

Robinson Crusoe is an adventure novel written by English author and pamphleteer Daniel Defoe, first published in 1719. The narrative is presented as the autobiographical account of Robinson Crusoe, a shipwreck survivor who spends 28 years on a deserted island. The novel chronicles Crusoe's resourcefulness as he learns to adapt to his surroundings, cultivate crops, domesticate animals, and eventually encounter another survivor, whom he calls Friday, a native of the island. The story investigates themes of survival, isolation, and the consequences of colonialism. Set against the backdrop of the Age of Exploration and colonial expansion, *Robinson Crusoe* reflects the historical context of the 17th and 18th centuries.

The novel is considered one of the earliest examples of the realistic novel and is often cited as the first English novel. Defoe's work captures the spirit of adventure and discovery prevalent during

this era, while also addressing the challenges and ethical questions associated with European colonization. The novel's enduring popularity lies in its universal themes of resilience and self-discovery. *Robinson Crusoe* has inspired a huge number of adaptations, imitations, and reinterpretations in literature and popular culture. Its impact on the adventure genre and its exploration of the human spirit's capacity for survival in the face of adversity have secured its place as a classic work of literature.

Themes:

1. Christianity and Divine Providence

As much as Defoe's novel is about **Robinson's** literal, physical journey, it is also about his more metaphorical, spiritual journey toward Christianity. In the beginning of the novel, Robinson disregards

Christianity and leads a life that he later looks back on as wicked. He discounts his father's warning that God will not bless him if he goes to sea, and does not thank God when he is rescued from the storm on the way to London, or by the **Portuguese captain** off the coast of Africa. However, after he dreams one night of a strange figure scolding him for not repenting, Robinson turns to Christianity on the island and eagerly studies the Bible. With his newfound Christianity, Robinson is never entirely alone on his island, because he can converse with God through prayer. Moreover, Christianity offers Robinson a way to make sense of his life and its various twists and turns. He sees his rebelling against his father as his original sin, for which he was then punished by being taken as a slave and then by being shipwrecked. However, he was blessed and saved by God by being

saved from drowning and ending up on the island with enough provisions to survive. After repenting, Robinson sees himself as further blessed by various miracles, whether the accidental growing of his first crops or the arrival of **Friday** and the **English captain**. In addition, Robinson comes to see various unpredictable natural disasters like storms, hurricanes, and the earthquake that damages his island home as signs from God, instruments of his divine agency.

2. Society, Individuality, and Isolation

At the center of *Robinson Crusoe* is a tension between society and individuality. As the novel begins, **Robinson** breaks free of his family and the middle-class society in which they live in order to pursue his own life. If he were to stay at home, he would live a life already arranged for him by his father and by the constraints of English society. By

setting out to sea, Robinson prioritizes his sense of individuality over his family and society at large. Robinson gets exactly what he asks for (and more than he bargained for) when he finds himself stranded alone on his island. There, he lives entirely as an individual apart from society and is forced to struggle against nature to survive. He becomes self-sufficient and learns how to make and do things himself, discovering ingenuity he didn't know he had. Thus, one could say that being separated from society leads to Robinson becoming a better person. Robinson himself seems to come to this conclusion, as he realizes that his experience brings him closer to God and that living alone on the island allows for a life largely without sin: he makes, harvests, and hunts only what he needs, so there is nothing for him to be covetous of or

greedy for. And while he is alone, he does not suffer from lust or pride.

3. Advice, Mistakes, and Hindsight

Robinson Crusoe is constantly disregarding prudent advice. He begins the novel by discounting his parents' advice not to go to sea, disregards the shipmaster's advice to go home after the storm on the way to London, and goes against his own better judgment in trying to voyage from Brazil to Africa. Even at the end of the novel, he disregards the widow's advice in setting out on yet another sea voyage. Each time, Robinson later realizes that he should have listened to the advice he ignored—most especially that of his parents, who were right about the dangers of a seafaring life. Robinson's double-position as both protagonist and narrator of his story means that he is often in this position

of looking back on his life. With this hindsight, Robinson's retrospective narration often foreshadows the misfortunes that will befall him. However, this hindsight is only gained by making mistakes and learning from them. As Robinson's experiences on his island exemplify, knowledge in the novel is gained through experience: Robinson learns how to tame goats, cure grapes, build walls, and do all sorts of other things by trying to do these things and learning along the way (rather than following someone else's instructions). Similarly, throughout the entire novel Robinson must learn from his own experiences rather than relying on other characters' warnings. Somewhat paradoxically, Robinson must discount good advice in order to learn from his experiences and realize his mistakes; only then is he in a position to see how good such advice was. With the benefit of

hindsight, Robinson often draws lessons from his own experiences for the reader and gives the reader advice—about obeying God or trusting in providence, for example. This may be precisely what the anonymous editor who introduces the novel in the preface has in mind, when he says that Robinson's story is more than just entertaining; it's educational. But, it is unclear whether we readers should really follow Robinson's advice to the letter or whether, much like Robinson himself might do, we must make our own mistakes.

Important Quotation1 :

I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a

foreigner of Bremen who settled first at Hull. He got a good estate by merchandise and, leaving off his trade, lived afterward at York, from whence he had married my mother whose relations were named Robinson, a very good family in that country, and from whom I was called Robinson Kreutznaer; but by the usual corruption of words in England we are called, nay, we call ourselves, and write our name “Crusoe,” and so my companions always called me.

Crusoe’s opening words in Chapter I show us the fact-oriented, practical, and unsentimental mind that will carry him through his ordeal. Crusoe introduces his parents objectively through their nationalities, professions, and places of origin and residence. There is no hint of emotional attachment either here or later, when Crusoe leaves his parents forever. In fact, there is no expression of affection whatsoever. The passage also shows that leaving home may be a habit that runs in

the family: Crusoe's father was an emigrant, just as Crusoe later becomes when he succumbs to his "rambling" thoughts and leaves England. Crusoe's originally foreign name is an interesting symbol of his emigrant status, especially since it had to be changed to adapt to English understanding. We see that Crusoe has long grasped the notion of adapting to one's environment, and that identities—or at least names—may change when people change places. This name change foreshadows the theme of Crusoe's changing identity on his island, when he teaches Friday that his name is Master.

Chapter1 (Start in Life < I go to sea)

A man named Robinson Crusoe records his own life story, beginning with his birth in 1632 in the English city of York. Crusoe's father was a German, originally named Kreutznaer. Crusoe is the youngest of three brothers, the eldest being a soldier and the second one

having vanished mysteriously. As the youngest son in the family, Crusoe is expected to inherit little, and, as a result, his father encourages him to take up the law. But Crusoe's inclination is to go to sea. His family strongly opposes this idea, and his father gives him a stern lecture on the value of accepting a middle station in life. Crusoe resolves to follow his father's advice. But when one of his friends embarks for London, Crusoe succumbs to temptation and boards the ship on September 1, 1651. A storm develops. Near Yarmouth the weather is so bad that Crusoe fears for his life and prays to God for deliverance. The ship nearly founders, but all are saved. Crusoe sees this ordeal as a sign of fate that he should give up sea travel, and his friend's father warns him against setting foot on a ship again, echoing his own father's warning.

Robinson felt a strong
desire to go to **sea**, even though
both his **parents** were against this

idea. One day, his father called him into his room. He told Robinson that going to **sea** was for desperate people, or wealthy people seeking adventures, and that Robinson was middle class. His father told him that the "middle station" was the best position in life, free from both the anxieties that come with privilege and power and the problems of poverty.

Urging **Robinson** not to go, his **father** promised to help establish him in a comfortable life at home, but, amid tears, warned him that if he joined a boat and went to **sea**, there would be no one to help him in his troubles and God would not even bless him.

Robinson notes that this last part of his father's speech was prophetic.

After speaking with his **father**, **Robinson** resolved to stay home, but this feeling wore off after a few days. He planned to run

away and told his **mother**, who warned him that he would ruin himself if he left. About a year later, Robinson finally "broke loose" and left home, when a **friend** encouraged him to join a ship from Hull to London.

Chapter 2: I Am Captured by Pirates

Crusoe parts with his friend and proceeds to London by land, where he meets a sea captain who proposes that Crusoe accompany him on an upcoming merchant voyage. Writing to his family for investment money, Crusoe sets off with forty pounds worth of trinkets and toys to sell abroad. Crusoe makes a net income of 300 pounds from this trip, and considers it a great success. Taking one hundred pounds with him, and leaving the remaining 200 pounds with a widow whom he trusts, Crusoe sets off on another merchant expedition. This time he is

pursued by Moorish pirates off the coast of Sallee in North Africa. His ship is overtaken, and Crusoe is enslaved, the only Briton among his Moorish master's slaves. Crusoe is assigned the task of fishing because of his natural skill. One day the slaves' fishing vessel gets lost in fog, and the master installs a compass on board. The master also stores some gunpowder on board in preparation for a shooting party, but the guests do not come. Crusoe waits.

Robinson joined the London-bound ship on September 1st, 1651. The ship soon encountered a storm and Robinson became sick and frightened. Remembering his **parents'** warnings, he vowed to return home if he ever made it safely to land again. The other sailors onboard, however, did not think much of the storm.

The **sea** got calmer as the storm died down, and **Robinson** joined some other sailors in getting drunk on some punch. In about six days, Robinson says he had gotten over his conscience at disregarding his vows to return home. Then, the ship encountered an even worse storm. Even the experienced sailors were scared, and Robinson heard

the master of the ship cry out to God for help.

Robinson was terrified, and some sailors said that the ship was going to founder (sink), though at that time Robinson didn't know the meaning of this word. The ship sprang some leaks and Robinson and other sailors tried to pump water out of the ship. Robinson was so scared he fainted. Another ship came to the aid of Robinson's, and rowed a boat over to rescue the sailors.

After returning to shore, **Robinson** says that he should have gone back to Hull, but "ill fate" pushed him to go to London against reasonable judgment. The **shipmaster** told Robinson not to tempt Providence and to go back to his **father**, or else he would "meet with nothing but disasters and disappointments."

After returning to shore, **Robinson** says that he should have gone back to Hull, but "ill fate" pushed him to go to London against reasonable judgment. The **shipmaster** told Robinson not to tempt Providence and to go back to his **father**, or else he would "meet with nothing but disasters and disappointments."

Robinson traveled to London by land, debating his next course of action. He says that some "evil influence" made him disregard all of the warnings he received. He joined a ship bound for Guinea, on the coast of Africa.

According to **Robinson**, this was his only successful voyage. The ship's **captain of the ship bound for Guinea** taught him astronomy and math, and he became a sailor-merchant, bringing back three hundred pounds of gold, which filled him with the desire to return to **sea** and find more wealth, a desire that would be the ruin of him.

Chapter 3: I Escape from the Sallee Rover

Robinson sets off on a fishing expedition with two other slaves, a man named Ismael and a boy named Xury. Sneaking up behind Ismael, Robinson pushes him into the water. Ismael swims alongside the boat and begs to be taken in. Crusoe pulls a gun on him and tells him to return to shore or else be killed. Crusoe then asks Xury whether he will accompany him and serve him faithfully, and Xury agrees. By evening, Crusoe calculates they have sailed 150 miles south of Sallee.

They see wild creatures onshore that Crusoe recognizes as lions. Crusoe shoots one dead, and he and Xury skin it. They proceed southward toward what Crusoe believes are the Cape Verde or Canary Islands. They see naked Black people onshore, and they fear them until the natives offer them food. When the Africans witness Crusoe shooting a leopard, they are impressed, and they offer the skin to Crusoe. Unsure where to head, Crusoe is surprised by a European ship in the distance. The ship picks up Xury and Crusoe, and its kind Portuguese captain offers to take them to Brazil. The captain buys Crusoe's boat as well as Xury.

Robinson prepared to go on the same voyage again, though the **captain of the Guinea vessel** had died and been replaced. Leaving two hundred pounds of his **money** with the old captain's **widow**, he voyaged to Guinea again, but "fell into terrible misfortunes."

Along the way, **Robinson's** ship was captured by a Turkish pirate ship

and he was taken as a prisoner to Sallee, a Moorish port. Robinson was made the slave of the pirate ship's captain. He didn't think his fortune could get any worse, but says that these events were "just a taste of the misery I was to go through."

Robinson stayed in Sallee as a slave for two years, constantly thinking of a way to escape but finding none. He finally devised a means of escape when he was sent with a Moor named **Ismael** and a boy named **Xury** on a small row-boat to go fishing. He tricked Ismael into loading the boat with plenty of provisions, including gunpowder and guns.

When **Robinson** and **Ismael** went out to fish, Robinson deliberately lost any fish he had hooked, and told Ismael that they needed to go farther out to **sea** to catch fish. When they were a ways out at **sea**, Robinson pushed Ismael overboard. He told Ismael to swim back to shore and threatened to shoot him if he tried to swim back to the boat, because he was "resolved to have my liberty."

Robinson then turned to **Xury** and told him, "if you will be faithful to me I will make you a great man," but that, if not, he would throw him into the **sea**, as well. Xury swore his loyalty to Robinson. Out of fear of being caught, he sailed southward for six days, not daring to go to shore. He finally anchored at the mouth of a river one evening.

Xury and **Robinson** did not sleep that night, as they heard strange creatures come into the water. One of these creatures came close to the boat and Robinson shot at it. The next day, Robinson and Xury were still afraid of going ashore, because they might encounter "savages," but they needed to go find fresh water. The two of them went ashore with jars for water and Xury found a source of clean water

Xury and **Robinson** saw no other humans around them. Robinson didn't know where exactly they were, but thought that if they waited off the shore of Africa long enough, they would encounter an English merchant ship. One day, Robinson and Xury shot a huge lion and brought its hide back aboard their boat.

Robinson decided to sail south, making for the Cape de Verd, where he knew European merchant ships often passed by. As they went further south, they began to see inhabitants on the shore. **Xury** was wary of going ashore to speak with these Africans, but Robinson sailed close enough to shore to see that they had no weapons and made signs to them indicating that he was in need of food.

Some native inhabitants brought back food for **Robinson** and **Xury**. Then, two strange creatures came running down the mountains toward the water, frightening the Africans. The creatures

jumped into the water and one swam close to Robinson's boat. Robinson shot and killed the animal. The Africans were astonished at and frightened by Robinson's gunshot but were grateful and amazed when they saw the dead creature (a huge leopard) float ashore.

The natives supplied **Robinson** with some fresh water and Robinson continued to sail south, until he neared the Cape de Verd. **Xury** spotted another ship, which turned out to be a Portuguese vessel. The Portuguese took them aboard and the **Portuguese captain** promised to take Robinson to Brazil for free.

Analysis: Chapters 1–3

These chapters introduce us to Crusoe's particular style of narration, which revolutionized the English novel: he speaks openly and intimately, with none of the grandiose rhetorical effects notable in earlier ages of English literary history. In telling us frankly how much profit he makes from his first merchant venture, and in acknowledging his inner struggle about

obeying his father or following his desire to go to sea, Crusoe addresses us as if we are his close and trusted friends. He is also an exceedingly practical and fact-oriented narrator, as the editor emphasizes in calling the narration a “just history of fact.” Crusoe is fixated on precise details, telling us the exact day he set off on his voyage and the number of miles south of Sallee he is. His feelings are less fully narrated, though he does relate his anguish at disobeying his father. Crusoe also shows his basic kindness and humanity in sparing the life of Ismael, though it is clear that this act is a minor detail for him. His focus on facts, actions, and details helps mark the beginning of the novelistic form in English literature.

Crusoe’s narrative is not just an adventure story about storms and pirates, but also what in religious literature is called an *exemplary tale*: a tale told for purposes of moral and religious instruction. In the Preface, the editor explicitly tells us that this novel will teach us to honor “the wisdom of

Providence.” We are meant to learn something spiritually useful when reading this story. Crusoe underscores this spiritual aspect by focusing on his wickedness in disobeying his father’s orders, and the punishments that come upon him for doing so. In Chapter II he refers to the “evil influence which carried me first away from my father’s house,” and the word “evil” is important: this choice is not just a foolish decision, but one made with a morally wicked influence. Moreover, the evil curiously makes Crusoe its passive victim, introducing another central aspect of Robinson’s story—his own passivity. Crusoe’s place as the rebellious younger son in the family, resembling the Prodigal Son in the Bible, enhances the religious side of Crusoe’s story.

The idea of foreignness is introduced as an important foreshadowing of Crusoe’s later long existence as a castaway in an alien land. Interestingly, despite the story’s beginning in Hull and London, Crusoe does

not focus much attention on any Englishmen in his narrative. The friend who tempts him on board the ship is not named, and Crusoe shows no real affection for him. Not even Crusoe's family members are named. The English simply do not appear to excite his interest. By contrast, Crusoe is quick to tell us the names of the other slaves, Ismael and Xury, on the Moorish fishing boat. The Portuguese captain is not named, but he is described with much more vividness than the first English captain. Crusoe reveals a basic predisposition toward foreigners that underscores his early inclination to go to sea and leave England. As the son of a foreigner—his father's name was Kreutznaer—this roaming may be his fate. Perhaps like Odysseus in *The Odyssey*, he is simply destined by nature to leave home.