

12. Doctor Dolittle Learns Animal Language



“Now listen, Doctor,” said Polynesia, “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 biscuit’, you understand me. But hear this : ‘Ka-Ka oi-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 biscuit-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 a notebook 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 notebook.

At tea-time, when the dog, Jip, came in, the parrot said to the Doctor, “See, *he’s* talking to you.”

“Looks to me as though he were scratching his ear,” said the Doctor.

“But animals don’t always speak with their mouths,” said the parrot in a high voice, raising her eyebrows. “They talk with their ears, with their feet, with their tails – with everything. Sometimes they don’t **want** to make a noise. Do you see now the way he’s twitching up one side of his nose?”

“What does that mean?” asked the Doctor.



“That means, ‘Can’t you see that it has stopped raining?’ ” Polynesia answered. “He is asking you a question. Dogs nearly

always use their noses for asking questions.”

After a while, with the parrot’s help, the Doctor got to learn the language of the animals so well that he could talk to them himself and understand everything they said. Then he gave up being a people’s doctor altogether.



– From ‘The Story of Doctor Dolittle’
by Hugh Lofting.



- **dusting off** : removing dirt or dust from something.
- **dresser** : a cupboard with shelves, drawers, etc.
- **Birds' ABC** : the alphabet of birds' language, simple, basic information about birds' language.

Things to do :

1. Answer the following questions :
 - (a) Who was Polynesia ?
 - (b) Why was the doctor excited ?
 - (c) What did Polynesia and the Doctor do all that afternoon ?
 - (d) What did Polynesia tell the doctor about animals talking without making a noise ?
 - (e) When did the doctor give up being a people's doctor altogether ?
2. Find out and write the following from the lesson :
 - (a) The words that mean 'Is the porridge hot yet ?'
 - (b) Something that means 'Can't you see that it has stopped raining?' in dog language.
Do you think the two things above, as described in this passage, could be true?
3. Gather information about how animals communicate. Read the examples given below.

Honey bees dance to tell other bees that they have found nectar.

Dogs wag their tail to show pleasure.

Cats move their tail when they are angry or irritated.

Elephants link their trunks to show affection.

4. If you could learn the language of one animal, what animal would you choose ? Why would you choose that animal ? What would you talk about ? Write it in short.
5. Learn and write ten letters of any language other than English.