

ENTERTAINMENT

ANIMAL MAGIC!

DOLITTLE is the new adventure film starring Robert Downey Jr as a doctor who can talk to animals. We talked to the film's stars Harry Collett, 16, and Carmel Laniado, 15, about acting with invisible animals and what it's like working with Iron Man!



■ **How did you come to star in Dolittle?**

Carmel: Dolittle is actually my first film ever, which is crazy!

Harry: I used to dance with Diversity, the street-dance group. Then I got my first part in *Billy Elliot: The Musical*. It sort of snowballed from there but this is definitely the biggest thing I've done!

■ **What was it like working with Robert Downey Jr?**

Harry: I'm a huge Marvel fan. It's weird because when you meet Robert for the first time, he's such a normal guy. You forget he's Iron Man, the nerves go away and you're like: "This guy's kinda chill!"

Carmel: It was really surreal for me but such a good experience. I didn't feel like I was talking to this mega superstar. I felt like I was talking to a friend.

■ **How was it working with CGI animals? What do you see?**

Carmel: You don't see anything!

Harry: Yeah, mostly nothing. Sometimes you'd get a picture of what they wanted the animal to look like. We also had help from these professionals that walk around in green suits for a living and pretend to be animals – one of them was BB-8 from *Star Wars*! It was quite funny seeing them walk around.

■ **Were there any other funny moments?**

Carmel: The day we filmed the scene where Dr Dolittle performs surgery on Kevin the squirrel was really funny. There was a squirrel prop and Robert had to perform CPR on it. He was taking these massive breaths and blowing into it. Harry and I couldn't keep a straight face!

Harry: Yeah, it was flopping back and forth!

Carmel: We stayed at a haunted hotel during filming too. Harry was in the attic!

Harry: Yeah, I got the attic room, which was a beautiful room but it creeped me out. I thought: "I might as well go and stay in the Holiday Inn down the road because I can't deal with this!" It was a weird place but looking back on it, it was funny.

■ **Harry, you have a cool stunt where you jump onto a boat from a bridge...**

Harry: I was really lucky because I did most of my own stunts. Glenn Foster, the stunt supervisor, was Iron Man's stunt double. We'd play this game called stunt football where we'd all be wired up. I'd jump up as somebody pulled the wire and you've got to get a ball in the hoop. The boat jump was really fun too. It was all very safe but you forget you're harnessed up, so when you're really high, you're just like: "Oh my god, I'm so high up!"

■ **Did you get seasick at all?**

Harry: Robert got seasick at one point – between takes, he'd be like: "Just breathe, just breathe..." But his character's seasick in the film so it kinda worked. I actually felt more seasick on the giraffe rig. It moves and vibrates and I'd be on it for 20 minutes!

■ **If you could be any animal, what animal would you be?**

Harry: I'd be a little monkey. I'd love climbing trees.

Carmel: I always used to say dolphin, but I'd be a butterfly because I feel they're elegant and would be able to get to places quickly without walking.

DOLITTLE FACTS

Doctor Dolittle is Robert Downey Jr's first film since leaving his Marvel Cinematic Universe role as Iron Man.

The teams that made the CGI animals studied real animals to get the look and feel right, including the way light or wind changed their fur.



Robert Downey Jr gave Doctor Dolittle a Welsh accent. "It turns out it was the single hardest accent on Earth," he said. "It drove me crazy!"

■ **What animal would you like to talk to?**

Harry: Whales, so then I could start my own whale-watching business! Nobody would have to wait to see them, I'd just be like: "Come on, it's time!" and they'd come up and everyone would be happy.

Carmel: I'd love to be able to speak to the little sugar glider, Minnie, who was in the film. I could put her in my schoolbag and no-one would know. I could show her to my friends at break time and be like: "Look what I've got!"

■ **Do you have any advice for any of our readers who are interested in acting?**

Carmel: Always stay grounded. Stay with your close friends and family who really care about you. And enjoy the process. Even if you don't get a role, just learn from it. Just be patient and enjoy it.

Harry: Don't overthink things and be yourself. It's not about what background you come from – you don't have to be rich to be an actor. As long as you have a supportive family and you love doing it, that's the most important thing.

The film has an all-star cast playing Doctor Dolittle's animals. They include Emma Thompson as a parrot, Tom Holland (Spider-Man!) as a dog, Rami Malek as a gorilla, Selena Gomez as a giraffe and Ralph Fiennes as a tiger called Barry.



Dolittle is in cinemas nationwide on 7 February

GLOSSARY

Robert Downey Jr — An American actor, producer and singer. He is most recently known for playing Iron Man in the Marvel Cinematic Universe films

CGI — Computer-generated imagery. The use of computer graphics to create special visual effects



Questions on: Entertainment: 'Animal magic!'

Part A:

A1. Answer the following questions about the film *Dolittle*.

What is it about?	
Who plays the doctor?	
What accent did he give Dr Dolittle?	
Name the film's stars interviewed for this article.	
How old are they?	
When will <i>Dolittle</i> be shown in cinemas?	

A2. What did Harry do before starring in *Dolittle*?

A3. If they could be any animal, what would the film's young stars be and why?

Actor	Choice of animal	Reason
Harry		
Carmel		

A4. How did the teams that made the CGI animals get them right?

A5. Identify the famous actors playing Dr Dolittle's animals.

parrot	
dog	
gorilla	
giraffe	
tiger	

Part B:

B1. What is difficult about working with CGI animals?

B2. Why couldn't Carmel and Harry "keep a straight face" during the filming of the scene in which Dr Dolittle performs surgery on Kevin the squirrel?

B3. Why did Harry find it "weird" that when he met Robert Downey Jr for the first time, he found him to be "such a normal guy"?

B4. Why didn't it matter that Robert Downey Jr got seasick during filming?

B5. Suggest why, out of all the cast, Carmel and Harry are interviewed for *First News*.

Part C:

C1. Comment on the choice of 'Animal magic!' for the headline.

C2. Look at the fifth bullet point in the interview. Why isn't it in the form of a question?

Part D: Writing task

Imagine that you are the interviewer for this article. Think of five additional questions to ask Carmel and Harry.

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How old are they?
When will Dolittle be shown in cinemas?

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Teacher Answers

AIM OF THE NEWS COMPREHENSIONS: News reports are unique non-fiction texts. Being real, they naturally engage students, and with the range of topics that are covered, help to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world outside the classroom. The reports are ideal for short, focused comprehension or discussion activities. Along with the opportunity to find fascinating facts and appreciate the opinions of those involved, there is plenty to be inferred and deduced to understand in more depth what is being reported. Like authors, journalists play with language, so news 'stories' are rich nuggets of text to investigate and provide the opportunity for literacy programmes.

TEACHER ANSWER GUIDE: The teacher answers are intended to provide a guide to the reading skill each question is practising. Suggestions are given for a starting point for responses that students would be expected to give at the start of KS3. Further suggestions then give fuller, more developed responses that students will work towards by the end of KS3, in preparation for the non-fiction elements of GCSE English language.

Part A

A1. Answer the following questions about the film *Dolittle*.

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point — some information correctly identified

Developed response — information correctly identified and explained

What is it about?	It is about a doctor who can talk to animals.
Who plays the doctor?	Robert Downey Jr
What accent did he give Doctor Dolittle?	Welsh. He said: "It turns out it was the single hardest accent on Earth..."
Name the film's stars interviewed for this article.	Harry Collett and Carmel Laniado
How old are they?	Harry is 16 and Carmel is 15
When will <i>Dolittle</i> be shown in cinemas?	It is in cinemas nationwide on 7 February.

A2. What did Harry do before starring in *Dolittle*?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- He used to dance with Diversity, the street-dance group.

Development

- Then he got his first part in *Billy Elliot: The Musical*. However, he thinks that his role in *Dolittle* is the biggest thing he has done.

A3. If they could be any animal, what would the film's young stars be and why?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point — some information correctly identified

Developed response — information correctly identified and explained

Actor	Choice of animal	Reason
Harry	Little monkey	He'd love climbing trees.
Carmel	A butterfly	She feels they're elegant and she would be able to get to places quickly without walking.

A4. How did the teams that made the CGI animals get them right?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- The teams that made the CGI animals studied real animals to get the look and feel right.

Development

- They paid particular attention to the way the light or wind changed their fur.

A5. Identify the famous actors playing Doctor Dolittle’s animals.

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer**Expected response*

parrot	Emma Thompson
dog	Tom Holland
gorilla	Rami Malek
giraffe	Selena Gomez
tiger	Ralph Fiennes

Part B**B1. What is difficult about working with CGI animals?**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer**Starting point*

- Working with CGI animals is difficult because they aren’t there during filming. As Carmel said: “You don’t see anything!”

Development

- However, Harry and Carmel got some help because sometimes they’d get a picture of what the animal was meant to look like. Also, professionals would walk around in green suits pretending to be the animals so at least they had something to focus on.

B2. Why couldn’t Carmel and Harry “keep a straight face” during the filming of the scene in which Dr Dolittle performs surgery on Kevin the squirrel?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer**Starting point*

- Carmel and Harry couldn’t “keep a straight face” during the filming of the scene in which Dr Dolittle performs surgery on Kevin the squirrel because it looked so funny.

Development

- There was a squirrel prop and when Robert Downey Jr had to pretend to perform CPR on it, the prop “was flopping back and forth!”

B3. Why did Harry find it “weird” that when he met Robert Downey Jr for the first time, he found him to be “such a normal guy”?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer**Starting point*

- When he first met him, Harry was surprised that Robert Downey Jr was “such a normal guy” because he is a very famous actor.

Development

- Robert Downey Jr has starred in a huge array of films over his long career and as Carmel says, he is considered by many to be a “mega superstar”. As a Marvel fan, Harry was star-struck because Robert Downey Jr famously played the role of Iron Man. However, both Harry and Carmel found him to be “kinda chill” and friendly. Their nerves at working with him went away after they’d met him.

B4. Why didn’t it matter that Robert Downey Jr got seasick during filming?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer**Starting point*

- It didn’t matter that Robert Downey Jr got seasick during filming because his character is seasick in the film.

Development

- However, apparently, Robert Downey Jr did have to compose himself between takes. He would say: “Just breathe, just breathe...”

B5. Suggest why, out of all the cast, Carmel and Harry are interviewed for *First News*.

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer**Starting point*

- It is likely that Carmel and Harry are interviewed because they are teenagers themselves and thus *First News*’ young

readers will be interested in what they have to say. Indeed, they even give advice for any readers who might be interested in acting.

Development

- Furthermore, it might be more difficult to get an interview with one of the famous adult actors in the film because of their busy schedules.

Part C**C1. Comment on the choice of 'Animal magic!' for the headline.**

READING SKILL — Explain methods used by the writer with appropriate use of terminology

Possible answer**Starting point**

- The headline is appropriate because the interview is based on the film *Dolittle* and Dr Dolittle's ability to speak to animals is magic. Moreover, the whole adventure that Dr Dolittle embarks on with his animal friends is fantastical.

Development

- A headline is meant to hook readers, and since the title of the film isn't mentioned until the lead paragraph, the reference to animal magic is intriguing. The use of the exclamation mark is also effective because it acknowledges how surprising it might seem for readers to be asked to consider "animal magic".

C2. Look at the fifth bullet point in the interview. Why isn't it in the form of a question?

READING SKILL — Identify benefits of text organisation and presentation

Possible answer**Starting point**

- It isn't in the form of a question to enable Harry to take his answer in whichever direction he would like.

Development

- Indeed, Harry only mentions the boat jump very briefly. By pausing instead of asking a question, the interviewer gets Harry to volunteer lots of interesting information that he might not have spoken about otherwise. For example, Harry talks about the behind-the-scenes games of stunt football. This is very skilful on the part of the interviewer.

Part D – Writing task

Imagine that you are the interviewer for this article. Think of five additional questions to ask Carmel and Harry.

Possible answer

1. What did you have to do during your audition for *Dolittle*?
2. You filmed with Robert Downey Jr, but did you get to meet any of the famous stars playing Doctor Dolittle's animals?
3. If you could choose any other famous actor to work with, who would you choose and why?
4. What would be your dream acting role and why?
5. How did you keep up with your school work during the filming of *Dolittle*?