

---

# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## Gulliver's Travels

### 9: In the land of houyhnhnms



*This is not a word-for-word transcript*

---

#### Language focus: verb patterns

##### Gulliver narrator

My name is Gulliver, and this is the story of my travels.

It was September 1710. I'd set sail from Portsmouth, but my luck ran out after just a few weeks. My crew rose up against me and **mutinied**. I was put **ashore** at the first island we saw.

On following a path from the beach, I was relieved to notice some **tracks** – a few looked human, but most were from horses. So I was not alone – thank goodness!

As I passed one field, I saw some animals. They were ugly looking with long beards like goats, and thick **ragged** hair on their chest and their heads. The rest of their bodies were bare. Some moved towards me and I hurried on. But one of them blocked my way. It raised its filthy claws.

I swiped at it with my sword.

##### Gulliver

Out of my way!

##### Gulliver narrator

I hit the creature and it howled. Within seconds, a herd of the creatures descended on me, their ugly faces **leering** and spitting...

Suddenly they all fled.

##### Gulliver narrator

Then I saw it – a beautiful grey **stallion** trotting gracefully out of the woods. Its smooth **mane** and back were gleaming in the **dappled** sunlight. It was this superb animal that had scared off the creatures.

##### Gulliver

Here boy... You're a beauty aren't you... Here...

##### Gulliver narrator

The horse stopped, **circled** around me, eyeing me all the time. It lifted its head away as I went to stroke it.

---

**Gulliver**

Where's your owner then? Won't you let me ride you? – I'm really tired ...

**Gulliver**

Are you trying to say something?

**Gulliver narrator**

It was as if he was talking to me...

Out of the trees another horse approached, a brown one. It stopped by us. Then the most extraordinary thing happened! Both horses lifted up their right **hooves** and touched each other's hoof in greeting.

I couldn't believe it... They were really talking to each other. They kept glancing at me and then bent their heads together as they communicated.

There was no doubt – I definitely heard the word 'yahoo' several times.

**Gulliver**

Ya... hoo.

**Master (grey horse)**

Yahoo.

**Gulliver**

Gentlemen, I see you are magicians who have taken the shape of horses. Please... take me to your master so I can find some food and drink.

**Gulliver narrator**

And so they led the way. After a mile, we came to a long, low building, made of logs. But when we went in, there were no people – just a **mare** and two **foals**.

I followed the grey stallion through the door and into a yard. Here, tied up, were two **deformed** creatures like those I'd seen earlier. They were eating lumps of meat.

**Mare**

Yahoo?

**Gulliver narrator**

The stallion picked up some meat and offered it to me, but the smell made me feel sick.

Then **it dawned on me**. This creature was a 'yahoo'. That's what the horses called them! They thought I was one of them! A yahoo!

**Gulliver**

No... no, I'm not a yahoo!

**Gulliver narrator**

But then I took a closer look at the yahoo. He had two legs and arms ... like mine, except his nails were long and shaped like claws. He was... in fact... a man... like me... but ... **savage!**

In the following days, I was looked after well by the stallion. It became clear to me that the houyhnhnms, as these horses were called, were no ordinary animals – they had their own language, which they pronounced through the nose and roof of the mouth. I set about learning it and was soon able to talk easily with the grey stallion, whom I called Master. He was a very patient teacher.

The houyhnhnms were the kindest, gentlest, most honest and civilized race I'd ever come across. Months passed and I felt healthy and happy to live among them. They saw me as some kind of superior yahoo – they were confused because, although I bore some resemblance physically to those beasts, they thought my clothes were part of my body.

I told Master where I came from and how I had got to their country, but he could not believe that there was another land beyond the sea or that yahoos could build boats... Nor could he understand when I described our society – where innocent people are killed in wars.

**Gulliver**

In England, Master, the horses work in the fields for the people.

**Master**

How can this be? How can there be a country where yahoos are in charge?

**Gulliver narration**

The more we talked and the more I learnt about their society, the more the failings of my own became clear. And it became clear, I was a yahoo after all.

**Master**

There is something I must tell you, Gulliver... now that I know your secret... There is one question we houyhnhnms, are at this very moment debating... whether we should get rid of the yahoos once and for all.

**Gulliver narrator**

He said yahoos were **vile** and dangerous and threatened the peace and tranquillity of his society...

**Master**

I know that you are different to the other yahoos. But there are many who think that you are just one of them...

**Gulliver narrator**

I knew what that meant. My life was in danger...

## **Vocabulary**

### **mutinied**

time when sailors take control of a ship against their captain's orders

### **ashore**

on the shore

### **tracks**

marks left by feet

### **ragged**

(of hair or clothes) untidy

### **leering**

making ugly faces

### **stallion**

male horse

### **dappled**

covered with areas of light and darkness

### **circled**

moved in a circle

### **hooves**

horse's feet

### **mare**

female horse

### **foals**

young horses

### **it dawned on me**

I realised

### **savage**

not civilised, wild

### **vile**

disgusting

## Questions

1. What are these horses called?  
(Hint: Check your spelling! It's difficult.)
  - a) Houhynhms.
  - b) Houyhnms.
  - c) Houyhnhms.
  
2. What does Gulliver think of the yahoos?  
(Hint: He used words like 'vile' and 'deformed'.)
  - a) He thinks they are ugly and wild.
  - b) He thinks they are hardworking but stupid.
  - c) He thinks they are sad and unloved.
  
3. Why is Gulliver's life in danger?  
(Hint: What does his Master tell him at the end?)
  - a) Because the yahoos are trying to kill him.
  - b) Because some of the horse people think he is a dangerous yahoo.
  - c) Because the Master wants to kill him.

## Answers

1. What are these horses called?
  - a) Houhynhms. Sorry, that's not right.
  - b) Houyhnms. Sorry, try again.
  - c) Houyhnhms. That's right!**
  
2. What does Gulliver think of the yahoos?
  - a) He thinks they are ugly and wild. Well done. He is disgusted by them.**
  - b) He thinks they are hardworking but stupid. He thinks they're stupid, but doesn't say anything about being hardworking.
  - c) He thinks they are sad and unloved. He doesn't say he feels this way.
  
3. Why is Gulliver's life in danger?
  - a) Because the yahoos are trying to kill him. They did attack him earlier, but it's not the reason he thinks his life is in danger.
  - b) Because some of the horse people think he is a dangerous yahoo. That's right.**
  - c) Because the Master wants to kill him. No, his Master warns him some of the other horse people are worried about him.