

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*: Factual and Fictional Writing

Lesson Plan

Grades: 11-12 or adaptable for above.

Subjects: social studies, history, geography, language arts/writing

Lesson Summary: Students will learn about the history and geography of the Caribbean, the history of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and what can be learned of real histories from fictional travel narratives.

Note: The University of Florida's Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature alone has over 300 versions of *Robinson Crusoe*. Not all of these are available online yet, but many copies are. Many of the copies are similar, but some have different images, different text, or other differences. [This version of Robinson Crusoe](#) is the one used for the purposes of this assignment. Any version of *Robinson Crusoe* should do, but page numbers may not match on others.

Objectives:

The students will be able to:

- 1) Define mariner
- 2) Explain how language evolves through the "corruption" of words in *Robinson Crusoe* and how the same "corruption" changes words now.
- 3) Locate the different countries mentioned in *Robinson Crusoe* on a map.
- 4) Discuss the different styles of writing in first and third person narration.
- 5) Discuss the relationship between factual and fictional writings and the blurred division between the two.

Materials:

Each student will need the following:

- 1) Computer with internet access
- 2) Paper
- 3) Pen or pencil
- 4) Copy of a world and Caribbean maps: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/>
<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/UFDC/UFDC.aspx?g=all&m=hd1X&i=28103&vo=01&>
- 5) Copy of the selections from *Robinson Crusoe* (also online)
- 6) Copy of the *Robinson Crusoe* map and writing assignments
- 7) Copy of the writing instruction sheet, editing form, and FCAT rubric

Teacher Preparation:

- 1) Print out copies of the maps, the selections from *Robinson Crusoe* activity (pages [y](#) - [x](#) for plot overview and 36-44 <http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/UFDC/UFDC.aspx?g=all&m=hd61J&i=1114&> through <http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/UFDC/UFDC.aspx?g=all&m=hd69J&i=1114&>), the map activity, and the *Robinson Crusoe* writing assignment. Photocopy enough for everyone in your class.
- 2) Make sure the computers are ready for the students so there is no lost time.
- 3) Make sure there are enough copies of the three components of the writing lesson. You can print out and photocopy new ones or reuse the old ones.

Procedures:

- 1) **Optional:** Have the students read all of *Robinson Crusoe* or watch a film version for more background.
- 2) Ask students to read the background information on *Robinson Crusoe*. (5-10 minutes)
- 3) When the students have finished reading, pass out world map activity and ask them to complete it. (20-30 minutes)
- 4) Pass out the writing assignment and ask the students to complete it. (20-30 minutes for research, 20-30 for writing)
- 5) Have the students get out the writing instruction sheet, the editing form, and the FCAT rubric. Using these forms, they should edit their OWN paper. (20-30 minutes)

Total Time estimates:

Two to three 50-minute class periods

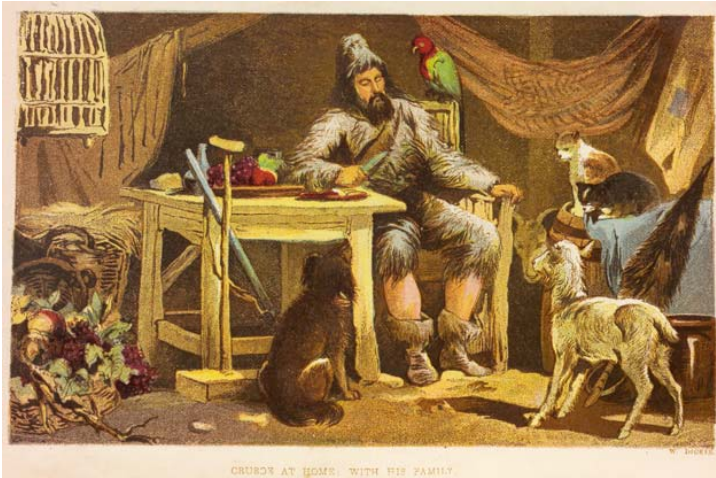
Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

Overview

Daniel Defoe is best known for his writing, especially for his novel *Robinson Crusoe*. Often credited as one of the earlier novels in English, *Robinson Crusoe* told the story of a man's travels, including his adventures while being shipwrecked on a deserted island. In addition to being popular in its own time, published in 1719, *Robinson Crusoe* continues to be popular today and has spawned many similar stories through the years. The original, lengthy title offers a simple plot summary. The full original title was:

The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner: who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island on the coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pirates. Written by Himself.

The original title tells readers that *Robinson Crusoe* is intended to be an autobiography of a man named Robinson Crusoe, who is a sailor or mariner. The title also explains that that sailing leads to exciting travels from England (York) to the Americas, and that he has adventures with being shipwrecked and dealing with pirates.



While many similar stories have followed, *Robinson Crusoe* is an original because it is both a shipwreck and travel adventure story in novel form. Before *Robinson Crusoe*, most stories followed the epic or romance traditions more closely. Epic works include the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *Odyssey*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Romance works are those in Romance languages (1000-1500 when the language was still new) and include the original stories about King Arthur and knights as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. As a novel, *Robinson Crusoe* was a long story, written in prose, which was still a new format for the time it was released. This novelty and the story content fed the popularity of *Robinson Crusoe* and helped solidify it as a

reference for other stories of sea travel and shipwrecked travelers.

Narration and True (Tall) Tales

Because Defoe wrote the novel as though it was an autobiography, the story is told in the first-person from Robinson Crusoe's perspective. The entire story is thus told as if Crusoe was writing. For instance, the story begins with Crusoe explaining his own name:

I was so called Robinson Kreutznaer; but, by the usual corruption of words in England, we are now called, nay, we call ourselves, and write our name, Crusoe. (24)

The first-person narration differs from other stories, which are told in third-person, with the narrator acting as a voice outside of the story. Newspaper articles are often written this way, with the journalists writing to explain that events occurred, but not what they say. If the passage above was in a news article, it would likely be changed into third-person, and possibly something like this:

Robinson Crusoe's name was Robinson Kreutznaer; but, because of the usual changes in words in England, Robinson's last name and the names of those in his family changed to Crusoe.

The difference between the first and the second ways of writing the same information are differences in perspective, but they also lead to other differences.

Third-person narrators seem to have knowledge of any and all events. First-person narration tells stories from a single person's perspective and thus cannot have all of the information. Because first-person narrators tell the story from their own perspectives, first-person narrators focus their stories on themselves. They can also seem closer to their readers because they share personal thoughts and feelings. While seeming closer to their readers, first-person narrators can withhold or misrepresent information. For instance, detective stories often use first-person narration so that readers can follow along with detectives as the detectives uncover new information.

First-person narration can also be useful to call information into question, as with unreliable narrators (like Poe's narrator in "The Tell-tale Heart") who may be lying to themselves and to the readers.

Travel, Shipwreck, Survival

Ships logs, travel journeys, maps, and other forms serve to document travel and exploration. *Robinson Crusoe* works within the traditions of these forms to create the story of one man through his travels. *Robinson Crusoe* is more exciting than most non-fictional travel documentation because it adds the main characters' perspective and experiences. It also adds excitement through events like a pirate encounter and a shipwreck.

Throughout the novel, the exciting elements are combined with factual information on sea travel, international trading and economics, and even mundane information about farming and cooking. The novel thus expands from a travel narrative (normally meaning a letter, diary/journal, or a chronicle) into a man's personal story, a travel narrative, and a narrative of survival.

Travel narratives are often real and include relevant information about traveling to the same location or via the same transportation format. Narratives of survival include information pertinent to the living conditions and surviving in those conditions. For instance, [Robinson Crusoe has a day by day journal of how Crusoe survived after the shipwreck](#), including what Crusoe ate and how he cooked his food. Because Crusoe is stranded for a long period of time, the narrative also explains how he creates tools to survive, [like creating pots for cooking and storage](#).

Travel and survival guides are non-fictional counterparts to travel and survival narratives. The information between the two is often very similar. The major differences are that travel and survival guides explain how to travel or survive (or how to best do so) given a set of circumstances, whereas travel and survival narratives chronicle how someone did travel or survive. The difference is thus one of instruction versus record keeping. While *Robinson Crusoe* was a fictional story of travel and survival, even fictional elements can reveal true information, just as real histories can contain false information that was incorrectly believed to be true.

As a fictional work that tries to present itself as factual, *Robinson Crusoe* shows how both history and fiction can contain the same errors. Because history, like fiction, is written by people, it can contain the same sorts of biases, misrepresentations, and outright falsehoods. *Robinson Crusoe* is often viewed as a literary classic, but that does not mean that it is a perfect or a great novel. Classic works are often considered classic because they explain something about history or society. *Robinson Crusoe* exemplifies the beginning of the novel, adventure and travel writing, the history of slavery, racism, and the problems of colonialism.

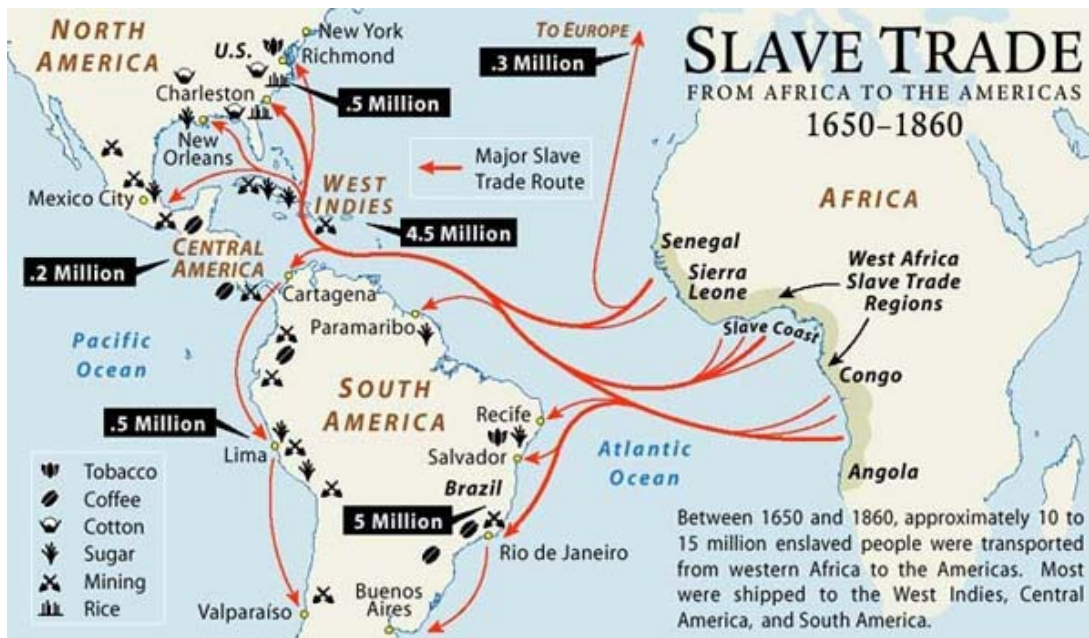


Image on the slave trade, a driving force underlying Robinson Crusoe's narrative. Image from: http://www.slaveryinamerica.org/geography/slave_trade.htm

Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe: Map Activity

Using the map, find the places mentioned in *Robinson Crusoe*. Because *Robinson Crusoe* is a story of adventure, the places mentioned give it the sense of exploration that appealed to Defoe's readers. Note that the places mentioned are sometimes misspelled by today's standards, because of the way language evolves as with the "corruption of words" Robinson Crusoe mentions in explaining the transformation of his own name.

Countries and Major Geographic Areas

England	Spain	Portugal
Coast of Africa	Canary Islands	River Gambia
Senegal	Malay Archipelago (East Indies)	Jamaica
York, England	London, England	Lisbon, Portugal
Guinea	Morocco	Malay
Brazil	Baía de Todos os Santos	Trinidad
Barbados	America	Amazon River
Siam	China	The Republic of Cape Verde or Cape Verde
Sallee (the port of Salé in the "Barbary Coast," which referred to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya—label all of these)		

For help finding and identifying locations, see [this online map](#), which shows all of the places mentioned in *Robinson Crusoe* on a map.

2) What names above are correct? Which names are incorrect? Research the names above to find the correct names for each of the places above in your language and in the language of the country named or the country in which the place exists. In groups, discuss how translation can further complicate the "corruption of words."

Writing Assignment

After identifying the places above on the map, pick one of the countries or locations and research it. Compare your research on the country to the way it is described in *Robinson Crusoe*. (You can do this by using the ["Search this document" on the upper left of the book page](#)). What parts of the description are accurate? What parts are inaccurate?

Using information from the maps and the readings, write a five paragraph essay (with an introductory paragraph, three supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph) comparing and contrasting the description in *Robinson Crusoe* with the real place. What factors would have influenced the Robinson Crusoe's description of the country? What resources are you using for the comparison? Are they accurate, or what factors influence them?