NEWS LESSON

His Captor Sent Him a Message



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What makes a story about a real person stay with you?
2. Can you understand someone's actions without forgiving them?
3. When does replying to an unwanted message make things harder?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**journalist**	☐	A	a person who writes news stories for a living
2	**captors**	☐	B	the people who keep someone as a prisoner
3	**ransom**	☐	C	money paid to free a prisoner
4	**hijacked**	☐	D	a meeting in a court to decide if someone is guilty
5	**guards**	☐	E	stopping being angry with someone who did wrong
6	**trial**	☐	F	fair treatment by the law
7	**forgiveness**	☐	G	taken by force by criminals
8	**justice**	☐	H	people who watch a prisoner all the time

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Michael Scott Moore was a hostage of Somali pirates for 977 days. Two months after he was freed, one of his guards sent him a friendly message. What happened next?

1 Michael Scott Moore, a journalist, set off for Somalia in January 2012 to research a book about piracy. He was kidnapped shortly after arriving and held for 977 days, more than two and a half years. His captors moved him between buildings, outdoor camps and a hijacked fishing boat. He often felt frightened and alone. He was sometimes beaten, and armed guards controlled his daily life. In September 2014, a large ransom payment finally secured his release.

2 Two months after his release, Moore received an extraordinary Facebook message out of the blue. It came from Mohamed Tahlil, one of the men who had guarded him. Tahlil said he was pleased that Moore was free and described himself as a friend. Someone involved in that terrible experience now wanted to talk to him online.

3 During the early part of his captivity, Tahlil had seemed calmer than some of the other guards. Moore did not trust him, but he remembered their conversations. When Tahlil got in touch on Facebook, Moore decided to reply because he wanted to find out more. The two exchanged messages, and Tahlil provided some information that helped Moore write his book about the experience.

4 However, Tahlil also wanted something in return. He hoped Moore could help him travel to the United States. Moore had already been speaking to the FBI, which was investigating his kidnapping. He told the agents about their messages. In 2018, Tahlil flew to New York believing he would receive help. Instead, FBI officers arrested him when he turned up.

5 The case became more complicated during the trial. Evidence showed that Tahlil had played a more important role in the pirate group than Moore had originally understood. Another man, Abdi Yusuf Hassan, had also been involved. In 2023, both were convicted of serious crimes connected with the kidnapping. In 2024, they each received a 30-year prison sentence.

6 Moore has written openly about the difficult question of forgiveness. During captivity, trying not to hate his guards helped him survive. But forgiving someone does not mean pretending that their actions were acceptable. He still wanted justice, even when he felt uncomfortable about harsh punishment. A person can want answers, peace and accountability at the same time.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Tahlil and Hassan each received a 30-year sentence. T F NG
2. Moore was a hostage for more than two and a half years. T F NG
3. Moore has visited Tahlil in prison. T F NG
4. Tahlil received help to settle in the United States. T F NG
5. The messages from Tahlil helped Moore write his book. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

complicated	convicted	extraordinary	frightened	harmless	hopeful	investigating

1. Surviving two and a half years as a hostage is an _____ achievement.
2. The children were too _____ to go into the dark room alone.
3. The case became more _____ when new facts appeared.
4. Police are _____ the robbery and looking for the thief.
5. A jury found the manager guilty, and he was _____ of fraud.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. The message _____ from one of the men who had guarded him. (COME)
2. He _____ shortly after arriving in Somalia. (KIDNAP)
3. FBI officers _____ Tahlil when he turned up in New York. (ARREST)
4. In 2018, Tahlil flew to New York _____ he would receive help. (BELIEVE)
5. Forgiving someone does not mean _____ their actions were acceptable. (PRETEND)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some words go together as a pair. Learn the pair, not just the word.

hold	keep	make	pay	serve	strong	tell

1. Moore had to _____ a hard decision about whether to reply.
2. Both men must _____ a 30-year sentence in prison.
3. A family may have to _____ a ransom to free a hostage.
4. A witness must promise to _____ the truth in court.
5. The lawyers showed _____ evidence that the man was guilty.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Should someone who has suffered a crime feel any pressure to forgive?
2. What do journalists owe people when they retell a painful story?
3. Can a court judgment give a story a clear ending?

9 Role-play: should I reply?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the person who got the message

An old classmate who treated you badly has sent you a friendly message after many years. You are curious and want to reply. Explain why, and say what worries you.

Student B · the friend

You think your friend should be careful. Ask questions, give your opinion, and suggest what to do. You can say reply, ignore it, or reply with conditions.

Useful phrases

I've just had a message from someone I haven't heard from for years.

Part of me wants to find out why they wrote.

I'd think twice before answering.

What if they're only after something?

Maybe you could reply, but keep it short.

I'm still angry, but I don't want to be bitter.

Afterwards, tell the class: what did your pair decide, and why?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 B · 3 C · 4 G · 5 H · 6 D · 7 E · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 extraordinary · 2 frightened · 3 complicated · 4 investigating · 5 convicted

6 Verb forms

1 came · 2 was kidnapped · 3 arrested · 4 believing · 5 pretending

7 Language focus

1 make · 2 serve · 3 pay · 4 tell · 5 strong

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**