Baker Street Readers

Great reads for all ages

Running away to sea brings adventure and wealth, but then come shipwreck and a desperate struggle for survival.

Defying his parents, Robinson Crusoe goes to sea. He is captured by pirates, but escapes to Brazil. There he makes a fortune using slave labour to grow tobacco and sugar. He sails to Africa to bring back more slaves, but is shipwrecked on an uninhabited island.

Everyone else is drowned, and for over twenty years he lives alone. He learns to hunt and fish and make shelter. Then the cannibals arrive. Will this be the end of his adventure – or his chance to escape?

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- BBC R4, Open Book

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TEACHER'S EDITION ONLY

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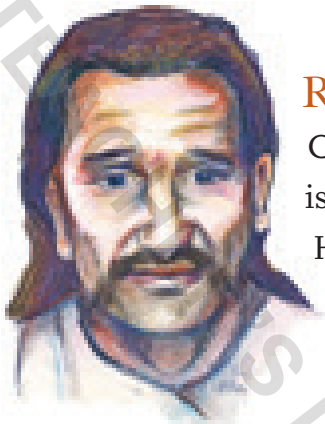
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THE CHARACTERS



Robinson Crusoe

Crusoe, shipwrecked on an island, must survive alone. How will he do it? Will he ever escape?

Robinson's parents



Crusoe's parents have already lost two sons. They try to persuade him not to go to sea.



The Brazilian planters

Like Crusoe himself, his friends in Brazil own plantations worked by slaves. Is their latest plan a good idea?



Crusoe's dog

Crusoe's dog also survived the shipwreck. What would Robinson do without his friend and companion?



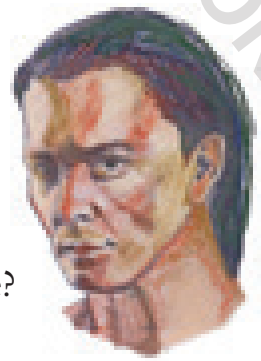
Poll Parrot

Crusoe catches and tames a parrot. At last there is someone else on the island who can talk.



The Savages

Crusoe discovers that cannibals sometimes hold feasts on the island. Is he in terrible danger? What can he do?



Friday

What is Friday really like? Is he a dangerous savage? Should Crusoe trust him? Can he help Crusoe escape?

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ROBINSON CRUSOE

My father wouldn't hear of me going to sea. Both my elder brothers had gone abroad and never come back. Naturally my parents wanted me to stay in York. But I hadn't learned any trade, and my head was filled with rambling thoughts. One day I found myself in Hull with a friend who was going to sea. I hadn't planned to run away, but it seemed too good an opportunity to miss. I sailed with my friend. It was the 1st of September 1651. I was eighteen years old.

The ship ran into a terrible storm. I thought God was punishing me for running away. The storm passed, and my friend teased me for my fears and gave me punch to drink. I forgot all about turning back. We suffered even worse storms; in the end our ship was wrecked near Yarmouth. Even my friend was frightened.

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'I think you're some kind of Jonah,' he said. 'In the Bible, Jonah caused bad weather and shipwrecks. He brought bad luck to any ship he went aboard. You ought never to go to sea any more!'

I wish I'd listened to him, but I was ashamed to turn back. In London I signed on a ship bound for Africa. We were captured by Turkish pirates, who sold me as a house slave. After two years I was rescued by a Portuguese ship, which took me to Brazil.



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out all the other characters involved in Crusoe's departure.

- After Crusoe returns to England, he goes back to Brazil with Friday to visit his plantation, and has more adventures there. He even revisits his island and meets the Spanish colonists who took over from the villainous English mutineers.

Back in time

Robinson Crusoe is set more than three hundred years ago, in the seventeenth century. People then had a very different idea of the geography of the world, of relations between different races, and of the importance of religion.

Europeans were still exploring the rest of the world, and there was fierce competition between European countries for access to the wealth of places like Africa, America and Asia. This competition led to a succession of wars.

Virtually everyone in Europe believed in a god who could influence all aspects of life and punish wrong-doers. Crusoe would have grown up during the English Civil War, which led to King Charles being executed and a Protestant Commonwealth being established under Cromwell.

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Crusoe was a Protestant and this is reflected in his attitudes to religion, and his belief in self-sufficiency.

Crusoe works hard and is inventive. He shows a lot of initiative in improving his conditions and looking after himself. This reflects the individualism which is associated with being a Protestant. He is used to valuing everything in terms of money, so it is a shock to him to realise that money is useless on his island. He belongs to a European world where personal wealth, and therefore personal worth, is measured in money.

In those days no one questioned the rights and wrongs of slavery. Crusoe had been a slave himself, but he never compares his experiences with those of the slaves on his plantation. He automatically makes Friday his slave. Europeans assumed that they were superior to other races, just as they thought that Christianity was the only true religion and only Christians had a true god. Nevertheless some Europeans were beginning to question the idea that other races were inferior. Although Crusoe is very dismissive of 'savages' generally, he comes to admire Friday as an individual.

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