

Apollo 13

WORKSHEET A

On 11th April 1970 a spacecraft was launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida, with the intention of putting American astronauts on the moon for the third time – Apollo 13's mission had begun.

During the first lunar landing, achieved by Apollo 11 on 20th July the previous year, astronaut Neil Armstrong had said some very famous words as he started to walk on the moon: "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." The words of an astronaut who took part in the Apollo 13 mission, James Lovell, have also become famous (thanks partly to the 1995 film *Apollo 13*, starring Tom Hanks), because when a very serious accident happened and his life was in danger, all he said to mission control was "Houston, we've had a problem here." It was probably the greatest understatement in the history of space travel.

The objective of Apollo 13's mission was for its three astronauts – Lovell, John Swigert and Fred Haise – to carry out geological experiments on the moon. However, on 13th April, before Apollo 13 reached its destination, one of its oxygen tanks exploded, reducing the astronauts' oxygen, electricity, light and water. The astronauts could immediately see that the objective of the mission had changed: it was now simply to get back to Earth alive.

The astronauts had to move into an area of the spacecraft called the lunar module (LM), because after the explosion it was the only part that had enough oxygen. However, the LM didn't have much electricity or water – the men had very little to drink, and would become extremely cold.

Also, the LM did not have a very good navigation system: the astronauts had to do very difficult calculations in order to work out how to get on a path back to Earth, which was more than 200,000 miles away. They managed to do this, but the situation was still terrifying because of the possibility that the spacecraft, damaged by the explosion, would be destroyed by the heat caused by re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere.

Apollo 13 survived re-entry, however, and the LM was able to parachute down safely into the Pacific Ocean. The sense of relief was enormous – not just for the three astronauts and everyone at mission control, but also for the millions of people around the world who had been following the situation on TV.

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WORKSHEET B

Now decide whether the following twelve statements are true or false:

1. The successful Apollo 11 mission took place in 1970.
2. An understatement is a statement that emphasises the importance of a situation.
3. Neil Armstrong took part in the Apollo 13 mission.
4. Apollo 13's three astronauts were planning to do scientific work on the moon.
5. Apollo 13's oxygen tank exploded when the spacecraft arrived on the moon.
6. It didn't take long for the astronauts to realise that the explosion had created a very dangerous situation.
7. The astronauts found it difficult to breathe in the lunar module.
8. The astronauts were cold and thirsty during the journey back to Earth.
9. The lunar module's computers told the astronauts what the correct route back to Earth was.
10. There was a danger that the astronauts would die of cold during re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere.
11. The lunar module hit the Pacific Ocean at dangerously high speed, but the astronauts survived.
12. Millions of people knew that the astronauts were in great danger.