# Table of Contents

Why Study Cultures? ...................................................... 2

**Traditions**

  Guy Fawkes Day ..................................................... 3

**Folklore & Language**

  The Ravens at the Tower of London ............................. 8

**Food**

  Fish and Chips ..................................................... 11

**Cross-cultural Contributions**

  The Prime Meridian ............................................... 14

**Reference Material**

  Facts about England .............................................. 17
  History and Holidays ............................................ 18
  Additional Resources ............................................. 20
  Visuals ............................................................... 22
The early seventeenth century was a time of religious turmoil in England. Extreme Catholics conspired to revolt against the Protestant-led British monarchy. In November 1605, a man named Guy Fawkes led a plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament and destroy the British monarchy. However, he was found and put to death before the plot was carried out. Today, England’s citizens remember this foiled attempt as Guy Fawkes Day, celebrated annually on 5 November. His death is a warning to any who might attempt to destroy or disrupt the English monarchy. Today, children develop British loyalty by participating in festivities that unite communities and display English patriotism.

Starting Points
1. Describe Guy Fawkes Day for the students. It is an exciting and intriguing celebration marked by bonfires, fireworks, and other patriotic festivities. Though temperatures are cold at this time of year, spirits are high and festivities entice people to join in the celebration. Young people raise money by making straw men that represent Guy Fawkes. These straw men are thrown into bonfires at the celebration’s climax as fireworks light up the night sky around the country.

2. Begin by telling the story of the Gunpowder Plot. This will help the class focus on why the celebration of Guy Fawkes Day occurs annually in England.

3. Emphasize the following points:
   a. The Gunpowder Plot occurred during a time of great religious upheaval.
   b. The conspirators planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament with gunpowder. They were caught and executed.
   c. Guy Fawkes Day is celebrated in remembrance of the plot’s failure and the conspirators’ fates.

Information
Religious and Historical Background
During the reign of King Henry VIII, the English throne separated from the Catholic church and established the Church of England, or the Anglican church. Following Henry VIII’s death, the crown passed through his three children, and the country oscillated between Catholic and Protestant rule. Edward VI was Protestant, Mary was Catholic, and Elizabeth I was Protestant. Because Elizabeth had no heirs, her cousin’s son James, king of Scotland, became the rightful heir to the throne.

Because the rulers of England continually changed religion, the people of England were caught in the middle of an internal religious war. Many people lost their lives
as the crown constantly passed between Catholic and Protestant rulers, who changed what the people were and were not allowed to practice. For example, Mary sent almost three hundred Protestants to a fiery death at the stake and imprisoned even more. Kings Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Queen Elizabeth I confiscated Catholic church property and dissolved monasteries. Many priests went into hiding to avoid execution. People who helped hide a priest were sentenced to death. As the situation worsened, Catholics continued to lose more and more rights. A heavy monthly tax was placed upon those who did not attend Anglican services, and their land was often confiscated. Furthermore, all citizens were required to pledge allegiance to and accept the monarch as the supreme governor of the church. Anyone unwilling to do this was sentenced to death. These cruel measures forced everyone to practice Anglican worship. Anyone who remained loyal to the Catholic church had to practice in secret to escape death.

These religious restrictions explain why groups of Catholics wanted to revolt against the British government. In effort to free themselves from Protestant rule, they beseeched the Spanish royalty. When Protestant Elizabeth I beheaded Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, the Spanish Armada attempted to rescue the Catholics; however, the Armada was defeated.

When James I became king, he loosened some of the restrictive laws enforced by his forebears in hopes of establishing a more unified country. He pardoned several religious prisoners and gave people reason to hope for future change. Although life was not easy for the Catholics, many felt that it had become more bearable under King James’ rule. They believed if they cooperated as good citizens, the king would continue his policy of tolerance towards them.

The Rise of Guy Fawkes

In 1570, Guido Fawkes, better known as Guy Fawkes, was born in York (see Traditions Visual 1). At age twenty-one, he joined the Spanish militia, and served throughout the Netherlands for twelve years. Because Catholics were free to practice their religion in the Netherlands, Fawkes was able to see how true Catholics should practice. Upon returning to England, he was determined to do anything to gain complete religious freedom for his Catholic friends. He and other Catholic extremists plotted to blow up the Houses of Parliament with gunpowder.

The plot, however, was not the will of the majority, but merely the hope of an extreme, fanatical minority. After being away from England for twelve years, Guy Fawkes was radically determined to fight for the the plight of the Catholics, even though most Catholics had adjusted to King James’ rule and had no wish to rebel against the king. Consequently, his attempt to bring the Catholics more freedom only brought them additional and more severe restrictions. Life became more difficult for Catholics once again.

The Plot

The plan to blow up Parliament and kill the king was known as the “Gunpowder Plot.” The Houses of Parliament were to be blown up on the first day of Parliament’s sessions (see Traditions Visual 2), because the conspirators knew that the king, queen, and prince would be in Parliament that day. They hoped that by destroying the
king and lords of Parliament, the resulting confusion would allow the English Catholics to rise up and take over the government.

Several people collaborated on this project for many years (see Traditions Visual 3). Robert Catesby led the group and used his house for many of the meetings. Another gentleman, Thomas Percy, rented storage space beneath the Parliament building, where the rebels hid several barrels of gunpowder under metal bars and wooden sticks. The group of conspirators sought Guy Fawkes’ gunpowder expertise and appointed him to bring the plan to fruition. Fawkes faithfully looked after the gunpowder in the basement and waited patiently for daybreak to light the fuse at the right time.

The plan failed because a concerned conspirator, sent a letter to a member of Parliament, Lord Monteagle, urging him to stay away from Parliament on its first day of session. Lord Monteagle, unsure of the letter’s coded warning, took the letter to London and presented it to the king. The king called for a search of Parliament, and Guy Fawkes was found in the basement storage room, along with the barrels of gunpowder. On Guy Fawkes himself, they found the items necessary to ignite the gunpowder. He was immediately arrested and brought to King James. The king ordered him to be tortured until he revealed the names of his co-conspirators. Some of the conspirators were arrested and hung for treason, but others escaped. Guy Fawkes was hanged, beheaded, dragged through the streets behind a cart, and quartered (literally cut into fourths) on 31 January 1606.

The English first learned about the plot to destroy Parliament on the night of 4 November 1605, and they began celebrating the unsuccessful attempt with bonfires and such on 5 November, before Guy Fawkes was even put to death.

Guy Fawkes Day

The people of England commemorate Guy Fawkes Day every 5 November. Children make straw men representing Guy Fawkes. They put a great deal of thought and effort into making the best-looking and most realistic straw man. Then, they carry them around in wagons and say, “Penny for the guy, mister?” The children collect money throughout the day from those who are impressed (or at least feign to be impressed) with their creative work. They typically use the money collected from the straw men to buy fireworks.

Because November is cold and rainy in England, people do not typically like to be out in the park. However, 5 November is an exception, as the festivities make bundling up and facing the unkind weather worthwhile. At dusk, everyone gathers in the large parks and common areas of each town and city to enjoy the celebration. Roasted chestnuts and toffee apples are sold by street vendors, fireworks are available for the young, food and drink are either brought from home or purchased on-site from the vendors, and people light a huge bonfire (one of the most recognizable symbols of this celebration), which grows brighter as the straw men are thrown into it. People also light other smaller fires or use heaters to keep from getting too cold. Fireworks are also a big part of this celebration. In fact, each town competes to see who can create the largest and most impressive fireworks display. Some of these displays even compare to the extravagance of many Fourth of July celebrations in the
United States. Guy Fawkes Day has become a time for people to remember and reflect with gratitude about how the lives of their king and lords were preserved. Today, for a small number of Catholics, Guy Fawkes Day is not a celebration of patriotism; rather, it is a time of solemn reflection. Although most Catholics have forgotten the religious prejudices and restrictions of former times, there are still some who view Fawkes as a martyr. They equate his death with the death of their dream that England would someday return to a Catholic state. Such Catholics do not enjoy a joyous celebration of English loyalty on Guy Fawkes Day. For most Catholics and British patriots, however, this day is a time when family, friends, and communities can meet together and participate in fun, light-hearted activities. Even though most people know and remember the story of Guy Fawkes and his plot, the celebration does not focus on his punishment and death. For the young, it is a time to have fun; only as adults do the British fully recognize and understand the political and religious significance of the Gunpowder Plot.

**Activities**

1. Divide into small groups and write a letter warning Lord Monteagle about the Gunpowder Plot. It should be vague enough that the person reading it would not discover the plot.

2. Write a second verse to the nursery rhyme recited by youth all over England (see Traditions Visual 4). Use your poem to explain more about the plot or the celebrations that take place now.

3. Research and prepare a short lesson about Guy Fawkes, which you could share with their friends and family. If time permits, present it to the class, individually or in groups.

4. Write a eulogy for Guy Fawkes from his fellow Catholic conspirators and friends.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What other options do you think the group of English Catholics might have had to settle their differences with the English government rather than blowing up the Parliament? (Remember that this was 1605, fifteen years before the Pilgrims set sail for America on the Mayflower.)

2. How do you think a group of English Catholics justified blowing up a building with many innocent people inside, including the king, queen, and young prince? Can you think of any other religious groups that have attempted to violently enforce their religion?

3. Lord Monteagle’s letter was sent by one of the conspirators in order to save his life. In the end, the letter was the means of discovering the plot and ending the lives of the plotters. Should the letter have been sent to Lord Monteagle? Consider the fact that Lord Monteagle was related to at least one of the conspirators. Encourage the class to judge both from the viewpoint of the conspirators as well as the king.
4. How does the celebration of Guy Fawkes Day serve as a reminder of patriotism? What other lessons does it teach?

5. The issue of sovereignty has challenged nations and their people to decide where to draw the line between independence and interdependence with other nations. The time of King James I was no exception as one of his greatest desires was to unite Scotland and England. What concerns did the Scottish and English people have about uniting their countries at that time? Today, one major topic within international relations is whether nations should continue moving toward globalization. As we look at the trend of globalization, are there concerns that were present during King James’ rule that still exist?
Traditions Visual 1: Guy Fawkes
Remember, remember the fifth of November

Gunpowder, treason, and plot;

I see no reason why gunpowder treason

Should ever be forgot!