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 and answer the questions using full sentences. Use evidence from the text to support your answers.

Every year on the 5th of November, many people across the United Kingdom gather to celebrate Bonfire Night. This tradition dates back to 1605, following the infamous Gunpowder Plot. A group of conspirators, led by Robert Catesby, planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament to protest against the treatment of Catholics. However, the plot was discovered when Guy Fawkes was found guarding barrels of gunpowder in a cellar beneath the building. To mark the failure of the plot and the safety of King James I, bonfires were lit across London. Today, we continue this tradition with vibrant firework displays, which represent the explosive nature of the gunpowder, and the burning of 'guys' on bonfires. While the events of 1605 were serious, modern celebrations focus on community and the spectacle of light. As Nova the owl says, it is a fascinating moment where history meets science, as the brilliant colors in fireworks are created by heating specific metal salts. It serves as a reminder of a pivotal moment in British history that changed the course of the nation forever.

Word bank: Gunpowder Plot · commemorate · parliament · tradition · treason · symbolic

1. What was the specific goal of the conspirators during the Gunpowder Plot in 1605? (2 marks)

2. How did the authorities discover the plot according to the text? (2 marks)

3. Why do you think fireworks are used to celebrate an event from over 400 years ago? (2 marks)

4. Based on the text, how has the focus of Bonfire Night changed from the original event to modern times? (2 marks)

5. Do you think Bonfire Night is an appropriate way to remember a historical event? Give a reason for your opinion. (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a scene of a community bonfire with colorful fireworks in the night sky. In the corner, include Nova the owl watching the display through a pair of binoculars.

Extension challenge: Research one of the metal salts mentioned by Nova that creates a specific color in fireworks (e.g., Strontium for red or Copper for blue) and write a short paragraph explaining the science behind it.