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  

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.

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<td>READING</td>
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<td>Read the biographical note on Daniel Defoe.</td>
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<td>Read the Introduction by Paul Theroux.</td>
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<td>Read “A Special Note on Adventure”</td>
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<td><strong>Read Chapters 1-8</strong>: 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”)</td>
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“A Special Note on Adventure”: A young reader of Robinson Crusoe 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.)

**Synopsis**

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….”

**Paper Topic**

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.

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**Key Points:**

**Introduction:**

“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….”
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
WEEK 2

READING

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Synopsis

Isolated and lonely, Crusoe learns to fall back on his reason and, further, to rely on divine providence. He plants crops, charts the seasons, makes wicker baskets, explores the island, builds a canoe, and domesticates goats. Significantly, in “I Make Myself a Canoe,” Crusoe records that the day he left home and the day he was captured by the Sallee Rover fell on September 1. Crusoe’s escape from the first shipwreck corresponded to the day of his escape from the Sallee Rover. The day he was cast on the island was his birthday (Sept. 30), signaling a rebirth theme. So he begins to trace the hand of providence. After some time, he feels at home but struggles with feelings of despair, against which he fights by reading his Bible. Crusoe finds a man’s footprint, but shrinks from finding the owner; he discovers signs that cannibals use the beach; and retreats into his home, hiding all signs of his presence. Roused by gunfire, he goes to the beach where he finds a wrecked Spanish ship with no survivors. He salvages clothing, wine, gold bars, and doubloons from the ship. Cannibals arrive on the beach with two victims. After they kill the first one, the second escapes and runs past Crusoe’s hiding place pursued by two of the cannibals. Crusoe attacks the pursuers and befriends their intended victim. They bury the cannibals and return to Crusoe’s home. Crusoe names the native Friday since that is the day on which he rescued him. Crusoe clothes Friday and teaches him some English. Together they expand the grain cultivation.

Paper Topic

Describe your own desert island. Determine the layout of the island, its natural attributes, amenities, and drawbacks. Establish your methods of making it habitable and your daily routines. Name your island. Write about it as a series of journal entries. (Hint: Add depth to your writing by viewing each discovery or project on the island as forwarding civilization itself. Try to bring in the providential aspect of your story.)

Key Points:

Introduction: Crusoe is growing wiser and sees himself as a successful landowner rather than a castaway. He owns two homes and wants for nothing. At times he still laments his fate. However, he knows he may choose
to view his life on the island as “(his) reign, or (his) captivity”, and choosing the former is more beneficial to his survival. His stay on the island has allowed him to assess his life fully. Though human contact would make him truly contented, he avoids all thought of contact when faced with the sign of another’s presence—a footprint. Crusoe’s ambivalent attitude toward his fellow man is one of the mysteries of the novel, a mystery that demonstrates Dafoe’s awareness of our contradictory human natures. For years, Crusoe has lived in fear of the cannibals, yet, in an instant, he overcomes those fears and overpowers two of them. With one stroke he has overcome the mental limitations that have hampered his ability to live a fully engaged life.

Setting: The island.

Themes: Human society, law and morality. Crusoe’s rebirth or birth to a new life as he is cast away on the island on his true birthday (September 30).

Symbols: The footprint is a symbol of the dual nature of man and our capacity for good or evil.

Conflict: Man vs. Man. Crusoe’s conflict with the cannibals is a man-to-man conflict, but also a conflict between two different moral codes. In rescuing Friday, Crusoe is validating the idea of absolute standards in morality, including placing a high value on human life and saving the weak.

Discuss: ♦ Why it makes sense to regard our advances in learning and skill as precious ♦ How it is possible to learn in solitude what eluded us in society ♦ The way that good may arise from evil when we seek God’s will ♦ Our human need for society

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### WEEK 3

| READING | RC | **Read Chapters 20-27.** We Make Another Canoe, We March Out Against the Cannibals, We Plan a Voyage to the Colonies of America, We Quell a Mutiny, We Seize the Ship, I Find My Wealth All About Me, We Cross the Mountains, I Revisit My Island |
| Study Guide | RCSG | Answer questions for chapters 20-27. |

**Synopsis**

Friday becomes a great source of information. He tells Crusoe that the Spaniards of the shipwreck are in the cannibal village. Crusoe and Friday plan to find and save them. However, the cannibals return with three prisoners, and Crusoe and Friday join battle against them, rescuing the prisoners, one of whom is Friday’s father. Together they now stand a good chance of saving the captives. But, another ship arrives. While the crew is on shore, Crusoe approaches three bound men on board; and one turns out to be the captain who reports that the others are mutineers. Crusoe and his men help the captain reclaim his ship. The leader of the mutiny is killed in the siege and the other mutineers agree to remain on the island for fear of being executed in England. After 28 years on the island, Crusoe boards the ship and sails for England. His is reunited with surviving family members. Later in Lisbon, Crusoe finds the Portuguese Captain that took him to Brazil and learns that his plantations are doing quite well. Although Crusoe is tempted to move to
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<th>How did Crusoe’s stay on the island make him a better man? What did it teach him about God and his fellow man? Cite specific examples from the book.</th>
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**Key Points:**

**Introduction:** *Robinson Crusoe* raises questions about colonial expansion and its effect on the lives of native peoples. At the time of its writing, European expansion was global in its reach. The novel moves from a story of individual survival to a story of colonization. Crusoe plants a flag, so to speak, in honor of his way of life—a perfectly fine thing to do when he is saving someone’s life, but a not so fine thing when he is lording it over others. He regards himself as a “generalissimo” and Friday as his “lieutenant-general” and his guests as subjects. In Dafoe’s, and in Crusoe’s defense, the author gives Friday some very admirable qualities. As Crusoe and Friday’s friendship grows, our attention is drawn less to the inequalities between them and more to the similarities between their cultures. Though Crusoe and Friday share further adventures after Crusoe has arrived home (England, Portugal), Crusoe’s life away from the island is almost recorded as an after-thought. However, the struggle and adventures are ongoing in the little island civilization Crusoe leaves behind.

**Setting:** The island, England, Portugal, Brazil, and the island again. The story comes full circle.

**Themes:** Morality and law, authority and anarchy, a return to an old civilization and to a new civilization.

**Discuss:** ♦ The exciting events leading up to Crusoe’s rescue ♦ The providential care of Crusoe’s lands and goods by means of the Captain and the Widow ♦ The ongoing adventures of the islanders and how Dafoe views life and story telling

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*Notes*
### WEEK 1

**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, intergalactic 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.

The letter need not discourage the friend. It should simply ask the friend to evaluate the reasons behind his choice, whether or not his character can withstand the challenges and temptations, the what will be the disposition of his relationships and responsibilities during his absence, and whether he has discerned whether his undertaking is God’s will.

### WEEK 2

**Describe your own desert island.**

Determine the layout of the island, its natural attributes, amenities, and drawbacks. Establish your methods of making it habitable and your daily routines. Name your island. Write about it as a series of journal entries. (Hint: Add depth to your writing by viewing each discovery or project on the island as forwarding civilization itself. Try to bring in the providential aspect of your story.)

Answers will vary. Look for thoroughness and originality.

### WEEK 3

**How did Crusoe’s stay on the island make him a better man?**

What did it teach him about God and his fellow man? Cite specific examples from the book.

At the start of the novel, Crusoe was rebellious. Though he established himself in Brazil, he was avaricious and given to folly. He was providentially saved when all others were lost. He was allowed to do more than survive, he flourished. His isolation allowed him to reflect on his life and to turn to God for guidance and provision. He was brought out of his isolation when he helped others.

### WEEK 4

**Review and Take Final Exam**
Part I. Identify the character. (1 point each / 10 possible)  
Score: _______/10

1. Who delivers a grave warning to *Robinson Crusoe* when he meets with his first sea disaster?
________________________

2. What two biblical characters is Crusoe compared to after his first voyage?
________________________, ________________________

3. Who escapes from the Sallee Rover with Crusoe?
________________________

4. In what country does Crusoe become a prosperous plantation owner?
________________________

5. How long does Crusoe live in fear of discovering the owner of the footprint?
________________________

6. Who does Crusoe rescue from the cannibals (name all three)?
________________________, ________________________, ________________________

7. Who preserves Crusoe’s fortune in England?
________________________

Part II: State the importance of each of the quotations below to Robinson Crusoe’s life’s journey?  
(2 points each / 10 possible)  
(1 point each extra credit for naming the location / 5 possible)  
Score: _______/10

1. “Had I continued in the station I was now in, I had room for all the happy things to have yet befallen me, for which my father so earnestly recommended a quiet, retired life, and of which he had so sensibly described the middle station of life to be full of…”
________________________
2. “…as the sea was returned to its smoothness of surface and settled calmness by the abatement of that storm, so the hurry of my thoughts being over, my fears and apprehensions of being swallowed up by the sea being forgotten, and the current of my former desires returned, I entirely forgot the vows and promises that I made in my distress.”

3. “I had another reflection which assisted me also to comfort my mind with hopes; and this was comparing my present condition with what I had deserved, and had therefore reason to expect from the hand of Providence.”

4. “…for it was the sight of the horses which made the wolves so furious, seeing their prey; and that at other times they are really afraid of a gun;”

5. “All these things, with some very surprising incidents in some new adventures of my own, for ten years more, I may perhaps give a further account of hereafter.”

Part III. Short Answer. Choose 10. (3 pts. each/30 possible + 6 extra credit) Score: _______/30

1. What is Crusoe’s name for the island that he records in his journal?

2. Why is it that young men love adventure? Should Catholic Christians view life as an adventure? What is the Catholic view of adventure?

3. How is it that Robinson Crusoe manages to escape from the Sallee Rover?

4. What should Robinson Crusoe have learned from his time as a slave? Relate the lesson to his dealings with Xury and to the expedition that led to his being marooned on the island.

5. How does the wrecked ship itself twice help Robinson Crusoe in his life on the island?
6. Crusoe makes much of recurring dates? What other event occurred on the anniversary of his having left home (September 1)? What event occurred on the anniversary of his birth (September 30)? (Reflection on dates takes place in “I Make Myself a Canoe”)

7. How does Crusoe go about planting crops, domesticating animals, and providing for his defense? Give examples.

8. How is Robinson Crusoe’s attitude important to his survival?

9. How does Crusoe come to view the idea of rescue? What deeper kind of rescue does he come to value?

10. What is the meaning of the dream Crusoe had during his great illness (“I am very ill and frightened”).

11. How does physical rescue come to Robinson Crusoe? What price must he pay to take advantage of the opportunity for rescue?

12. How does Robinson Crusoe seem to feel about returning to England? Does he find it easy to take up where he left off?

Part IV. Essay (50 points possible) (You may use the book for this portion of the exam.)

Crusoe is telling us his story as an older and wiser man. What advice should we carry away from his words? How should we live in view of what he learned on the island?
GRADED _______/100

Part I. Identify the character. (1 point each/10 possible)  Score: ________/10

1. Who delivers a grave warning to Robinson Crusoe when he meets with his first sea disaster?  
The Captain of the ship that foundered

2. What two biblical characters is Crusoe compared to after his first voyage? 
Jonah, the Prodigal Son

3. Who escapes from the Sallee Rover with Crusoe?  
Xury

4. In what country does Crusoe become a prosperous plantation owner?  
Brazil

5. How long does Crusoe live in fear of discovering the owner of the footprint?  
Two years

6. Who does Crusoe rescue from the cannibals (name all three)?  
Friday, Friday’s father, the Spaniard

7. Who preserves Crusoe’s fortune in England?  
The Widow

Part II: State the importance of each of the quotations below to Robinson Crusoe’s life’s journey?  
(2 points each/10 possible)  Score: ________/10
(1 point each extra credit for naming the location/5 possible)

1. “Had I continued in the station I was now in, I had room for all the happy things to have yet befallen me, for which my father so earnestly recommended a quiet, retired life, and of which he had so sensibly described the middle station of life to be full of…”  
Location: Brazil  
Crusoe’s statement demonstrates that he knows that his life is exactly what his father recommended years before, and had he listened he would have taken it up in England, but as it is he was bent on throwing it away in the new world. The result: isolation and trial.

2. “…as the sea was returned to its smoothness of surface and settled calmness by the abatement of that storm, so the hurry of my thoughts being over, my fears and apprehensions of being swallowed up...
by the sea being forgotten, and the current of my former desires returned, I entirely forgot the vows and promises that I made in my distress.”

Location: First voyage (on board)
Crusoe had not yet learned to heed the warnings against the seafaring life.

3. “I had another reflection which assisted me also to comfort my mind with hopes; and this was comparing my present condition with what I had deserved, and had therefore reason to expect from the hand of Providence.”

Location: On the island
Crusoe is learning gratitude for his preservation and knows that his disobedience might have cost him his life, a fate that would have been just. He is aware of God’s mercy to him.

4. “…for it was the sight of the horses which made the wolves so furious, seeing their prey; and that at other times they are really afraid of a gun;”

Location: the Pyrenees Mountains
Crusoe has made his way to Portugal and wishes to avoid sea travel and so takes an overland journey. He is certainly not above finding himself in the midst of adventures, partly owing to his own poor judgment.

5. “All these things, with some very surprising incidents in some new adventures of my own, for ten years more, I may perhaps give a further account of hereafter.”

Location: his island again
Crusoe is more himself, more alive, on his island, to which he returns after his wife dies to take up further adventures that promise another book.

Part III. Short Answer. Choose 10. (3 pts. each/30 possible + 6 extra credit) Score: _______/30

1. What is Crusoe’s name for the island that he records in his journal?
The Island of Despair

2. Why is it that young men love adventure? Should Catholic Christians view life as an adventure? What is the Catholic view of adventure?
Young men (and women) love adventure because they are made that way. It is the Catholic view of life that makes it an adventure with a true goal (Heaven). The Catholic view is that we engage in it whether we stay home or go abroad.
3. How is it that Robinson Crusoe manages to escape from the Sallee Rover?
Crusoe escapes when sent out on a fishing voyage without his master aboard and talks the commanding servant in charge into pushing off farther and farther from shore—at which point he throws him overboard.

4. What should Robinson Crusoe have learned from his time as a slave? Relate the lesson to his dealings with Xury and to the expedition that led to his being marooned on the island.
Crusoe should have learned that slavery is wrong. Crusoe had misgivings about selling Xury, but felt that 10 years of involuntary servitude would soften the arrangement. Had he not been avaricious and ready to break the law by going on a slaving expedition, he would not have been marooned.

5. How does the wrecked ship itself twice help Robinson Crusoe in his life on the island?
At first the ship provides salvageable goods such as food and seed, then when it breaks apart it provides building materials.

6. Crusoe makes much of recurring dates? What other event occurred on the anniversary of his having left home (September 1)? What event occurred on the anniversary of his birth (September 30)?
(Reflection on dates takes place in “I Make Myself a Canoe”)
Crusoe was taken captive by the Sallee Rover on 9/1; and washed ashore on the island on 9/30.

7. How does Crusoe go about planting crops, domesticating animals, and providing for his defense? Give examples.
Crusoe finds corn and barley from the ship and is able, through painful trial and error, to sow each and preserve the crops; he is able to at first hunt the goats and then to capture them in pits, build a hedge for their stall, separate out the tame from the wild as he gathers more, and secure a supply of meat and milk; by settling first in a cave, preserving his gun powder, and salvaging goods he assembles his “fortress”; later his second home is completely hidden from view by the stakes that take root and grow, forming a natural defense.

8. How is Robinson Crusoe’s attitude important to his survival?
Crusoe learns that he alone can determine how he will view the past and daily events, and that remaining grateful, active, and aware of God’s presence changes the experience of the island from one of a prison to one of a kingdom.

9. How does Crusoe come to view the idea of rescue? What deeper kind of rescue does he come to value?
At first Crusoe wants a physical rescue and despairs when it seems farther and farther away, but as he is forced to rely on God’s providence and to examine his life, he realizes that being rescued from sin is the greatest rescue.
10. What is the meaning of the dream Crusoe had during his great illness (“I am very ill and frightened”). Crusoe’s dream was a warning that he had failed to heed divine guidance offered by his parents, hardship, and blessing; and that he deserved spiritual death. (The being in the dream was armed with a spear it pointed at him. It is represented as a kind of angel.) Crusoe decides to mend his ways.

11. How does physical rescue come to Robinson Crusoe? What price must he pay to take advantage of the opportunity for rescue? An English ship reaches Crusoe. He cannot take advantage of its origins until he has helped the captain reclaim the ship from mutineers.

12. How does Robinson Crusoe seem to feel about returning to England? Does he find it easy to take up where he left off? By the time he returns, Crusoe’s parents are dead and very few of his relations survive. Although he marries and has children, his family life takes up very little of the book. He seems himself again when he has returned and takes up further adventures on his island.

Part IV. Essay (50 points possible) (You may use the book for this portion of the exam.)

Crusoe is telling us his story as an older and wiser man. What advice should we carry away from his words? How should we live in view of what he learned on the island?

Honor thy father and mother; pay attention to divine providential messages, especially when they seem to be delivered by megaphone (storms, shipwreck, prophetic advice, parental warnings, dreams); undertake your labors with gratitude; make the most of human society and companionship; preserve and value the things that civilization has given you; pray and read the Bible (and go to Mass), accept adventures when they come your way, but don’t make a special habit of seeking them at the expense of obedience, reflect on your life. The student may include others.