Once upon a time, many years ago when our grandfathers were little children—there was a doctor; and his name was Dolittle—John Dolittle, MD. ‘MD’ means that he was a proper doctor and knew a whole lot.

He lived in a little town called Puddleby-on-the-Marsh. All the folks, young and old, knew him well by sight. The dogs and the children would all run up and follow behind him; and even the crows that lived in the church-tower would caw and nod their heads.

The house he lived in, on the edge of the town, was quite small; but his garden was very large and had a wide lawn and stone seats and weeping-willows hanging over. His sister, Sarah Dolittle, was housekeeper for him.

He was very fond of animals and kept many kinds of pets. Besides the goldfish in the pond at the bottom of his garden, he had rabbits in the pantry, white mice in his piano, a squirrel in the linen closet and a hedgehog in the cellar. He had a cow with a calf too, and an old lame horse—twenty-five years of age—and chickens, and pigeons, and two lambs, and many other animals. But his favourite pets were Dab-Dab the duck, Jip the dog, Gub-Gub the baby pig, Polynesia the parrot, and the owl Too-Too.
His sister used to grumble about all these animals and said they made the house untidy. And one day when an old lady with rheumatism came to see the Doctor, she sat on the hedgehog who was sleeping on the sofa and never came to see him any more, but drove every Saturday all the way to Oxenthorpe, another town ten miles off, to see a different doctor.

Then his sister, Sarah Dolittle, came to him and said, 'John, how can you expect sick people to come and see you when you keep all these animals in the house? If you go on like this, none of the best people will have you for a doctor.'

'But I like the animals better than the "best people",' said the Doctor.

'You are ridiculous,' said his sister and walked out of the room.

So, as time went on, the Doctor got more and more animals; and the people who came to see him got less and less. Till at last he had no one left—except the Cat's-meat-Man, who didn't mind any kind of animals.

And now, when he walked down the street in his high hat, people would say to one another, 'There goes John Dolittle, MD! There was a time when he was the best known doctor in the West Country—Look at him now—He hasn't any money and his stockings are full of holes!'

But the dogs and the cats and the children still ran up and followed him through the town—the same as they had done when he was rich.
One day the Doctor was sitting in his kitchen talking with the Cat’s-meat-Man who had come to see him with a stomach-ache.

‘Why don’t you give up being a people’s doctor and be an animal-doctor?’ asked the Cat’s-meat-Man.

The parrot, Polynesia, was sitting in the window looking out at the rain. She started to listen.

‘You see, Doctor,’ the Cat’s-meat-Man went on, ‘you know all about animals—much more than these vets do. That book you wrote—about cats, why, it’s wonderful! You might have been a cat yourself. You know the way they think. And listen: you can make a lot of money doctoring animals. Do you know that? You see, I’d send all the old women who had sick cats or dogs to you. And look, all the farmers ’round about who had lame horses and weak lambs—they’d come. Be an animal-doctor.’

When the Cat’s-meat-Man had gone the parrot flew off the window on to the Doctor’s table and said, ‘That man’s got sense. That’s what you ought to do. Be an animal doctor.’

‘Oh, there are plenty of animal-doctors,’ said John Dolittle.

‘Yes, there are plenty,’ said Polynesia. ‘But none of them are any good at all. Now listen, Doctor, and I’ll tell you something. Did you know that animals can talk?’

‘I knew that parrots can talk,’ said the Doctor.

‘Oh, we parrots can talk in two languages—people’s language and bird-language,’ said Polynesia proudly. ‘If I say, “Polly wants a cracker”, you understand me. But hear this: Ka-kaoi-ee, fee-fee?’
"Good Gracious!" cried the Doctor. "What does that mean?"

"That means, "Is the porridge hot yet?"—in bird-language."

"My! You don't say so!" said the Doctor. "You never talked that way to me before."

"What would have been the good?" said Polynesia, dusting some cracker-crumbs off her left wing. "You wouldn't have understood me if I had."

'Tell me some more,' said the Doctor, all excited; and he rushed over to the dresser-drawer and came back with the butcher's book and a pencil. 'Now don't go too fast—and I'll write it down. This is interesting—very interesting—something quite new. Give me the Birds' ABC first—slowly now.'

So that was the way the Doctor came to know that animals had a language of their own and could talk to one another. And all that afternoon, while it was raining, Polynesia sat on the kitchen table giving him bird words to put down in the book.

Hugh Lofting (Abridged)

ABOUT THE STORY

This short extract is from the opening chapters of 'The Story of Doctor Dolittle' by Hugh Lofting (1886–1947). Lofting was born in England and moved to the United States after completing his schooling. During World War I, when he was fighting in the trenches in Europe, he wrote imaginative letters to his children. Instead of telling them about the horrors of war, he wrote about the character he had invented, Doctor Dolittle, a man who could speak the language of animals. Lofting wrote more books about the adventures of this doctor. You will enjoy reading the books.
**WORDS TO KNOW**

**butcher's book** the book the butcher uses for writing down what meat has been supplied and how much is owed

**cracker** a thin, crisp wafer or biscuit

**dresser** a low chest of drawers

**hedgehog** a type of small mammal, with sharp spines covering the body

**linen closet** a cabinet or recess for storing clothing and sheets

**pantry** a small room, usually near a kitchen, where food and other dining articles are stored

**porridge** a soft food made by boiling oats or cereal in water or milk

**rheumatisms** a condition in which discomfort is felt in the limbs and joints

**ridiculous** silly; deserving to be made fun of

**stockings** long, tight fitting socks worn by people

**weeping-willows** a type of tree with long branches and leaves that reach down to the ground

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**COMPREHENSION**

1. **Answer the following questions.**

   a. Who followed Doctor Dolittle?
   
   b. Did Doctor Dolittle live alone?
   
   c. How many different kinds of pets lived with Doctor Dolittle?
   
   d. What did Doctor Dolittle have to say about the 'best people'?
   
   e. Who gave Doctor Dolittle the idea to become an animal-doctor?
   
   f. What did the parrot say to Doctor Dolittle in its own language? What did that mean in English?
   
   g. What did Doctor Dolittle write in his butcher's book?

   **These questions are more difficult. Discuss them first.**

   h. How and why did Doctor Dolittle become poor?
   
   i. In what ways could it be useful to know the language of animals?

2. **Answer the questions about this line from the story.**

   'You are ridiculous,' said his sister and walked out of the room.

   a. Who is speaking and to whom?
   
   b. What have the brother and sister been speaking about?
   
   c. Why does the speaker get upset and leave the room?
   
   d. What happens after this?
WORKING WITH WORDS

Fill in the blanks with words from the story. You will not find these sentences in the story.

1. The people did not know his name, but when they saw him on the road they knew him .......................... (Two words are missing.)
2. Doctor Dolittle's house was not in the town but on the .............................. of the town.
3. The doctor's ....................... pets were a duck, a dog, a baby pig and a parrot.
4. The children were not happy and ......................... all day because they could not go out.
5. He wore such a ...................... hat that the others all laughed and made fun of him.
6. After he fell over, the boy picked himself up and ...................... his shirt.
7. The children ...................... out of the class to see the parade passing along the road.

LEARNING ABOUT LANGUAGE

INFINITIVES

Look at the following sentences:

She never came to see him anymore.

She started to listen.

The verbs underlined above are called infinitives. Usually infinitives have the word to in front of them.

Sometimes an infinitive is the subject of a sentence.

Example: To work is difficult.

Sometimes an infinitive is used as an object.

Example: She tried to climb the steep hillside.

1. Underline the infinitives in the following sentences; in some sentences there is no infinitive.

a. The boy wanted to enter the playground.

b. He tried to climb the high wall round the playground.

c. When he got to the top the park-keeper saw him.

d. The keeper tried to catch him.

e. He looked at the keeper and decided to jump.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT SPEECH

Look at the following sentences:

Direct speech: 'There are plenty,' said Polynesia.

Indirect speech: Polynesia said that there were plenty.
Direct speech tells us the exact words of the speaker.
Indirect speech is speech that is reported by someone else.

2. Change these sentences into indirect speech.
   a. ‘My father is a carpenter,’ he said.
   b. ‘I have a good idea,’ said the girl.
   c. ‘I am the greatest magician in the world,’ said the old man.
   d. ‘I am your friend,’ said the visitor.

When we change a question into indirect speech, we often use if.

Example: ‘Do you know that?’ the man asked the doctor.
         The man asked the doctor if he knew that.
(Note that the tense changes from the present to the past.)

3. Change the following from direct to indirect speech.
   a. ‘Are you eating an apple?’ she asked him.
   b. ‘Is it raining?’ she asked him.
   c. ‘Is your school very big?’ she asked her.
   d. ‘Is the meeting over?’ they asked him.
   e. ‘Did you buy the cakes?’ she asked me.

4. Now try to make these into questions in direct speech.
   a. He asked Amu if she was ten years old.
   b. She asked if he liked the book.
   c. She wondered if the Post Office was over there.

LISTENING AND SPEAKING

REPORTING QUESTIONS

Take turns to ask somebody a question. The pupil sitting next to you will report your question, then ask another question. Follow the pattern given in the example below.

Name + do you ...?

The pupils in the example are seated like this:

Dilip   Anil   Arun   Bala   Mukesh   Veda   Geetha   Sita
Mahesh   Roopa  Padma  Mohan  Bhaskar  Sridhar  Nikhil  Pratap

Begin with:

Dilip: Roopa, do you like sweet tea?
Anil: (sitting next to Dilip) Dilip asked Roopa whether she likes sweet tea.
Anil: Geetha, do you dance?
Arun: (sitting next to Anil) Anil asked Geetha whether she dances.
Arun: Padma, do you watch television?
Bala: (sitting next to Arun) Arun asked Padma whether she watches television.

Make sure nobody repeats a question that has already been asked.

**COMPOSITION**

Write a short account beginning with the sentence:

If I could talk to animals I ...