Bonfire Night: History and Traditions

Learning objective: To understand the historical significance of the 5th of November and explore the traditions associated with Bonfire Night in the UK.

Read each flashcard carefully. The front of the card features a key term or question, and the back provides the answer. Use these to test your knowledge of this traditional British event.

What is the historical event commemorated on 5th November?

Bonfire Night commemorates the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when a group attempted to blow up the Houses of Parliament.

Who was the monarch in 1605 when the plot was discovered?

King James I was the King of England during the time of the Gunpowder Plot.

Which famous historical figure was caught guarding the gunpowder?

Guy Fawkes was the man discovered in the cellars beneath the Houses of Parliament with barrels of gunpowder.

What is an 'effigy' and why is it sometimes used on Bonfire Night?

An effigy is a model of a person, often called a 'Guy', traditionally placed on top of the bonfire to represent the conspirators.

Why do we set off fireworks during Bonfire Night celebrations?

Fireworks are used to represent the explosives that were intended to be used during the Gunpowder Plot.

What is the traditional food often eaten on Bonfire Night?

Toffee apples, parkin (a ginger cake), and jacket potatoes baked in the embers of a fire are traditional treats.

How does Max the monkey calculate the cost of a firework display?

Max adds the price of different firework packs, for example: if a pack costs £12.50 and another costs £7.50, the total is £20.00.

What safety rule is essential when handling sparklers?

Always wear gloves, hold the sparkler at arm's length, and never touch the hot wire after it has finished burning.

Compare and contrast: How are modern firework displays different from the smaller home bonfires of the past?

Modern displays are often large, professional, and musical, whereas traditional celebrations were smaller, community-focused, and centred on the bonfire itself.

Explain why the date 5th November is significant in British history.

It marks the night the Gunpowder Plot was foiled, which is remembered annually to signify the safety of the King and Parliament.

Justify your answer: Is Bonfire Night a celebration or a commemoration?

It is a commemoration because it remembers a historical attempt to change the government, though today many people view it as a celebratory community event.

What might happen if we stopped observing traditions like Bonfire Night?

We might lose the connection to our local history and the stories that explain why certain customs exist in our culture today.