

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Robinson Crusoe

by

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Book Information

Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe
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A young seaman is cast ashore on an uninhabited tropical island.

Topics: Adventure, Lost/Abandoned; Adventure, Survival; Classics, Classics (All); Popular Groupings, Upper Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12

Main Characters

Friday the man who Robinson rescues from the cannibals and turns into a Christian, servant, and friend

Robinson Crusoe the principal character in the story; a man who spends most of his adult life trying to survive while stranded on a tropical island

the captain the captain of the English ship that eventually rescues Robinson from the island

the English captain's widow the woman who takes care of Robinson's money during many of his adventures

the old savage Friday's father, who Robinson and Friday rescue from the cannibals

the Portuguese captain the man who rescues Robinson as he is escaping from the Sallee Rover, transports him to Brazil, and watches his plantation while he is on the island

the Spaniard the captive who Robinson and Friday also rescue from the cannibals

Xury a boy who escapes with Robinson from the Sallee Rover and ends up with the Portuguese captain

Vocabulary

malefactor a person who has committed a crime; a criminal

moidore a former Portuguese or Brazilian gold coin

omnipotent having unlimited power

subsistence the act of continuing in existence

Synopsis

Robinson Crusoe is a young man when he decides he wants to leave England and try a life at sea, against his father's wishes. Bad weather or other trying circumstances plague all but one of his early voyages. On one trip, he is captured by pirates and serves as a slave in Sallee for several years. He finally escapes from his master when he is sent out to fish and never returns.

After his escape from the Sallee Rover, he is taken onboard the ship of a Portuguese captain. This captain proves to be a lifelong friend of Robinson. They voyage to Brazil, where Robinson eventually becomes a successful Brazilian planter. When several surrounding merchants and planters express an interest in sailing to Guinea to obtain Negro slaves, Robinson is more than happy to head the expedition.

It is on this voyage that Robinson's ship encounters such stormy weather that it is carried off course. When the ship runs aground, the crew tries to escape, but only Robinson survives. He is fortunate enough, however, to be able to go back to the wrecked ship and retrieve many things that are of future use to him on the island.

Robinson lives twenty-eight years on the tropical island fending for himself. He discovers that cannibals visit the island to eat some of their captives. During one of these visits, Robinson rescues one of the savages who is destined to be a meal. He names this savage Friday and converts him to Christianity. For several years, the two of them live a quiet and enjoyable life on the island.

When the cannibals visit the island again, Robinson and Friday rescue two of the captives. One of these is a Spaniard, and the other is Friday's father. For a time, the four live on the island together. After taking

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a year to build up their stores of food, Robinson sends the Spaniard and Friday's father to the mainland from which the Spaniard had come. They are to return with as many Spaniards and Portuguese as they can who are willing to come in peace and help Robinson in his quest to escape the island.

Before the Spaniard and Friday's father return, Robinson and Friday have visitors from an English ship that is experiencing a mutiny. With Robinson's help, the original captain resumes leadership of his ship and agrees to take Robinson and Friday back to England. The mutineers are left on the island rather than be taken back to England to be hanged.

When Robinson returns to England, he finds many things changed. He realizes he has little money and decides to travel to Lisbon to check on the status of his Brazilian plantation. There he discovers he is a rich man. He sells his plantation and returns to England overland because of his many problems during sea voyages.

In the end, Robinson revisits his tropical island to see how the men he has left there have fared. He considers the island his own, and he divides the island into parcels for each of them. He brings them supplies and leaves them to continue on their own.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why did Robinson revisit the island years after he had "escaped"?

He had grown fond of the place, and he was curious about what had happened in his absence. He also wanted to help those who were still living there.

Literary Analysis

How did Robinson Crusoe change during the course of the story?

He becomes more self-sufficient, and he discovers Christianity.

Inferential Comprehension

Predict what will happen to Friday when Robinson dies.

He will either return to the island and live similarly to the way he and Robinson lived, or he will continue a life in England. He will most likely be successful at whatever he does because of his willingness to work hard.

Constructing Meaning

Why do you think Robinson Crusoe took the ill-fated voyage to Guinea that resulted in his long stay on the tropical island?

He enjoys adventures, especially on a ship. He also likes helping others.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The island upon which Robinson Crusoe is stranded is somewhere close to the equator between Brazil and the Caribbean. Have the students study the people in that area of the world. What types of clothing do they wear? What do they eat? What do they do for a living? Is there a lot of ship traffic along the coast of Brazil? What types of cargo do they carry?

Understanding the Author's Craft During a portion of the story, the author uses a diary form to relate the tale. Ask the students which way they preferred the story to be written. Was it easier for them to read the story in a diary form? Did it seem to flow better when it was a narrative? If they were going to write a similar story, what technique would they use?

Recognizing Feelings When Robinson discovers there are cannibals visiting his island, he lives in fear for several years until he realizes his life is

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not in immediate danger. Have the students think about a time they have been afraid. How long did this feeling last? How did they deal with the situation? What did they do to help them stop being afraid?

Responding to Literature Have the students pretend they are Robinson Crusoe and have just been stranded on a deserted island. Their ship is within reach for a few days. Ask them to write out a list of supplies that they hope to bring back from the ship to help them live for the next twenty-five years on the island. Do they think they would be as self-sufficient as Robinson? What skills would they use to help them during their stay? If they had one person to choose to be stranded with them, who would it be? Why?