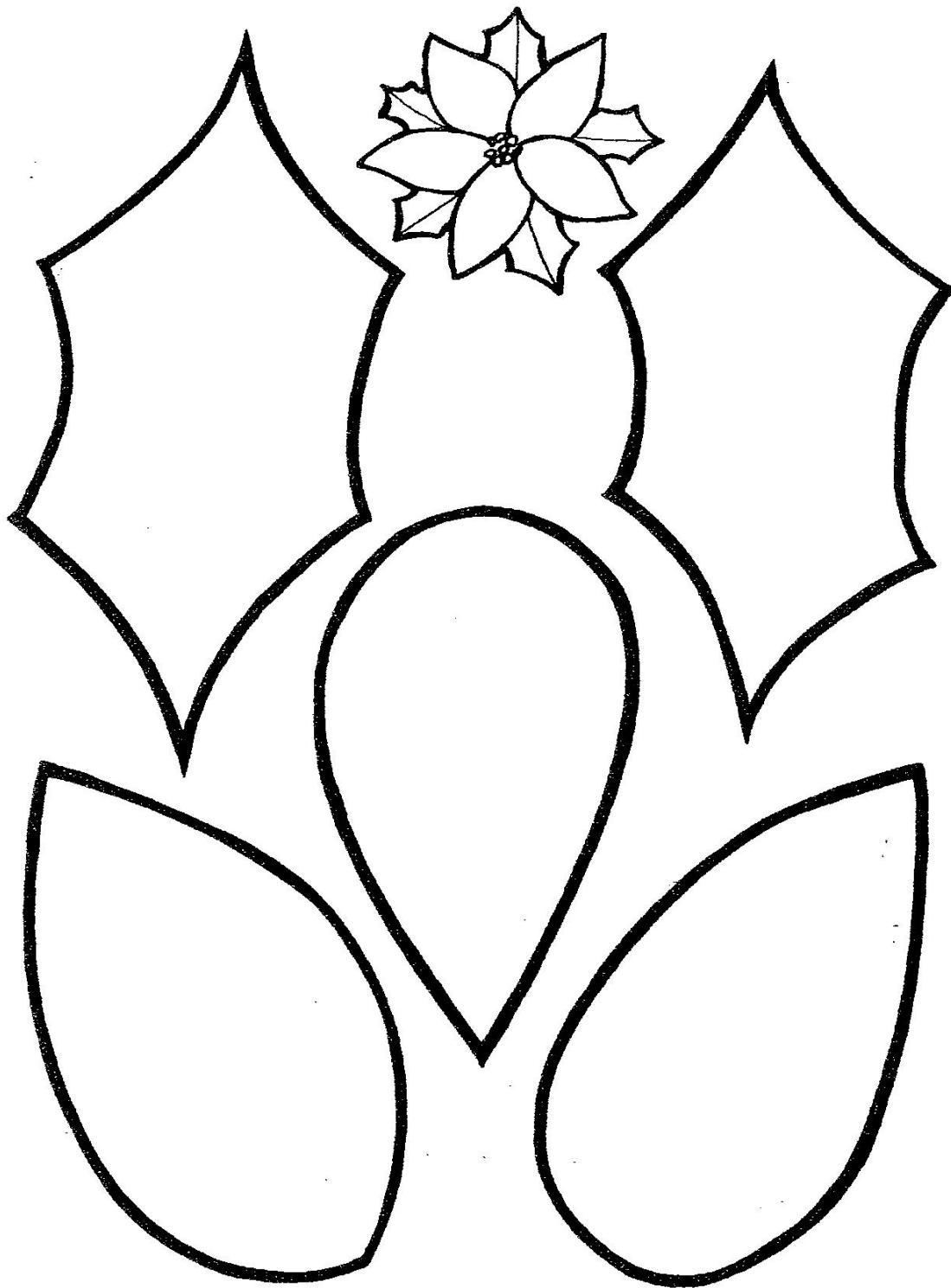
Entre los Astros que Esparcen su Luz.

Bella Anunciando al Niñito Jesus.

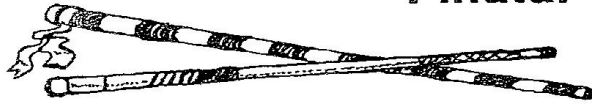
Brilla la Estrella de Paz.

Brilla la Estrella de Paz.

Make poinsettias. Use the pattern below to construct the flowers and leaves. Trace the petals onto red paper and the leaves onto green. Glue small yellow circles in the center.



Piñata!



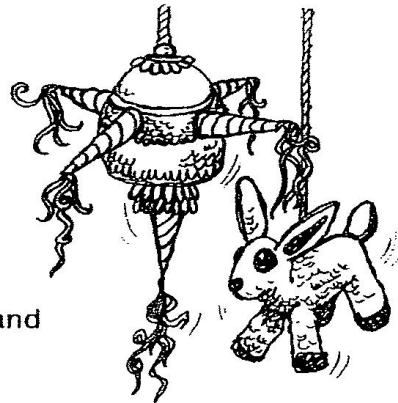
In the United States, most toys are manufactured and mass-produced. In Mexico, many toys are completely handmade works of art. The most famous Mexican toys are piñatas.

A true piñata begins with a clay pot called an olla. The pot is covered with papier-mâché and tissue paper. It may be made in the shape of an animal, a star, an angel or an imaginative sculpture.

A little trap door is made in the figure over the mouth of the pot. The "door" is opened and filled with candy and toys, then reclosed.

The piñata is swung from a rope, so that the person holding the rope can raise and lower it. When it is time to break the piñata, a child is blindfolded and given a stick. He is whirled around, so he is not sure where the piñata is. As he swings at it, the person holding the rope moves the piñata up and down.

When someone finally breaks the olla inside the piñata, the piñata still hangs, but the goodies fall to the ground. All the children scramble excitedly for their share!



Using balloons, newspapers, and thinned glue, make your own pinatas. Blow up the balloon and tie it shut. Take strips of newspaper dipped in thinned glue and wrap around the balloon. Make several layers. Allow it to dry for about a week. Cut a small hole and fill it with candy, then decorate the pinata.

FOODS SERVED ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Polvorones

Mexican Sugar Cookies are served at Special Family Celebrations



Ingredients:

2 cups flour $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. cinnamon 1 cup butter

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 300 F.
2. In a bowl, stir together flour, sugar and cinnamon.
3. Cream butter with a beater.
4. Add flour mixture $\frac{1}{2}$ cup at a time to the butter while still beating until it is all incorporated.
5. Use a teaspoon to spoon out small pieces of dough and shape into a cookie.
6. Place on ungreased cookie sheets and bake 25 minutes.
7. Optional: sprinkle warm cookies with sugar and cinnamon.
8. Makes 24 cookies.

Mexican Hot Chocolate

The travellers in Las Posadas might enjoy this delicious hot chocolate drink when they reach the final "inn."



Ingredients:

- 6 c. (1.5 L) milk
- 1 c. (250 mL) semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- $\frac{1}{2}$ t. (2.5 mL) ground cinnamon
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ t. (7.5 mL) vanilla
- 2 T. (30 mL) sugar
- whipped cream (optional)

Preparation:

1. Heat 1 c. (250 mL) milk and chocolate chips in a large saucepan over low heat until the chocolate is melted.
2. Gradually stir in the remaining milk. Add cinnamon sticks, ground cinnamon, vanilla, and sugar, and continue to heat until the milk is almost boiling.
3. Remove the cinnamon sticks, split them in half, and place in mugs if desired.
4. Use a rotary beater and whip the milk mixture until frothy.
5. Pour into mugs and add a dollop of whipped cream, if desired.