

The Canadian Caper

On November 4, 1979, a mob of 300-500 Iranian militants stormed the United States embassy in Tehran, Iran, and took 66 diplomats and staff hostage. Amazingly, 6 diplomats escaped from the embassy compound undetected. They were Robert Anders, Cora Lijek, Mark Lijek, Joseph Stafford, Kathleen Stafford, and Lee Schatz. Schatz took refuge in the Swedish embassy. The others headed towards the British embassy. As they got near the embassy, they saw a large crowd of protestors blocking their way. The decision was then made to proceed to Anders' house to hide out and make plans.

The five remained here for six days, assessing the situation. As it deteriorated, Anders made the decision to contact an old friend, John Sheardown, a Canadian immigration official. He asked Sheardown if the Canadian embassy would take them in until plans could be made to leave Iran. The answer was an enthusiastic "yes". The group proceeded to Sheardown's house where they were also met by the Canadian ambassador, Ken Taylor. It was decided that the Staffords would stay at the Taylor's house and the rest would remain with Sheardown. Two weeks later, Schatz arrived at the Taylor household from the Swedish embassy.

The Canadian diplomats were in a dangerous situation for harboring the Americans. If discovered, there was the very real possibility that their embassy could be seized and their personnel taken hostage. Therefore, Taylor contacted the Canadian government in Ottawa with a plan to smuggle the Americans out of Iran on an international flight using Canadian passports. The response, again, was an enthusiastic "yes" from the Canadian government.

The Canadian government contacted United States officials about their plan to smuggle the six Americans out of Iran. Thus began Operation Exfiltration, a cooperative effort between the Canadian government and the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Canada would supply the passports and plane tickets. The CIA would supply forged Iranian visas, disguises, and a cover story for the Americans. Tony Mendez, a CIA operative, went to Tehran to coordinate the plan.

Mendez's cover story was the six Americans were Canadians who were in Iran as part of a film production crew scouting sites for the filming of a movie called Argo. A fake company was created in Hollywood complete with a staff, telephones, newspaper advertisements, a script for the movie, and promotional flyers to promote the movie were printed. The hope was to use this, along with the passports and visas, to get the American out of Iran on a commercial flight to Europe where they would be flown to the United States and held in secrecy until the remaining embassy hostages were freed.

Mendez arrived in Tehran in early January 1980, to begin putting the plan in place. At the same time, Ambassador Taylor began the slow process of closing the Canadian embassy and evacuating personnel. On January 28, Mendez and the Americans easily made it through security at the Tehran airport and boarded a Swissair flight bound for Zurich, Switzerland. Later that same day, Taylor and the remaining embassy staff also left Iran.

While the entire operation was meant to be secret, a Canadian reporter had learned of it. On January 29, after he had learned everyone was safely out of Iran, he released his article to the media. Fortunately, he kept the CIA's involvement out of his article and gave the Canadian government full credit for the rescue. Only in 1997 did the CIA reveal its role in this operation.

Once the news of the rescue got out, a wave of gratitude swept the United States. The Canadian flag was flown across the country. "Thank you Canada" banners and billboards appeared. Television commentators lauded Canada for its assistance. Ambassador Taylor was honored with the key to the city from New York City's Mayor Koch. He was also given the Congressional Gold Medal. Taylor, Sheardown, their wives, and three other embassy staff were awarded the Order of Canada medal. Tony Mendez was given the CIA Intelligence Star for Valor. Mendez and the six former hostages were also invited to the White House to meet with President Carter.

Over time, the incident was highlighted in two movies (1981 and 2012), two non-fiction novels (1981 and 2010), and a children's book on the topic (2013). One of the movies called "Argo" received *Winner of three Academy Awards ("Best Picture," "Best Adapted Screenplay" and "Best Film Editing")*, *two Golden Globe Awards ("Best Picture-Drama" and "Best Director")*, *three British Academy Film Awards ("Best Film," "Best Director" and "Best Editing")*, *as well as winning the award of "Outstanding Performance by a Cast" at the Screen Actors Guild Awards*. The Canadian Caper represents an example of how two nations can work together to resolve a crisis.

The Canadian Caper-Teacher Script

Show Slide 1 before beginning the reading to introduce the topic.

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Show Slide 3 took 66 diplomats and staff hostage.

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This slide is hyperlinked to the Internet. Show Trailer to the movie if you like.

Name _____ **News Article Writing Assignment**

Prompt: You have been assigned the task of writing an article for the school newspaper on The Canadian Caper. Base your article on The Canadian Caper handout you read and any other resources you choose to use. Be sure to include the “what, why, who, when, where, and how” in your article. The checklist below will help guide your writing.

Checklist:

- I have explained what The Canadian Caper was _____
- I have explained why The Canadian Caper occurred _____
- I have explained who was involved in The Canadian Caper _____
- I have explained when and where The Canadian Caper took place _____
- I have explained how The Canadian Caper aided the United States _____
- I have checked my article for spelling errors _____
- I have checked my article for grammatical errors _____

News Article Grading Rubric

Category	3	2	1
What	Fully explains what The Canadian Caper was.	Gives a general explanation of what The Canadian Caper was.	No explanation of what The Canadian Caper was.
Who	Identifies all the people involved in The Canadian Caper.	Identifies only the countries involved in The Canadian Caper.	Does not identify who was involved in The Canadian Caper.
When and Where	Gives both the dates and location of The Canadian Caper.	Only gives either the dates or the location of The Canadian Caper.	Does not say when and where the Canadian Caper took place.
Why	States both reasons why this happened.	States only one reason why this happened.	Does not say why this happened.
How	Gives three or more ways the Canadians aided the United States.	Gives two ways the Canadians aided the United States.	Gives one way the Canadians aided the United States.
Spelling	No spelling errors	1-5 spelling errors	More than 5 spelling errors
Grammar	No grammar errors	1-5 grammar errors	More than 5 grammar errors

News Article Scoring Sheet

Student's Name _____

What _____

Who _____

When and Where _____

Why _____

How _____

Spelling _____

Grammar _____

Total Points _____

Grade _____

News Article Scoring Sheet

Student's Name _____

What _____

Who _____

When and Where _____

Why _____

How _____

Spelling _____

Grammar _____

Total Points _____

Grade _____