***Macbeth***

**Informational Text: Gunpowder Plot of 1605**

**The Monarchy**

The Gunpowder Plot of 1605 was an attempt by a group of Catholics led by Robert Catesby and Guy Fawkes to overthrow and assassinate King James I of England and VI of Scotland.

For decades, the battle between Catholics and Protestants in England was one of the bloodiest times in English history. In 1533, King Henry VIII took control of the English Church of Rome. This quickly caused problems as the English people now had to wear allegiance to the newly formed Protestant Church of England, led by the King as the Supreme Head of the Church of England in 1534. Over time, he strove to take all power away from the Catholic Church, and even declared his marriage to Catholic Catherine of Aragon invalid after the Catholic Church refused to grant him a divorce. They had a daughter, Mary.

After Henry VIII divorced, he married longtime mistress Anne Boleyn, with whom he had a daughter, Elizabeth, who would eventually become Queen of England. After Anne Boleyn failed to give him a son, Henry had her arrested for high treason, and she was beheaded a month later, in May of 1536.

Although Henry’s son Edward VI inherited the throne after Henry’s death, many believed the throne still should rightfully belong to Henry’s daughter Mary. After Edward VI died at age 15, Mary fought for and gained the throne, becoming Queen of England and Scotland- declaring her kingdom Catholic once again. She earned the title “Bloody Mary” after executing hundreds of Protestants. After Mary failed to have any children, it was declared that Elizabeth would take over the throne in the case of Mary’s death. In November 1558, Mary died and Elizabeth took over as Queen of England.

Not surprisingly, Elizabeth established the English Protestant Church, which has evolved into the modern Church of England. Despite numerous courtships, Elizabeth never married and never had children, leaving in question who would become her successor. Many Catholics believed her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots should succeed, however Elizabeth saw Mary as her adversary and a threat. Elizabeth quickly imprisoned her (where she remained for 19 years) and later executed her for treason in 1587.

In the months before Elizabeth died, the English Secretary of State Robert Cecil negotiated with Mary’s son James VI of Scotland to take the English throne. The Catholics, however, sought to transfer the throne to Lady Arbella Stuart, Elizabeth’s cousin. Instead, in March 1603, James I (who was also King James VI of Scotland at the time) became King of England and Ireland.

**The Gunpowder Plot of 1605**

Although James was Protestant, he was viewed as more sympathetic of the Catholic faith than his predecessors. However, after his wife, Queen Anne was secretly sent a rosary- Catholic prayer beads- James was incensed and denounced the Catholic Church. He began to exorbitantly fine those who did not attend the Protestant church, and eventually a bill was introduced that threatened to banish or persecute all followers of the Catholic Church. He also ordered all Catholic priests to leave England.

Before the Gunpowder Plot, several other attempts to rid England of King James were made. In what became known as the Bye Plot, two priests conspired to kidnap and hold the king in the Tower of London until he agreed to be more tolerant of Catholics. The Main Plot, an attempt to remove James and replace him with Arbella Stuart, was also hatched at about the same time. Both plots were thwarted and all those involved were arrested. The two priests were later executed.

The Gunpowder Plot was an attempt to kill King James and several other important targets, and to kidnap James’s daughter, Princess Elizabeth, whom the conspirators aimed to place on the throne. Believed to be the main conspirator was Robert Catesby, who concocted the plan and rallied the group in 1604.

The plan was to rent a house near the House of Parliament, fill it with gunpowder, and then blow it up with King James and others inside it. After a series of changes of plans, by March 1605, the men had filled a space under the House of Lords full of 36 barrels of gunpowder. As they gained followers and fellow conspirators, their circle of trust was breached, and the idea began to slip into the ears of others. After attempting to anonymously warn Catholic members of the Parliament to avoid going to work that day, suspicions grew. A search party was sent out and it was then that the royal court discovered the gunpowder and Guy Fawkes, who was eventually tortured to give the games of the other conspirators. The conspirators were tried and hanged in 1606.

November 5th is now Guy Fawkes Night, a night of festival in Great Britain and other British colonies. Fireworks are set off, bonfires are set and “guys” (dummies made of cotton or hay to represent either Fawkes or the Pope) are burned on the bonfires. British children make the “guy” in advance, then walk the street asking for money for the “guy,” which children often use for fireworks.