

Nobody's Fault

Name: _____

Read the passage all the way through before you start.

The window broke at 4:12 in the afternoon, and by 4:15 there were four versions of how it had happened.

Devon said Amir had thrown the ball. Amir said Devon had told him to. Kai said he had not been watching, which was not true, because Kai had been the one who counted down from three. Nobody mentioned the countdown.

Mrs. Okonjo did not ask who broke it. She asked them to sit down and write what they saw, separately, no talking. Devon wrote four sentences. Amir wrote most of a page. Kai sat with the pencil in his hand for a long time and wrote one line: *I counted down from three.*

She read all four and put them face down on the desk. Then she said the window would be fixed on Thursday, and that she was not going to decide who was to blame, because she had not seen it and they had. She said they could work that out among themselves, and that she would like to know on Friday what they had decided.

It took until Thursday. What they came to, in the end, was that all four of them owed part of it, and that Kai owed the most, not because of the ball but because of the countdown — and that Kai was the only one who had written down the thing that made him look worst.

That last part was Devon's idea. Nobody argued with it.

Fiction • 244 words

Before you turn over

1. Underline any word you are not sure of. Work out what you can from the sentence around it.

2. In one sentence, what is this passage about?

3. Write down one question you still have.

The questions are on the next page. →

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Answer in complete sentences. Look back at the passage as often as you need to.

1. What actually caused the window to break?

2. Why does Mrs. Okonjo make them write separately with no talking?

3. Kai writes the one line that makes him look worst. Why does that change how the others treat him?

4. What does the teacher believe about how this should be settled?

5. The title is "Nobody's Fault". Is that a fair title? Use the story to explain.

Nobody's Fault — Answer Key

1. Amir threw the ball, but Devon told him to and Kai counted down — all four were involved, and none of the first accounts said so. *(Recall)*
2. Answers will vary. So each account is their own rather than shaped by the others — and so they have to face what they saw before they can agree a story. *(Inference)*
3. He told the truth when he did not have to, so the others trust his account and give him credit for it even while holding him most responsible. *(Character)*
4. That the boys should work it out themselves, because they were there and she was not. *(Recall)*
5. Answers will vary. Accept either: it is ironic, because it is really everybody's fault; or it reflects how each boy first tried to make it nobody's fault of theirs. *(Theme)*