

The History and Traditions of Bonfire Night

Learning objective: To analyse the historical origins of Bonfire Night (5th November) and understand how religious and political tensions in 17th-century Britain shaped this annual commemoration.

Read the questions carefully and use your knowledge of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 to provide detailed, thoughtful responses. Ensure you use historical terminology where appropriate.

Bonfire Night, observed annually on the 5th of November, marks the failure of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot. At this time in history, Britain was deeply divided by religious tensions between the Protestant establishment and those who followed the Catholic faith. A group of conspirators, including Guy Fawkes, sought to replace King James I with a Catholic monarch by destroying the Houses of Parliament. The plot was foiled when an anonymous letter led to the discovery of explosives beneath the building. Today, the event is remembered through fireworks, bonfires, and the burning of an effigy, representing the historical attempt to overthrow the government.

Word bank: Gunpowder Plot · Guy Fawkes · Parliament · Protestant · Catholic · King James I · Treason · Commemoration · Persecution

1. Explain why the Gunpowder Plotters felt it was necessary to target the Houses of Parliament specifically, rather than just the King himself. (2 marks)

2. Compare and contrast the religious climate of 17th-century Britain with modern society. How has our approach to religious diversity changed? (3 marks)

3. Justify why many historians argue that the failure of the plot significantly strengthened the power and authority of King James I. (2 marks)

4. Max the monkey is calculating the cost of a community fireworks display. If a local council spends £450 on fireworks and £125 on safety equipment, what is the total cost? If they charge £2 per entry and 300 people attend, how much profit is made for charity? (3 marks)

**5. What might happen if the anonymous letter had never been sent to Lord Monteagle?
Predict the potential consequences for the British monarchy and religious laws. (3 marks)**

Draw: Draw a scene representing the 'Gunpowder Plot' from the perspective of an observer in 1605, focusing on the atmosphere of mystery and the tension of the era.



Extension challenge: Nova the owl wants you to write a short, formal diary entry from the perspective of a person living in London on the morning of 6th November 1605, the day after the plot was discovered. Describe the mood of the city using at least four words from the word bank.