Name: _____ Date: _____

# Complaints Department

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1329 words

THE OFFICIAL LOG OF COMPLAINTS, kept by Hollis Pratt, age eleven and four-fifths, of Room 9. Property of Hollis Pratt. If found, please return to Hollis Pratt, and if you read it anyway, please do not laugh at any part except the parts that are meant to be funny, of which my sister Fran says there are none. FRAN'S REBUTTAL: There are none. HOLLIS'S REPLY: Received. [Doodle: a small angry pencil standing guard over a notebook.]

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8. COMPLAINT NO. 1. To: The Office. Re: the water fountain outside Room 6. When you press the button, it does not go up like a normal fountain. It squirts sideways, in a curve, directly at whoever is standing in line behind you, and this morning it got Jabari's glasses, and he said a word I will not repeat. Mrs. Penfold stamped my complaint RECEIVED and dropped it in a gray tray marked OTHER. FRAN'S REBUTTAL: Nothing will happen. [Doodle: the fountain, with eyebrows, looking guilty.]

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11. A plumber named Walt came with a bag of wrenches and fixed the fountain in nine minutes, and it now squirts straight up and hits the ceiling, which is an improvement, because the ceiling does not have glasses. Principal Dunmore sent down a note in his big square handwriting that said, Noted, and thank you, H. Pratt. I have read it eleven times, and it is possible that nobody in this school has ever been thanked for a complaint before, and I would like it noted that it feels remarkably good. FRAN'S REBUTTAL: Lucky.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15. COMPLAINT NO. 2. The clock in Room 9 is four minutes slow, and I have checked it against my watch, the cafeteria clock and the sun. This means that recess starts four minutes late every day, which adds up to twenty minutes a week, or about a whole afternoon of lost happiness every month. I attached a chart. It has a pie in it. Mrs. Penfold stamped RECEIVED, looked at the pie, and said, "Is that a pie of time?" I said it was. She stamped it twice, which I choose to believe was admiration.

On Wednesday, the clock was fixed. On Thursday, the recess bell rang four minutes early, because the janitor had set it by the new time and nobody had told the bell. COMPLAINT NO. 3, filed that same afternoon, was against the bell. COMPLAINT NO. 4 was against the recess rule that says Walking Only on the Blacktop, which I pointed out is a rule for a very small blacktop and a very large number of legs. I proposed a Running Lane. FRAN'S REBUTTAL: He did not think of the lane. Jabari did. Hollis only typed it. HOLLIS: Typing is thinking with fingers.

The Running Lane is white, forty feet long, and has a small sign that says RUN HERE. Principal Dunmore cut the ribbon with the cafeteria scissors, and he ran the length of it himself

while the whole school cheered, and then he had to sit down for a while. Mrs. Penfold gave me a new stamp for the log, a custom one, which says RECEIVED AND TAKEN SERIOUSLY. I have used it on everything. COMPLAINT NO. 5: the cafeteria loaf, which has no color. COMPLAINT NO. 6: the word "moist." COMPLAINT NO. 7: Tuesdays. All were received. Two were seriously taken.

I am now, I think, quite well known, and kids come by Room 9 at lunch with grievances on folded paper, and I read them out loud, and I accept all of them, except the ones about homework. Jabari, who is my best friend and sits behind me, has taken to calling me "the Department." This morning a small boy from the first grade handed me a note that said, My shoe is mad at me. I logged it as NO. 11. FRAN'S REBUTTAL: You are getting a big head. HOLLIS: A big head holds more complaints.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2. COMPLAINT NO. 12. This is a serious one. MY GREEN DRAFTING PENCIL IS MISSING. This is the silver-and-green one with the tiny eraser that was Pop-Pop Alder's and which is not like other pencils, because it does not run out, it just gets shorter in a dignified way. I last saw it Friday, on my desk, and Monday it was gone. The only person who sat near it, who borrowed a pencil, and who was smiling in a way I did not like, is JABARI COLE. I therefore name him. In writing. As the rules say.

I should explain the rule. Complaint Rule 3 says that any complaint naming a student must be read aloud to that student by the principal himself, because a complaint with no name on it is only a feeling. I wrote that rule, and I was extremely proud of that rule. At 1:15 on Friday, I sat in a chair in the office with my hands on my knees. Principal Dunmore read COMPLAINT NO. 12 aloud, in his big square voice, to Jabari Cole, who stood by the door in his socks, because his shoes were still drying from the fountain.

Jabari listened to the whole thing. He did not shout, and he did not even say the word, but only looked at the floor for a while, and then at me. Then he said, very quietly, "I thought you knew me," and he walked out. In the whole office, the only sound was the clock, which was exactly right. I would like it recorded that I felt, at that moment, like a pie of time that had been sat on. FRAN'S REBUTTAL: I found it. SATURDAY, 7 A.M. IN THE LAUNDRY. IN THE HEM OF YOUR OWN SWEATSHIRT.

HOLLIS PRATT, in his own words, on Saturday, in the dark, with a flashlight. It was in my sweatshirt. I must have clipped it to the hem on Friday when I wore it to the library. I have been over the case, and the only person with the pencil, the means and the opportunity was me. I kept the log. I wrote the rule. I stood in an office and heard the worst thing I have ever written about a friend read out loud. COMPLAINT NO. 13 is against myself, and it is enormous.

COMPLAINT NO. 13, filed Monday at 8:02. To: The Office. Re: Hollis Pratt. He accused a person with no evidence. Mrs. Penfold looked at it for a long time. "There's a blue tray," she

said, "for this kind," and she held the stamp over the paper, and then she did a thing she has never done in this log, which was to put it down. "I think you'd better take it to him yourself," she said. "Not me. Not the tray."

I found Jabari at the Running Lane. I did not stamp anything. I read him COMPLAINT NO. 13 out loud, every word, including the part about the log, and when I got to the end he did not say anything for a very long time. Then he held out his hand for the paper. Across the bottom, in his own handwriting, with my own green pencil which I had given him to borrow, he wrote, Upheld. Remedy: you carry my tray for a week, and you say sorry to the hamster in Room 4, because he was there.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14. COMPLAINT NO. 14. To: The Office. Re: the water fountain outside Room 6. I have been looking at it for several minutes, and I have nothing to say. It squirts straight up, and it has done so for a month, and everybody who drinks from it comes away completely dry. This is a complaint that I do not have. Mrs. Penfold read it twice. Then she put down the old stamp and picked up a different one, from the very back of the drawer. It was small and dusty. It said, in tiny letters, RECEIVED WITH THANKS.

## Questions

**1. What does Hollis do after the plumber fixes the fountain?**

A. He feels pleased that a complaint worked
B. He asks for a different fountain
C. He complains about Walt

**2. Why does Hollis blame Jabari for the missing pencil?**

A. Jabari admitted taking it
B. Jabari sat near it and borrowed a pencil that day
C. Fran told him to

**3. Where did Hollis's pencil turn out to be?**

A. In Jabari's backpack
B. On the Running Lane
C. In the hem of his own sweatshirt

**4. Why does Mrs. Penfold say "I think you'd better take it to him yourself"?**

A. She was out of stamps
B. She thought an apology should come from Hollis, in person
C. She did not read it

**5. When Hollis says he felt like "a pie of time that had been sat on," he means he felt**

A. hungry
B. flattened and ashamed

C. proud of his chart

**6. What do the last stamp and the fountain suggest?**

A. Hollis stopped caring

B. Mrs. Penfold was angry at him

C. Hollis had grown, and she noticed it

## Words to know

grievances: complaints

rebuttal: answer back

custom: made special

remedy: way to fix

upheld: agreed with

# Answer key: Complaints Department

1. A. He feels pleased that a complaint worked
2. B. Jabari sat near it and borrowed a pencil that day
3. C. In the hem of his own sweatshirt
4. B. She thought an apology should come from Hollis, in person
5. B. flattened and ashamed
6. C. Hollis had grown, and she noticed it