

Reading: the Great Train Robbery of 1963

Lead-in

Discuss with your partner(s).

- What kind of things do people steal in robberies?
 Can you think of any well-known robberies in your country?
 Have you watched any movies about robberies?
 What are the disadvantages of robbery as a way of getting money?

Comprehension 1

Read the text about the Great Train Robbery of 1963.
 Mark the statements below (T) - true, or (F) - false.

- They didn't plan the robbery very carefully.
- They didn't use violence.
- Somebody let the robbers down.
- Security on the train was very poor.
- The public tended to support the robbers.
- All of the robbers went to prison for a long time.
- The train driver was well rewarded for his bravery.

Comprehension 2

Arrange the sentences to make a summary of the story.

1	They bought a farmhouse to use as a place to hide.	
2	The police found the farmhouse and their fingerprints.	
3	Most of the robbers were caught and sent to prison.	
4	An informer told the police the names of the some of the robbers.	
5	They paid a man to remove evidence from the farmhouse after the robbery.	
6	The criminals chose a place to rob the train.	
7	They stopped the train in the middle of the night with a false red signal.	
8	A postal worker told some criminals about a train carrying a lot of money.	
9	They took the money to the farmhouse and shared it out.	

Vocabulary matching

Match the words from the story with the meanings.

audacity	think something is very bad, morally wrong etc.
deplorable	very careful and precise with a lot of attention to detail
loot	very strict, unkind or cruel
meticulous	secret information
tip-off	making you think about serious things
harsh	stolen money or valuable objects
sobering	confidence and willingness to take great risks

Grammar

Complete the sentences with the correct forms of the verbs in brackets.

- The gang _____ (know) the train _____ (carry) money because a post office worker _____ (tell) them.
- After robbing the train, they _____ (drive) to a farmhouse which they _____ (buy) six weeks earlier.
- The robbers _____ (get) long sentences because the robbery _____ (embarrass) the government.
- Some of the robbers _____ (escape) and others _____ (never / catch)
- To this day, much of the money _____ (never / find).

Speaking

Discuss with your partner(s).

- Do you think the train robbers deserved any sympathy?
 What kind of sentence do you think is appropriate for this kind of crime?
 Should criminals and their families be allowed to sell their stories to the media?

Reading: the Great Train Robbery of 1963



Night train

Pic: [Phil Sangwell \(CC\)](#)

One of the most **notorious** robberies in English history took place on 8, August, 1963, when a gang of men stole over two million pounds (US\$53 million in 2018) from a night mail train in the countryside outside London. The daring **audacity** of the raid and its **meticulous** planning have given the **heist iconic** status.

The story began months earlier when the gang received a **tip-off** from a post office worker that a mail train would be carrying bags of old banknotes to London for recycling, an irresistible prize for criminals as they would be untraceable.

After careful research, they chose a lonely spot 50 kilometres north of London and stopped the train in the **early hours** by making a false red signal.

They then **swarmed** onto the locomotive, hitting the driver over the head in the struggle that followed. After uncoupling the front two coaches containing the money, they drove the train to a bridge 800 metres ahead where the rest of the gang were waiting.

Here they unloaded the 128 mailbags weighing 2.5 tons onto trucks parked in the **lane** below. These were disguised as **military** vehicles taking part in a night exercise. The whole operation took just 30 minutes.

Driving slowly through back **lanes** to avoid detection, they arrived forty-five minutes later at a remote farmhouse which they had bought six weeks earlier. When they counted the money, they found it was far more than they had expected and **amid** noisy celebrations, they shared out the **loot**.

By listening in on police radio messages, they soon

learned the police had guessed they were still in the area. Concerned that the farmhouse would soon be discovered, they decided to leave immediately and over the next 24 hours went their separate ways. Each man had about £150,000 (nearly US\$4 million in 2018). The police found the farm four days later.

It was at this point that things started to go wrong. They had paid a man to clean up the farmhouse to remove all evidence but he never turned up, which meant that fingerprints remained at the farm. These would later lead to the arrest of some of the gang.

Meanwhile, as the story hit the headlines, public reaction was surprisingly sympathetic. People wished the robbers good luck rather than **deplore** their lawless behaviour, never mind that the driver had been brutally beaten.

The gang were eventually to become **victims of their own success**. The media **frenzy** put the police under intense pressure to make arrests, and as leading professional criminals, they were prime suspects. A few weeks later, an unknown **informer** who was in jail for another crime revealed most of their names, possibly in return for early release. By Christmas, most of the robbers had been caught.

When their trial came early in 1964, the **sentences** shocked the nation: the **defendants** were given a total of over 300 years in prison. The government had clearly been embarrassed by the raid - the train had neither security guards nor an alarm system - and was determined to **make an example** of the men.

Many criticised the **harsh sentences**, including the detective in charge of the investigation. But as it turned out, none of the gang served more than fifteen years, while a number escaped and four were never caught.

As for the money, to this day only a fraction of it has ever been recovered.

It is **sobering** to reflect that train driver, who had bravely defended the state's millions, received a mere £250 (US\$6,700 in 2018) in compensation. Yet some of the robbers' wives were later paid thousands for their stories by the newspapers.

Word list

amid	<i>preposition</i>	while something is happening; surrounded by something
audacity	<i>noun</i>	confidence and willingness to take great risks
defendant	<i>noun</i>	someone who is accused of a crime and goes to court
deplore	<i>verb</i>	think something is very bad, morally wrong etc.
early hours	<i>noun</i>	early part of the day between midnight and sunrise
frenzy	<i>noun</i>	period of great activity and excitement
harsh	<i>adjective</i>	(law, rule etc.) very strict, unkind or cruel; (place, sound) unpleasant
heist	<i>noun</i>	robbery (informal)
iconic	<i>adjective</i>	famous event etc. that represents an idea, period in history etc.
informer	<i>noun</i>	someone who gives information secretly to the police, government etc.
lane	<i>noun</i>	small road, often in the countryside
loot	<i>noun</i>	stolen money or valuable objects
make an example of someone	<i>phrase</i>	give someone a severe punishment to warn others
meticulous	<i>adjective</i>	very careful and precise with a lot of attention to detail
military	<i>adjective</i>	relating to the army or armed forces
notorious	<i>adjective</i>	famous for something bad
sentence	<i>noun and verb</i>	give a punishment in court (verb); a punishment given in court (noun)
sobering	<i>adjective</i>	making you think about serious things
swarm	<i>verb</i>	when insects or people move in large numbers
tip-off	<i>noun</i>	secret information
victims of their own success	<i>phrase</i>	when someone's success causes them problems

Extra exercises : story summary matching

Story summary - matching dominoes - The Great Train robbery



only a small amount of it has ever been recovered.	On 8, August, 1963, a gang of men stole	over two million pounds from a mail train near London.	Months earlier they had received
a tip-off from a post office worker.	He told them that a on the 8 August, a mail train would	be carrying lots of old banknotes to London for recycling.	After careful research, they chose a lonely spot
and stopped the train in the middle of the night with a false red signal.	They unloaded the money bags onto trucks and drove	to a farmhouse which they had bought six weeks earlier.	Here they shared out the money
and celebrated before leaving the next day.	Things started to go wrong when a man they	had paid to remove evidence from the farmhouse never turned up.	Four days later the police found the farm
and discovered the fingerprints of some of the gang.	A few weeks after this, an unknown informer who	was in jail for another crime revealed most of their names.	By Christmas, most of the robbers had been caught,
and in 1964 they were sent to prison for over 300 years.	But some of them later managed to escape	while the others did not have to serve their full sentences.	As for the money, to this day

Extra exercises : vocabulary and grammar

The Great Train Robbery - grammar

On 8, August, 1963, a gang of men (1) _____ (steal) over two million pounds from a mail train near London. Months earlier they (2) _____ (receive) a tip-off from a post office worker. He (3) _____ (tell) them that a on the 8 August, a mail train would be carrying lots of old banknotes to London for recycling. After careful research, they (4) _____ (choose) a lonely spot and stopped the train in the middle of the night with a false red signal. They unloaded the money bags onto trucks and drove to a farmhouse which they (5) _____ (buy) six weeks earlier. Here they (6) _____ (share) out the money and celebrated before leaving the next day. Things started to go wrong when a man they (7) _____ (pay) to remove evidence from the farmhouse never turned up. Four days later the police (8) _____ (find) the farm and discovered the fingerprints of some of the gang. A few weeks after this, an unknown informer who (9) _____ (be) in jail for another crime revealed most of their names. By Christmas, most of the robbers (10) _____ (catch), and in 1964 they were sent to prison for over 300 years. But some of them later managed to escape while the others (11) _____ (not / have) to serve their full sentences. As for the money, to this day only a small amount of it (12) _____ (ever / recover).

The Great Train Robbery - vocabulary

On 8, August, 1963, a (1) _____ of men stole over two million pounds from a mail train near London. Months earlier they had received a (2) _____ from a post office worker. He told them that a on the 8 August, a mail train would be carrying lots of old (3) _____ to London for recycling. After careful research, they chose a lonely spot and stopped the train in the middle of the night with a (4) _____ red signal. They unloaded the money bags onto trucks and drove to a (5) _____ which they had bought six weeks earlier. Here they (6) _____ out the money and celebrated before leaving the next day. Things started to go wrong when a man they had paid to remove (7) _____ from the farmhouse never turned up. Four days later the police found the farm and discovered the (8) _____ of some of the gang. A few weeks after this, an unknown (9) _____ who was in jail for another crime revealed most of their names. By Christmas, most of the robbers had been caught, and in 1964 they were sent to (10) _____ for over 300 years. But some of them later managed to escape while the others did not have to serve their full (11) _____. As for the money, to this day only a small amount of it has ever been (12) _____.

Answers

Comprehension 1

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. True
6. False
7. False

Comprehension 2

8 6 1 5 7 9 2 4 3

Vocabulary matching

audacity

confidence and willingness to take great risks

deplore

think something is very bad, morally wrong etc.

loot

stolen money or valuable objects

meticulous

very careful and precise with a lot of attention to detail

tip-off

secret information

harsh

very strict, unkind or cruel

sobering

making you think about serious things

Grammar

1. knew, was carrying, had told
2. drove, had bought
3. got, had embarrassed
4. escaped, were never caught
5. has never been found

The Great Train Robbery - grammar

1. stole
2. had received
3. told OR had told
4. chose
5. had bought
6. shared
7. had paid
8. found
9. was
10. had been caught
11. did not have
12. has ever been recovered

The Great Train Robbery - vocabulary

1. gang
2. tip-off
3. banknotes
4. false
5. farmhouse
6. shared
7. evidence
8. fingerprints
9. informer
10. prison
11. sentences
12. recovered

Credits and copyright

Copyright

Text and design © Eltbase.com 2020. All rights reserved.

Permission is given for the photocopying of those pages marked 'photocopiable'.

No part of this file may be copied either mechanically or electronically for resale.

Photo credits

Photographs and other illustrations listed below are used under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0](#) Generic (CC BY 2.0) licence. See below for individual photograph attributions. Links are given to creators' web pages where these are known. Any photographs not listed here are in the public domain.



Phil Sangwell

<https://www.flickr.com/people/onemananhi>

[sdog/](#)