

## Study Guide: Nuestra Pastorela

The Pastorela is a Nativity folk drama in which the main plot line revolves around the journey of the *pastores* (shepherds) trying to reach *Belén* (Bethlehem). A bright star from the heavens guides the Pastores on their way. In Belén (Bethlehem), a baby has been born that represents hope for the world, a gift from God, *el Niño Dios*. Along the way, the pastores are met by an evil prince (Satan, Lucifer) and his evil (yet not-too-bright) companions who try to tempt the pastores and divert them from their path. But God is on the shepherds' side and has sent an angel (Michael or *Miguel*) to help them fight Satan (whose defeat usually unfolds when the *pastores* come to their senses and realize that Satan's promises are shallow, while God's gift is enduring).

What makes the Pastorela a beloved folk event is something else.

First, while there are stock characters that remain as "types" in each staged play (the young shepherds, a Mexican devil, Gabriel, the archangel, Jose and Maria). Cara Mia Theatre, like most community adaptations, are allowed to exercise creative license and make novel characters and "types". Here in *Nuestra Pastorela*, the playwrights, Jeffrey Farrell and David Lozano, honor Jose, Maria and Jesus while introducing comedic elements of clowns and a band of bungling devils, all with strong Mexican folk influences.

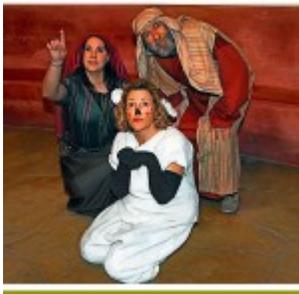
This makes for truly inventive and comical scenes, mostly taken from pop culture (Satan is a high tech, international glamourist, Estrellita is a seductive female devil, Pingo a Mexican devil, Gabriel, a down-to-earth archangel, and shepherds portrayed as a family of clowns).

Traditionally, the archangel Miguel also disguises himself in artistic and pop-culture ways to intervene against Satan. The *pastores*, in turn, have been interpreted in many ways: as migrants, as women escaping domestic violence, or displaced workers, or activists fighting gentrification, etc. The Devil and his assistants are always a source of comic relief: they fumble, are full of themselves, and misunderstand the true value of things (i.e. not money but love; not titles, but honest work, etc.). It is this flexible narrative structure and the possibility of inserting coded messages of many kinds within the basic plot that make Pastorelas appealing to both religious and secular audiences alike

Let's review some basic Pastorela facts.

- The roots of La Pastorela go back to Medieval Spain and Italy (somewhere circa the 16th century). St. Francis of Assisi is believed to have started the tradition of Christmas pageants in Italy, using real animals and a baby. There is at least one record of Princess Isabella watching a Christmas play in 1487. There is also a record of a Nativity play produced in Tlatelolco, Mexico in 1530. In 1595, the first "Coloquio de los Pastores" (a seminar for Pastorela-aficionados) was held in Sinaloa.
- Spanish priests introduced folk dramatizations in the Americas as a pedagogical tools sure to catch the attention of indigenous peoples, many of whom had elaborate folk dramas, festivals, and other festivities in their own cultures.

- In New Mexico, more than in any other region of New Spain (even Mexico!), the Pastorela was only one of many other folk dramas ritually taught and liturgically performed by the Spanish and the indigenous groups. Among the most popular, we can name Los Comanches, Moors and Christians, and The Lost Child.
- For most of its history, Pastorelas existed only as oral literature. In the 19th century they began to be written down as “scripts” that were then adapted by local playwrights.
- The 1960s, with the birth of the Chicano movement, began to see a revival of interest in Pastorelas.
- The town of Belén, New Mexico (how appropriate!) is believed to produce the longest-running consecutive Pastorela anywhere in the Southwest.
- In December 1991, PBS broadcasted under their “Great Performances” series a Pastorela produced by El Teatro Campesino, written by Luis Valdez. Linda Rondstadt, Paul Rodriguez, Freddy Fender, Lalo Guerrero, Flaco Jimenez, and Cheech Marin (among other stars) were casted in some of the traditional roles. Entertainment Weekly said that the production [deserved] “to become an annual TV event.”
- As is the case with carnivals and other festivities that allow symbolic inversion (in Mexico, for example the burning of the Judas at Easter or the *Calaveras*, verse poems, composed around Day of the Dead), the Pastorela offers one of those unique times when the folks can comment critically on authority figures without fearing retribution (it’s all in good fun, after all).



### Vocabulary Words

Decree  
El Senor  
Green card  
Messiah  
Pastorela  
Magi

### Characters

Gabriel  
Jose  
Maria

Luzbel (Lucifer)

Pingo

Mama

Nino

Nina

Estrelita

### Student Reflections

1. The “Seven Deadly Sins”- lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride-are exhibited in notable ways through several characters in *Nuestra Pastorela*. Please connect at least two characters with a particular “deadly sin”, and tell why you identify them as such.
2. Can you name at least one place that exists today that is and would indeed deny housing and care for a Baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph? What reason would they give for doing so?
3. What could be done in Dallas to make the city and its citizens a more welcoming place for strangers, immigrants, i.e., for people who generally don’t look or talk like us?
4. What can you do actually support and care for those in less fortunate situations than you?