

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Robinson Crusoe

by Daniel Defoe

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Notes

ABOUT DANIEL DEFOE

Born as Daniel Foe in London in 1660, Defoe was the son of James Foe, a butcher and devout Presbyterian in a Catholic England. Little is known about Defoe's early life, but he was educated in schools unaffiliated with the Church of England.

Though educated in preparation for the ministry, Defoe endeavored in trade and marketing, where for more than ten years he embraced the profession. His economic writings during this time reflected a talent for trade, but Defoe's practice often involved devious methods, risky adventures, and poor judgment that eventually overwhelmed him with debt and legal prosecution. Additionally, Defoe's extensive travels, both for business and for refuge from creditors, alienated him from his family—a wife and six children.

Defoe enhanced his political status by fighting in the uprising against the Catholic King James II, but his effort failed to help his own trade endeavors. By 1692, Defoe was bankrupt. By negotiating a deal with his creditors, Defoe was able to avoid debtor's prison but he never fully recovered from the debt.

Defoe continued to write throughout his complicated life, but eventually his writing only added to his troubles. While an advisor to King William, Defoe wrote an essay that criticized the way in which the Church and State handled Dissenters. He fled, only to be caught and imprisoned. Queen Anne pardoned Defoe, but his continued controversial writing led to a second arrest in 1715. Still paying his debt, Defoe worked on *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* while editing various newspapers—some in secret—until he died poor in 1731.

HISTORICAL RELEVANCE OF ROBINSON CRUSOE

Launched as an adventure series well ahead of its time, *Robinson Crusoe* is considered one of the most famous books in history. Printed in 1719 and often considered the first English novel, *Robinson Crusoe* is written in plain language but does not fail to describe the vivid adventures of a middle-class hero with the life and problems of a common man, rather than a monarch, deity, or an aristocrat. Crusoe is an ordinary man faced with extraordinary circumstances—a real hero for a real audience.

All references come from the Dover Thrift Edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, copyright 1998.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the author's writing style, including his use of the following:
 - A. foreshadowing
 - B. allusion
 - C. irony
 - D. personification
 - E. simile
2. identify and discuss the following themes in this novel and cite incidents in the novel for support:
 - A. Mastery is necessary for human survival.
 - B. The necessity of repentance.
 - C. Life is unnecessarily complicated.
 - D. Happiness requires constant self-awareness and reflection.
3. explain Robinson Crusoe's moral quandary over the cannibals.
4. identify and explain symbols in the novel.
5. cite examples that reveal Robinson Crusoe's change in philosophy regarding friendship and gratitude.
6. explain how Defoe's story depicts social accuracies of the time period.
7. explain how Robinson Crusoe's thoughts are sometimes beyond his time.
8. identify the religious allusions in Robinson Crusoe's narrative.
9. cite examples of Robinson Crusoe's inclination to control.
10. characterize Robinson Crusoe throughout his spiritual development.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Explain how Robinson Crusoe's life experience contributes to his survival on the island.
2. Why is this novel universally appealing?
3. Discuss the development of Robinson's spirituality.
4. Discuss the transformation of Robinson Crusoe as an individual and identify the turning point for him.
5. Why are people fascinated with characters that are involuntarily removed from civilization? What elements of this type of story create the most curiosity?
6. Discuss whether Crusoe is truly capable of having the father-son relationship that he claims to have with Friday. Cite incidents that either prove or disprove your theories.
7. Evaluate Robinson Crusoe's readiness to judge his guests and prisoners on the island.
8. Discuss the aspects of the novel that reflect the life of Daniel Defoe.
9. Define and find examples of these various literary elements:
 - foreshadowing
 - personification
 - irony
 - allusion
10. Discuss whether Crusoe is an unwise man or an unlucky man.
11. Prove that the novel contains the following themes:
 - A. Mastery is essential to human survival.
 - B. Acceptance is a requirement for happiness.
 - C. A complicated life only distracts from living.
 - D. True happiness can only be experienced after true misery.
12. Explain whether Robinson Crusoe is a hero or not. What events make him a hero? What does he lack to be a hero?
13. Discuss how Robinson might be different in this novel if he is denied the opportunity to salvage items from his ship and must begin his secluded life with nothing.
14. Explain why Robinson is either an optimist or a pessimist.
15. Robinson has an apparent dislike for the Catholic Church. Discuss his reasons for this attitude and whether you think that his dislike changes or remains the same throughout the story.

Robinson Crusoe

Section 1 – Robinson Crusoe’s Early Life

VOCABULARY

diligence – constant, careful effort
discourse – conversation
elopement – an escape
entreaties – earnest requests
expostulating – reasonably objecting
gout – a disease causing swelling and severe pain
propension – favorable inclination; bias
vicissitudes – unpredictable changes; variations

1. Describe the initial setting of the story.

2. In what field is Robinson’s education? What does he want to do for a living?

3. Describe Robinson’s father and his beliefs. Why does the father feel that Robinson should not travel to raise a fortune by “application and industry?”

Section 6 – Shipwrecked

VOCABULARY

application – mental effort; close attention
hogshead – a barrel or cask holding from 63 to 140 gallons
maggazin (magazine) – a space in which explosives are stored
malefactor – a criminal
provisions – a stock of food
pumps – low cut shoes without straps or ties
rack – cider or wine
reprieve – a postponement of an execution
runlets (rundlets) – small barrels for liquor
skrew-jack (jackscrew) – a machine for lifting heavy things a short distance
sustenance – food
truncheon – a short, thick cudgel or club

1. Explain Robinson's quote, "For sudden joys, like griefs, confound at first."

2. What are the only items in Crusoe's possession immediately after the shipwreck?

3. Where does Crusoe sleep on his first night on the island?

4. What does Robinson build in order to retrieve supplies from the ship? List the items that Crusoe recovers from the wrecked ship.

Section 9 – The Footprint

VOCABULARY

ambuscade – an ambush

chimera – an impossible or foolish fantasy

circumscrib'd (circumscribed) – encircled; surrounded

cogitations – thoughts; considerations

firebrand – a torch

indignation – anger or scorn

omnipotent – all-powerful

quandary – a state of uncertainty; a dilemma

tallow – the colorless, solid fat extracted from animal fat

vestiges – traces, marks, or signs of something that once existed but has disappeared

vitiated – spoiled; corrupted

1. Describe Robinson's initial reaction to the footprint in the sand.

2. After finding the footprint, Robinson begins referring to his abode as his castle: "When I came to my castle, for so I think I call'd it ever after this." Why does Crusoe choose to call the cave a castle at this point in the novel?

3. Why does Robinson first think that the devil left the footprint?

4. Explain why Crusoe concludes that the footprint cannot be that of the devil.

Section 12 – The Rescue

VOCABULARY

candor – honesty; frankness

countenance – facial features

filial – of a son or daughter

Papist – a Roman Catholic

1. What does Friday discover while searching for a turtle? Why is he so frightened?

2. Describe the visitors to the island.

3. While preparing an attack on the cannibals, Crusoe contemplates the justice of killing the savages. What is Crusoe's conclusion?

4. What convinces Robinson to proceed with the attack against the cannibals? Consider Crusoe's actions, and summarize Crusoe's beliefs about violence and killing.
