

◆◆◆ **ROBINSON CRUSOE** ◆◆◆

COURSE PLAN METHODOLOGY: *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe is represented by the abbreviation **RC**. The student should become familiar with the course plan, determining, with the help of parents, whether to read each synopsis beforehand, afterward, or as a study aid.

COURSE TEXT:

- RC** ❖ Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. New York: Penguin Group, 2008. Print. (T3951)
RCSG ❖ *Kolbe Academy Study Guide to Robinson Crusoe*. Kolbe Academy Press: Napa, 2014. (The two-book set includes a student book with questions and a teacher book with questions and answers.) (T3951A), Optional

**CHARACTERS:**

Robinson Crusoe: the hero and narrator; an impulsive, hapless young man who goes to sea against his parents' wishes and finds himself on a tropical island, having to build a "civilization" from scratch.

Mr. Crusoe: Crusoe's father; he advises his son to take the middle way, the way of a solid home and means enough to enjoy the blessings of life. He dies believing his son lost at sea.

Mrs. Crusoe: Crusoe's mother; she too advises her son against the seafaring life and is ignored. She shares her husband's belief that Robinson is dead, lost at sea.

The Portuguese Captain: Crusoe's rescuer; he saves him after his escape from slavery. Christian and honest, he preserves Crusoe's fortune through the years of his absence.

The Widow: the widow of the Captain; she became Crusoe's friend and took him on his only successful journey. She is honest and good.

Xury: the boy who comes with Crusoe when he escapes from slavery. Crusoe sells him into slavery for 10 years.

Friday: a native of the nearby continent; Crusoe saves him from the cannibals. He becomes Crusoe's student and companion on the island. He converts to Christianity.

The English Captain: he provides the means for Crusoe's deliverance from the island, but not before Crusoe has saved him from mutineers who had held him captive.

The Cannibals: the group of people whose presence poses a great danger to Crusoe and a challenge to his moral sense.

Note: We recommend that you number the chapters within your copy of *Robinson Crusoe* for reading ease.

WEEK 1		
READING	RC	Read the biographical note on Daniel Defoe. Read the Introduction by Paul Theroux. Read "A Special Note on Adventure" Read Chapters 1-8: <i>I Go to Sea, I Am Captured by Pirates, I Escape from the Sallee Rover, I Become a Brazilian Planter, I Go on Board in an Evil Hour, I Furnish Myself With Many Things, I Build My Fortress, The Journal (All 4 parts: "...Husks of Corn", "...Dreadful Hurricane", "...Ill and Frighted", "...Survey")</i>

<i>Study Guide</i>	<i>RCSG</i>	Answer questions for Chapters 1-8
Note	<p>"A Special Note on Adventure": A young reader of <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> need not take away the lesson that the young should avoid adventure and stay at home. That is not the Catholic position, so to speak. Christ calls us to lives of adventure; the invitation to explore comes from him. If we put our spiritual journey first, we can all lead lives of adventure. We are messengers of the Gospel and stewards of creation—living lives of adventure is implied in both roles. Metaphorically speaking, our births, marriages, and deaths are the main acts in the drama of life that we celebrate as a divine comedy—hoping to realize in each of its acts the sacramental fullness granted by God—whether we stay home or travel the world. Exploring nature through science down to its most infinitesimal parts and beyond to its infinite glories is also an adventure that we may pursue in confidence and reverence. Therefore, whether you take on a grand adventure like the missionaries of old or whether you stay home and take up "the middle way" you cannot escape the drama of redemption. (For more in this vein explore the life of Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton, two fine Catholic writers who lived and dreamed of adventures, respectively.)</p>	
Synopsis	<p>In this wide ranging tale, Robinson Crusoe goes to sea against the wishes of his parents. He almost drowns on his first voyage, but is providentially saved. Ignoring all warnings, he sails again and is captured by Moorish pirates. He escapes (with another man, Xury, whom he regards as his slave) and is ultimately rescued by a good captain (selling Xury to him) who takes him to Brazil where he becomes a prosperous planter. Not content to leave well enough alone, he sails in search of slaves and is lost somewhere in the Caribbean. Another storm breaks up the ship, and all are swept away except Crusoe. He makes it to shore and immediately thanks God. Building a raft, he returns to the ship many times to salvage anything he can. Crusoe chooses a spot close to fresh water with a view of the ocean to build his fortress. Finally, he erects a cross that he notches every day and starts a journal chronicling his trials, discoveries, courage, and faith. Through his trials he learns to regard the island less as the "Island of Despair", and more as a place of providential care. Pay attention to Crusoe's dream in the section on his illness. When the "avenging angel" comes in a dream, Crusoe takes it as a warning to give up his "stupidity of soul, without desire of good, or conscience of evil," that had made him, "the most hardened, unthinking, wicked creature among our common sailors...."</p>	
Paper Topic	<p>Write a letter of good counsel to a friend who is considering the seafaring life or another adventurous scheme (arctic exploration, gold or diamond mining, space voyaging). Give an assessment of your friend's character, the effect of his choice on his relationships and responsibilities, and whether or not his plan represents his true vocation. Adopt the formal language typified in the novel if you can.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">◆◆◆</p> <p>↔ Key Points: Introduction:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"Young man, you ought never to go to sea any more; you ought to take this for a plain and visible token that you are not to be a seafaring man...as you made this voyage for a trial, you see what a taste Heaven has given you of what you are to expect if you persist...."</i></p>		

With this warning, the young Robinson Crusoe is advised to give up his dream of the sailing life. The speaker is a captain who has just lost his ship and who views Crusoe as the Jonah whose presence may have brought it down. Of course, Crusoe does not heed the warning—had he done so there would have been no story. But the captain’s warning sets the tone for the book. Human beings conduct their affairs under Heaven. We can expect providential guidance if we will but pay attention to what we are being shown. This is a lesson that Crusoe learns slowly.

The story is an adventure story, and the preface tells us that we can expect to hear of a life of great variety, a life that can be read as a survival tale, an allegorical story that interprets events in light of divine providence, a cautionary tale demonstrating the value of preserving and defending civilization, and a coming of age story in the prodigal son tradition.

Considered to be the first Novel written in English, Robinson Crusoe was published on April 25, 1719, when its author was almost 60 years old, and had led a life as adventurous as its title character. Appearing in the world at the time when the merchant class was coming into its own and when fortunes were being made and lost by traders who sailed around the world—it offered a view of the adventures that awaited the daring and the brave. But, as Robinson Crusoe was to learn, the seafaring life had a way of exacting a high price from those who ill-advisedly pursue it.

Setting: The story starts in England and moves to Brazil, but the main action of the story takes place on a tropical island near the Orinoco River.

Themes: Defoe writes of the workings of divine providence, establishing civilization, survival, and the human need for companionship or society. He also writes of slavery as typified in the story of Xury. Crusoe should have been more sensitive to Xury’s fate, considering that he himself had been a slave literally hours before he becomes a slave holder. Adding insult to injury, Crusoe sells Xury to the first passing buyer. No wonder Crusoe’s misadventures as a would-be slave owner lead directly to his captivity on the island. The biblical theme of Jonah, the passenger who brings sailors bad luck because he is disobedient to God, figures in the first part of the story, as does the Prodigal Son theme, when Robinson Crusoe obstinately refuses to return home after his first mishap at sea, though he knows his father would slay the “fatted calf” for him.

Symbols: Ships, the island itself, and the things salvaged from the ships and grown or made on the island are all symbols of divine care and preservation.

Conflict: The chief conflict is Man vs. Himself. Because Robinson Crusoe is a dynamic character, and because during his isolation on the island he thoroughly examines his life and conscience, he comes to appreciate that he is a child of God.

Point of View: Robinson Crusoe is a first person narrative. He will employ storytelling and diary entries to help his reader understand the meaning of his experiences. Much of his writing will be in a confessional vein.



Discuss: ◆ Robinson Crusoe’s relationship with his parents ◆ Why in the face of everything he experiences and is told that Robinson Crusoe returns to the sea ◆ Robinson Crusoe’s similarities to the prodigal son The theme of slavery exemplified in Crusoe’s thoughtless treatment of Xury and his misbegotten notion that he needed slaves