

The History and Science of Bonfire Night

Learning objective: To develop reading comprehension skills by retrieving information, making inferences, and evaluating historical context regarding Bonfire Night.

Read the passage carefully, then answer the questions below. Use full sentences and clear explanations where required.

On the 5th of November, the night sky across the United Kingdom is illuminated by vibrant displays of fireworks. This tradition commemorates the failure of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when a group of conspirators attempted to destroy the Houses of Parliament. Nova the owl explains that while the history is serious, the science behind the celebration is fascinating. When fireworks ignite, specific metal salts are heated to produce brilliant colours; for instance, copper salts create blue, while strontium creates deep red. Max the monkey adds that there is plenty of maths involved too. To ensure safety, organisers must calculate the trajectory of the rockets and maintain a safe perimeter for the audience. Before the age of high-tech pyrotechnics, people gathered around large bonfires to burn effigies and stay warm during the cold November evenings. Today, communities continue to gather, balancing the historical reflection of the past with the modern joy of light and sound. It remains a night where we remember how one small discovery changed the course of British history forever.

Word bank: Gunpowder Plot · commemoration · parliament · trajectory · chemical · tradition

1. According to the text, what specific event does Bonfire Night commemorate and in which year did it take place? (2 marks)

2. Identify two different metal salts mentioned in the text and the colours they produce when heated. (2 marks)

3. Why might organisers need to calculate the 'trajectory' of fireworks during a display? (3 marks)

4. Explain why the author suggests that both history and science are important parts of Bonfire Night. (3 marks)

5. Do you think Bonfire Night is a better celebration because of its history, or because of the scientific display? Justify your answer. (4 marks)

Draw: Draw a scene of Nova the owl watching a firework display, ensuring you include at least three different colours of fireworks and a safe 'perimeter' fence labelled on your diagram.



Extension challenge: Research the term 'Guy Fawkes' and write a short paragraph explaining his role in the 1605 plot. Then, compare and contrast how Bonfire Night was celebrated in the 17th century versus how it is celebrated in your local community today. What might happen if fireworks were no longer allowed due to safety concerns?