

Don't try this at home, unless your home is a festival in Spain!



# The Castle Makers

by Michelle Burchett

**T**HOUSANDS OF PEOPLE fill the square, bumping against each other. They've gathered to watch the building of the tower. There are many beautiful towers here in Barcelona, Spain, but this one will be different. It will be built out of people!

A brass fanfare announces the building has begun, and everyone goes quiet. Drums join in. Body after body emerges from the crowd, and a human castle begins to grow straight up from the center of the square. Higher and higher it grows as these amazing athletes crawl like ants up their teammates' backs.

THIS is your better idea, Sam?.....



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A large ring of people on the ground keeps the castle stable. If the castle falls, this ring also gives castellers a softer landing.

The tower rises to five, six, seven, eight stories! The crowd roars as the final person reaches the top. The *Castellers of Barcelona* have done it again.

The people who make these castles are known as *castellers*. Their name comes from the word *castell*, which means castle in the

Catalan language—one of the main languages spoken in Spain. The first human castles were built in southwest Spain at the end of the eighteenth century, as part of a religious dance. In a Spanish region called Catalonia, people called *colles* competed by making different kinds of human towers. Over the years, the towers grew bigger and better. Today, human castles defy gravity, rising up to nine “stories” high.

Teams of castellers still come to Barcelona from all over to see which one can build the highest stack. They all wear white pants and black sashes, and each team wears a different brightly colored shirt. Barcelona’s castellers are known by their bright red shirts.

The most important part of the costume is the sash. It supports castellers’ backs, and their teammates hold on to it with their hands or feet as they climb the tower. The castellers climb barefoot. This helps them keep balance and prevents anyone from getting kicked by a hard shoe.



The bigger castellers carry most of the weight at the castle’s bottom, while the smallest castellers climb to the top.

The musicians who play during the building aren’t just there to entertain the crowd. At each stage of the building process, they play a different tune. This lets the castellers on the lower levels know what is happening above them. Without flutes and drums, the castle might crumble into chaos.

Most human castles have three main parts: the *pinya* (base), the *tronc* (trunk), and the *pom de dalt* (the crown). The *pinya* is made of the strongest people, as they have to carry all the weight. Lighter people make up the several levels of the *tronc*. The *canalla* (youngsters) form the *pom de dalt* at the top. The *anxaneta*, who can be a young girl or boy, climbs the tower last. When she reaches the top, she raises four fingers, which stand for the four red stripes on the Catalan flag. The crowd cheers!



Pom de dalt (crown)

Tronc (trunk)

Ouch, my ear!

Pinya (base)

This invention will allow you to defy gravity—stay up in the air in a way that shouldn’t be possible. You’ll shoot over the wall, drop in, and open the gate. We just need to test it. Bill the Pillbug, are you ready?



However, the most dangerous part is still ahead. The anxaneta quickly climbs down the castell, followed by the rest of the levels. Bodies gracefully glide down bodies—unless the tower collapses, which often happens at this stage. The applause continues until the castle has been taken down and everyone is safe. Then a celebration starts.



It's Minecraft, but in real life and with people instead of blocks.

The casteller motto is “strength, balance, courage, and reason.” To build human castles, you need all those things. The young children climbing to the top need courage most of all. Good castellers also have a strong sense of trust in their teammates, and they plan carefully—any mistake could knock the whole castle down.

Castellers show teamwork at its best. Each member has an important role, and they all work together to reach their goal. They also show that, with a little imagination and a few friends, people can rise very high. Here's to the creative and courageous castle makers of Catalonia! 🐜

That is no way to get back on a throne...



But it's a good way to get THROWN.



Um... there might still be a few bugs in it.

