

The Castellers of Catalonia



It's a bright, sunny afternoon in Catalonia, Spain. A man is walking towards a stadium with a young girl on his shoulders. The girl is nervous, but excited. She's wearing a blue shirt, white trousers and a red safety helmet. Perhaps she's going to be in a cycle race? But no, she hasn't got any shoes on! So, what is she going to do?

The girl is **Carla Olivella**, from the town of Vilafranca, and she's going to climb. She's going to try and climb to the top of a tower of people. Carla and her sister, **Mariona**, are **castellers**. It's an old tradition, and people come from all over Catalonia to enter competitions to make human towers, or **castells**. There are hundreds of **castellers** in the stadium, and thousands of people are going to watch them climb.



From the bottom to the top

The oldest and biggest **castellers** push together around the bottom of the tower to make it strong. The smallest and lightest children go higher up. The child at the very top is called the **enxaneta** (the ‘rider’). When they get there and put their hand up, their team can win.

‘Everyone is nervous’, says Carla, a new **enxaneta**. ‘It’s my first competition.’ Her mother is even more nervous. ‘When Carla and Mariona climb, I watch their every move’, she says. ‘I can’t not look.’ It can be dangerous. The people towers often fall, and when a 12-metre tower collapses, it’s a long way down for those at the top.

Everyone is important

Mariona, eight, became an **enxaneta** when she was five. She likes drawing, eating pasta, and climbing, climbing, climbing. She’s never afraid. ‘She has amazingly cold blood’, her father says. That’s not true for him – he cries every time his daughters climb. In one competition, the tower fell twice before Mariona could get to the top. Her father ran to her and found her crying. ‘I’m not crying because I’m hurt, I’m crying because I’m angry!’ she shouted. Her 600 teammates heard her and decided to have one more go. And Mariona got to the top!

Castells show that every single person in the community has an important role to play. The big, strong men at the bottom are no more important than the women and boys in the middle, and they can’t win without the little girl at the top.



Highest and best

The winning tower isn't always the highest – it also depends on how complicated they are. Carla climbed the highest and most complicated tower of the day in her first competition. The Vilafranca team were champions! Mariona is getting bigger, and knows she can't be an **enxaneta** for much longer. She's going to start gymnastics soon. Is she afraid of anything? She thinks for a moment. 'Getting bad grades at school.'

