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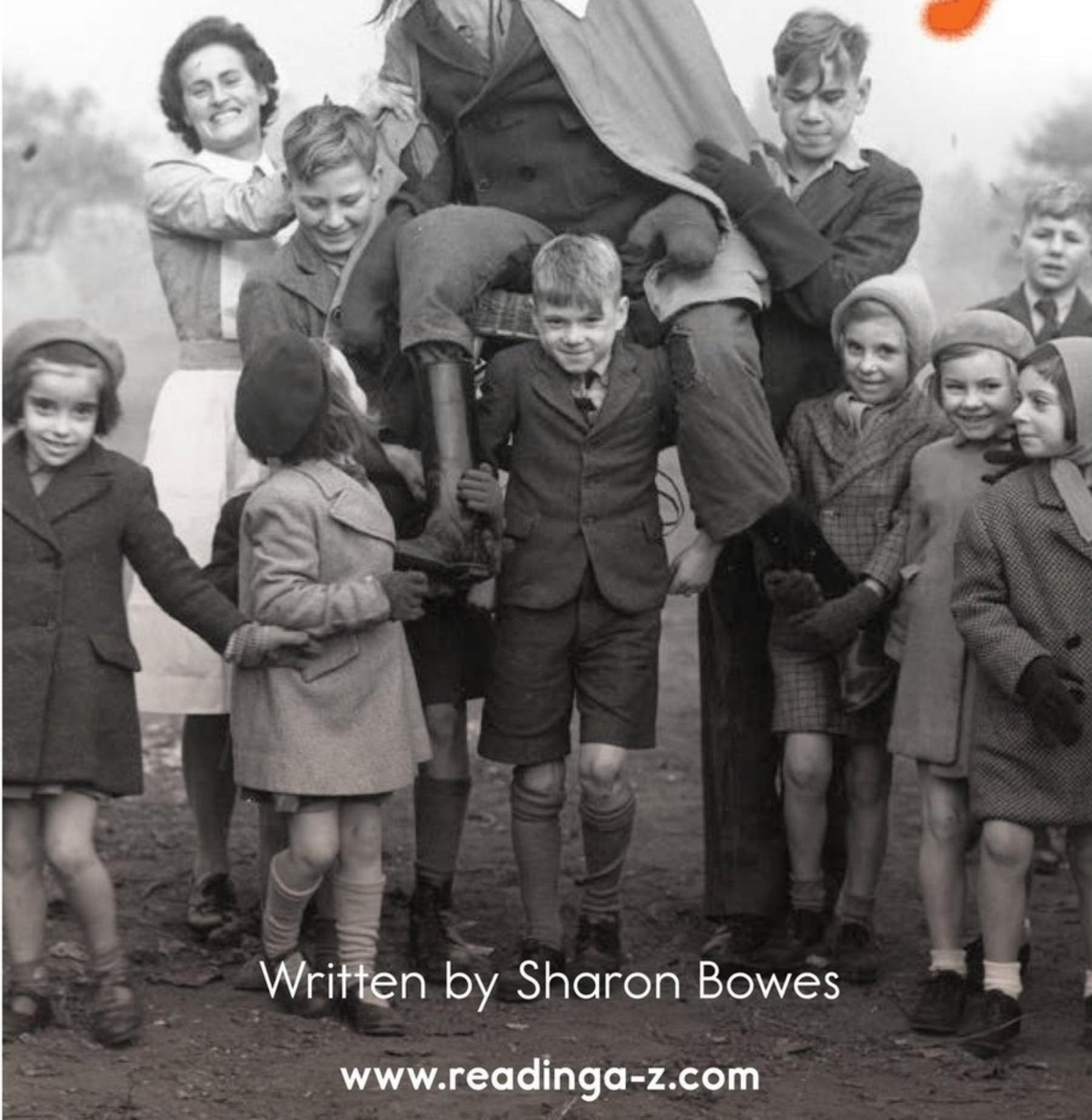
# Guy Fawkes Day

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Written by Sharon Bowes

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# Guy Fawkes Day



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## Focus Question

Who was Guy Fawkes? Why is Guy Fawkes Day celebrated in the United Kingdom?

# Words to Know

|              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| anonymous    | plight      |
| bonfires     | plot        |
| conspirators | processions |
| convert      | rebellion   |
| dummy        | revolt      |
| loyal        | treason     |

Front cover: Bonfire Night in Lewes, England

Title page: Children carry the Guy Fawkes dummy to the bonfire.

Page 3: Guy Fawkes masks

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## Correlation

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|-------------------|----|
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| Reading Recovery  | 40 |
| DRA               | 40 |



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## What Is Bonfire Night?

“Remember, remember the fifth of November.  
Gunpowder, Treason, and Plot,  
We know no reason why Gunpowder Treason  
Should ever be forgot.”

—*Traditional nursery rhyme*

On November 5 every year, adults and children in the United Kingdom gather together for fireworks and **bonfires**. Friends and families cheer as a **dummy**, called a “Guy,” on top of the fire bursts into flames. This traditional festival is known as Guy Fawkes Day, or Bonfire Night.

Guy Fawkes Day celebrates a day in 1605 when King James I and his ministers stopped a plot that would have blown up Parliament.



The Lewes, England, Bonfire Night celebration is the biggest in the world.

## Who Was Guy Fawkes?

Guy Fawkes was born in 1570 in York, England, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

At that time in Europe, many Catholic and Protestant countries were at war, and the Catholic religion was illegal in England. Catholics who were caught practicing their religion were punished severely.



Guy Fawkes went by the nickname Guido.

Guy's parents were Protestant. His grandparents, however, were Catholic, and when Guy's father died, his mother remarried a Catholic. When he was a teenager, Guy decided to **convert** to Catholicism. He was angry about the terrible treatment that Catholics received in England.

In his early twenties, Guy left England. He traveled to the Netherlands to join the Catholic Spanish army in their fight against the Dutch Protestants. Fawkes served as a soldier in the Spanish army for twelve years and became an explosives expert.



The Gunpowder Plotters, led by Robert Catesby, second from right

## The Gunpowder Plot

When Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603, Catholics hoped her successor, King James I, would be more accepting of their religion. Much to their dismay, he passed even harsher laws against them.

Many English Catholics had remained **loyal** to the king. However, Fawkes met other Englishmen in the Spanish army who were as angry as he was about the unfair treatment of Catholics in England.

In 1603, Fawkes went to Spain to inform the Spanish king about the **plight** of the Catholics in England, but the king refused to take action. Spain and England already had a long history of military conflict that they had recently agreed to end.

Meanwhile, in England, a man named Robert Catesby had begun to plan a **revolt** against King James I and recruited his cousin, Thomas Wintour. In April 1604, they invited Fawkes to join them in their plot against the Crown. They needed Fawkes's expertise with using gunpowder to make explosives. Fawkes did not hesitate.

Back in London, in May 1604, Fawkes met with other **conspirators** at a local inn. They took an oath of secrecy.

The conspirators intended to blow up Parliament on the day of the opening ceremony. All the ministers and the king would be in attendance. The plotters would then lead a **rebellion** of Catholic supporters against the king. They wanted to install King James's daughter, Princess Elizabeth, on the throne. Elizabeth was only nine years old, and they believed that powerful Catholic rulers could easily influence her decisions.

Thirteen conspirators in total were sworn into the plot. Robert Catesby had a house in Lambeth, just across the River Thames from Parliament. The peace between Spain and England meant there was a surplus of gunpowder. The plotters were able to purchase thirty-six barrels of gunpowder and store them in Catesby's house.

One of the plotters, Thomas Percy, got a job as a royal bodyguard. He moved into a house near Parliament and by chance heard that a cellar beneath the buildings of Parliament was available to rent. By night, the conspirators transported the gunpowder in a rowboat across the Thames from Catesby's house to the cellar.

Guy Fawkes assumed a false identity and called himself John Johnson. Posing as the servant of Thomas Percy, he could move freely inside the buildings of Parliament without raising suspicion. His job was to take care of the thirty-six barrels of gunpowder concealed under coal and firewood in the basement.

The opening of Parliament had been set for November 5, 1605. The plotters were ready.



Some historians think that Guy Fawkes's gunpowder was decayed and would not have actually exploded.

## Caught!

A few days before the opening of Parliament, Lord Monteagle, a Catholic nobleman loyal to the king, received an **anonymous** letter. The letter warned him not to attend the Parliament on November 5 because something terrible was going to happen. Lord Monteagle showed the letter to the king's first aide. After he was informed of the plot, the king ordered a complete search of Parliament.

ny lord ouE of the loue i beare ~~to~~ To some of youere freuds  
i haue a caer of yowre preseruation therfor i woulde...  
aduyse yowre as volbe tender yowre lyf To denys some  
epscuse To shifft of yowre aHendance at This parlement  
for god and man hathe cauoured To punishe the wicf ednes  
of this lynn and thinke not sligthe of this aduerisement  
but retwere yowre self into yowre contri wylle yowre  
mayle expecE the extent in safti for they shal receyue a terrible  
apparance of anai styr yet i saye they shal receyue a terrible  
blone This parlement and yet they shal nof seie who  
hurts them This conuict is not to be contynued becaus  
they do yowre good and can do yowre no harme for they  
will do no harme after

An excerpt from the anonymous letter sent to Lord Monteagle

The search party found a large amount of firewood in the cellar, and a second search was ordered. This time they found Fawkes in the basement with the fuses and matches he was hiding. They searched the cellar more thoroughly and finally discovered the thirty-six barrels of gunpowder.

The guards had caught Guy Fawkes red-handed. Fawkes tried to resist his arrest and fought his captors until they tied him up and brought him to the king's chambers for questioning.

Fawkes told the king's guards that he had intended to blow up both the king and Parliament. He insisted that he had acted alone and told the king he was only sorry that the plot had failed.

Fawkes was imprisoned in the Tower of London. There is no proof of exactly what he endured while imprisoned, but by November 9, Fawkes had signed his name on his final confession. By then, he had revealed the details of the rebellion and the names of his fellow plotters.



The Tower of London

On the morning of November 5, word of Fawkes's arrest had gotten back to the plotters. Robert Catesby and some of the conspirators were determined to continue with their plan to lead a rebellion against the government. Catesby's small band of rebels stole horses at Warwick Castle, but the authorities pursued them. On November 8, the king's forces surrounded the rebels. They fatally wounded Robert Catesby and three others, and imprisoned the rest of the men in the Tower of London.

The English courts tried all eight surviving plotters for treason and sentenced each traitor to death. In January 1606, Guy Fawkes and three of his fellow plotters were taken to the yard outside Parliament to be executed. The harshness of their punishment was a warning to anyone else who might have been plotting treason.



King James I later praised Guy Fawkes for his loyalty to his cause.

## Another Conspiracy?

Some experts suggest that the Gunpowder Plot was an inside job—a plot by the king's own ministers to convince him to make even harsher anti-Catholic laws. In this version of events, it may have been the king's chief minister who drafted the warning letter to Lord Monteagle. How could the plotters have carried out their work right under the noses of the king's guards? Were the plotters used as scapegoats to raise support for an unpopular king?

There is no clear proof for this theory, but the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot brought the public relief that the king's life had been saved. The king announced that his survival was a miracle and proof of his divine right to the throne. Parliament passed a law that same year to make November 5 an official annual day of celebration. The festivities were intended to strengthen loyalty to the king.



King James I

## The Legacy of the Plot

The holiday was first known as Gunpowder Treason Day. Records from this time show that people rang church bells and lit bonfires.

In England, burning dummies of unpopular figures on bonfires was already a popular activity. People believed that doing this would drive away evil spirits. On November 5, people began to burn a dummy of Guy Fawkes on top of the bonfire.



Modern artwork celebrates Guy Fawkes Day.

## Bonfire Parties

Some parts of Britain have kept their own traditions when it comes to Bonfire Night. Lewes, in the south of England, has bonfire societies that date back to 1679. The participants wear elaborate costumes and carry torches through the streets. Some towns choose to burn effigies of famous people who are unpopular with the public today rather than the traditional Guy Fawkes.



By the late nineteenth century, spectacular firework displays and torch-lit **processions** in towns and cities had become very popular. The processions led to where the bonfire and firework displays were held. Today, the bonfires are usually organized by local charities or municipal organizations.

## Conclusion

Guy Fawkes Day celebrates the failure of the Gunpowder Plot to kill the king of England over four hundred years ago. Today, millions of people in the United Kingdom continue to enjoy bonfires and special firework displays on November 5. Guy Fawkes Day has become a time to celebrate and have fun with friends and family.

## Some Fiery Facts

Once a year, guards traditionally search the houses of Parliament before the State Opening of Parliament. They make sure there are no would-be plotters hiding in the cellars.

Scientists from the Institute of Physics have calculated that the 2,500 kilograms (5,512 lb.) of gunpowder hidden by the conspirators could have caused damage about 490 meters (536 yd.) from the center of the explosion.

Guy Fawkes has an island in the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, named after him, called Isla Guy Fawkes.



Guards prepare for their annual search of Parliament.

## Glossary

|                            |                                                                            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>anonymous</b><br>(adj.) | having no known name, identity, or source (p. 9)                           |
| <b>bonfires</b> (n.)       | large fires built outside for celebrations (p. 4)                          |
| <b>conspirators</b> (n.)   | people involved in a secret plan to do something illegal or harmful (p. 7) |
| <b>convert</b> (v.)        | to change from one religion, belief, or view to another (p. 5)             |
| <b>dummy</b> (n.)          | a figure that is a likeness or model of someone (p. 4)                     |
| <b>loyal</b> (adj.)        | faithful to a person, government, institution, or cause (p. 6)             |
| <b>plight</b> (n.)         | an unfortunate or terrible situation (p. 6)                                |
| <b>plot</b> (n.)           | a plan or scheme (p. 4)                                                    |
| <b>processions</b> (n.)    | trains of people or vehicles; formal parades (p. 14)                       |
| <b>rebellion</b> (n.)      | a fight against authority or power; an uprising (p. 7)                     |
| <b>revolt</b> (n.)         | a fight against a government or authority (p. 7)                           |
| <b>treason</b> (n.)        | a crime of betrayal or disloyalty against one's government or ruler (p. 4) |

# Guy Fawkes Day

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,325

## Connections

### Writing and Art

Create a piece of art that represents the Guy Fawkes Day celebration.

Write a summary of your artwork.

### Social Studies

Research to learn more about Parliament in the United Kingdom. Create a poster showing the different parts and identify the role of each part.



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