

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-14081-2 - Selections: From Classic and Modern English Literature

Clare West

Excerpt

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I

DANIEL DEFOE

1660 – 1731



Daniel Defoe was born in London, the son of a butcher. As a salesman of tights and stockings, he travelled widely in Europe. Travel was one of his great interests throughout his life. He was also actively interested in politics. He wrote articles and poems attacking people's prejudices, and so angered Queen Anne that he was sent to prison from 1702-4. He was rescued from prison by a Conservative politician, who employed him as a secret agent, sending him round the country to gather information about people's political opinions. He was again sent to prison when he wrote articles criticizing King George I, but when he was set free he continued his writing.

During his life Defoe wrote over five hundred articles and books, but he is best known for the works he produced in his later years, and especially for *Robinson Crusoe*, one of the most familiar stories in English literature. This is considered by many to be the first English novel, and is based on the true story of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish sailor. When it was published it was an immediate success. It was translated into many languages, and influenced many later writers and thinkers.

Defoe's influence on the development of the English novel was enormous. He wrote plainly and clearly, with realistic descriptions of people, places and action. His writing shows a reporter's love of detail as well as a writer's powerful imagination.

Well-known works by Daniel Defoe include: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Captain Singleton* (1720), *Moll Flanders* (1722), *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), *Roxana* (1724), *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-7).

Robinson Crusoe

Robinson Crusoe has had a fortunate escape from drowning. The ship he was travelling in was wrecked by a terrible storm in the Caribbean Sea, and he only just managed to reach land. However, quickly realizing that he would need provisions, he swam back to the ship before it sank completely, made a raft and brought some useful things back with him – clothes, food, guns and tools.

Now Crusoe is apparently alone in this strange country, where it seems he will have to work hard in order to survive.

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Robinson Crusoe

5 My next work was to view the country and seek a proper place for my habitation, and where to stow my goods to secure them from whatever might happen. Where I was, I yet knew not; whether on the continent, or on an island; whether inhabited or not inhabited; whether in danger of wild beasts, or not. There was a hill, not above a mile from me, which rose up very steep and high, and which seemed to overtop some other hills, which lay as in a ridge from it, northward. I took out one of the fowling-pieces and one of the pistols, and a horn of powder; and thus armed, I travelled for discovery up to the top of that hill, where, after I had with great labour and difficulty got to the top, I saw my fate to my great affliction, viz., that I was in an island environed every way with the sea, no land to be seen, except some rocks which lay a great way off, and two small islands less than this, which lay about three leagues to the west.

10 I found also that the island I was in was barren, and, as I saw good reason to believe, uninhabited, except by wild beasts, of whom, however, I saw none; yet I saw an abundance of fowls, but knew not their kinds; neither, when I killed them, could I tell what was fit for food, and what not. At my coming back, I shot at a great bird which I saw sitting upon a tree on the side of a great wood. I believe it was the first gun that had been fired there since the creation of the world. I had no sooner fired, but from all the parts of the wood there arose an innumerable number of fowls of many sorts, making a confused screaming, and crying everyone according to his usual note; but not one of them of any kind that I knew.

• • • • •

20 Contented with this discovery, I came back to my raft, and fell to work to bring my cargo on shore, which took me up the rest of that day; and what to do with myself at night I knew not, nor indeed where to rest; for I was afraid to lie down on the ground, not knowing but some wild beast might devour me, though, as I afterwards found, there was really no need for those fears. However, as well as I could I barricaded myself round with the chests and boards that I had brought on shore, and made a kind of a hut for that night's lodging.

Notes*seek*: look for*stow*: put away*horn of powder*: container of gunpowder*viz.*: (*videlicet*, Latin) namely*barren*: with very few plants*fowls*: birds*raft*: a simple boat made of flat pieces of wood*cargo*: goods carried on a boat*devour me*: eat me up*barricaded*: made a wall or fence*hut*: small shelter made of wood

Comprehension

The author

Only one ending in each group is correct. Choose the correct one.

- 1 Daniel Defoe travelled abroad
 - a as a spy.
 - b selling things.
 - c to do research for his novels.
 - d to avoid being sent to prison.
- 2 He wrote
 - a romantic poetry.
 - b Conservative speeches.
 - c hundreds of articles.
 - d his autobiography.
- 3 He is most famous for
 - a his political views.
 - b *Robinson Crusoe*.
 - c his support for Queen Anne.
 - d his diaries.

The text

A The words and expressions on the left are no longer in common use. Match them with their more up-to-date meanings on the right.

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 habitation | a surrounded |
| 2 to overtop | b a gun for hunting birds |
| 3 fowling-piece | c to be higher than |
| 4 affliction | d a long way off, far away |
| 5 environed | e distress, despair |
| 6 a great way off | f about five kilometres |
| 7 league | g a place to live |

B Rewrite these phrases or sentences in modern English.

- 1 My next work was to (line 1)
- 2 I yet knew not (line 3)

- 3 not above a mile (line 4)
- 4 I travelled for discovery (line 7)
- 5 but knew not their kinds (line 14)
- 6 At my coming back (line 15)
- 7 crying everyone according to his usual note (line 19)

C Answer these questions.

- 1 Why does Crusoe want to find a place to put his goods?
- 2 Why does he climb up the hill?
- 3 Why does he take a gun with him?
- 4 How does he feel when he knows he is on an island?
- 5 Why do you think he doesn't recognize the types of bird on the island?
- 6 Why does he think 'it was the first gun that had been fired there since the creation of the world' (line 16)? What does he mean when he says this?
- 7 Why is he 'contented with this discovery' (line 21)?
- 8 Why doesn't he want to lie down to sleep at night?
- 9 Why do you think 'there was really no need for those fears' (line 25)?
- 10 How does he manage to make himself a shelter for the night?

Discussion

- 1 Crusoe has brought clothes, food, guns and tools with him from the ship. Decide what items in each of these categories would be most useful on a desert island. For example, clothes: pullover? coat? shorts? an extra pair of shoes? Make a list of what you would put on your small raft, if, like Crusoe, you only had a few minutes to think about it.
- 2 How do you think the story is going to continue? Are there any clues in the text?

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Robinson Crusoe

Role-play

Imagine that you and a friend are on an expedition exploring a remote part of the African jungle, and have got separated from your group. Plan what you will do about

- the possible dangers
- finding food and water
- protecting yourselves
- finding the other members of the group.

Student A: You are the adventurous type who enjoys action but who often gets into dangerous situations.

Student B: You are more cautious: your motto is 'Better safe than sorry!'

Extension

Grammar

A 'Where I was, I yet knew not' (line 2). Nowadays we would say 'I did not (yet) know where I was.' Make indirect questions from the following direct questions, starting *He asked ...*

- 'When do the banks close?'
- 'Where do they come from?'
- 'Do you speak Italian?'
- 'Did you go there yesterday?'
- 'How long have you been working here?'
- 'Have you been here before?'
- 'How long will they be staying?'
- 'Can you come here tomorrow?'
- 'Are you ready yet?'
- 'Who are you?'

B 'Whether on the continent, or on an island' (line 3). Decide whether articles are needed in the following sentences, and add *a*, *an*, or *the* where necessary.

- What did you think of book you borrowed from me?

- time is money.
- London is situated in south-east, on River Thames.
- They decided to buy house on Greek island when they retired.
- She isn't very keen on eating red meat these days.
- Robin Hood stole from rich and gave to poor.
- I think they live near Lake Geneva, don't they?
- He's engineer, and she's architect. Their children are artists.
- She's played piano all her life.
- I met friend of yours at party other day. party was at Hilton Hotel!

Negative adjectives

Uninhabited (line 13) is the negative of *inhabited*.

Make the negative form of these adjectives, by adding the correct prefix.

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1 intelligent | 9 comfortable |
| 2 legible | 10 mature |
| 3 practical | 11 rational |
| 4 literate | 12 convenient |
| 5 patient | 13 logical |
| 6 polite | 14 possible |
| 7 fit | 15 fair |
| 8 responsible | 16 secure |

Composition (120 – 180 words)

- Continue Robinson Crusoe's story by writing a composition beginning *When I woke up the next morning, I saw to my horror that*
- Which three objects would you most like to take with you to a desert island? Describe them, and explain why you have chosen them.