

Daniel Defoe

- ❖ Born in 1660 in London
- ❖ His mother and father, James and Mary Foe, were Presbyterian dissenters. James Foe was a middle-class wax and candle merchant.
- ❖ He witnessed two of the greatest disasters of the seventeenth century: a recurrence of the plague and the Great Fire of London in 1666.
- ❖ He was an excellent student, but as a Presbyterian, he was forbidden to attend Oxford or Cambridge. He entered a dissenting institution called Morton's Academy
- ❖ **Defoe developed a taste for travel that lasted throughout his life**
His fiction reflects this interest; his characters Moll Flanders and Robinson Crusoe both change their lives by voyaging far from their native England.
- ❖ He became a successful merchant and married into a rich family, but his business failed later on and he had money troubles for the rest of his life.
- ❖ He worked as a merchant, a poet, a journalist, a politician and even as a spy, and wrote around 500 books and pamphlets.

Defoe's Writing

- ❖ Defoe published his first novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, in 1719, when he was around 60 years old.
- ❖ The novel attracted a large middle-class readership. He followed in 1722 with *Moll Flanders*, the story of a tough, streetwise heroine whose fortunes rise and fall dramatically.
- ❖ **Both works straddle the border between journalism and fiction.**

Robinson Crusoe

- ❖ *Robinson Crusoe* was based on the true story of a shipwrecked seaman named Alexander Selkirk and was passed off as history in the South Pacific Ocean.
- ❖ Focus on the actual conditions of everyday life and avoidance of the courtly and the heroic made Defoe a revolutionary in English literature and helped define the new genre of the novel.
- ❖ Stylistically, Defoe was a great innovator. Instead of the ornate style of the upper class, Defoe used the simple, direct, fact-based style of the middle classes, which became the new standard for the English novel.
- ❖ With Robinson Crusoe's theme of solitary human existence, Defoe paved the way for the central modern theme of alienation and isolation.
- ❖ Defoe died in London on April 24, 1731, of a fatal "lethargy"—an unclear diagnosis that may refer to a stroke.

Plot Summary

- ❖ After two years of slavery, he manages to escape and is rescued and befriended by the Captain of a Portuguese ship off the west coast of Africa. The ship is en route to Brazil. There, with the help of the captain, Crusoe becomes owner of a plantation.
- ❖ Years later, he joins an expedition to bring slaves from Africa, but he is shipwrecked in a storm about forty miles out to sea on an island (which he calls the Island of Despair) on September 30, 1659.
- ❖ His companions all die, save himself, and three animals who survived the shipwreck, the captain's dog and two cats. Having overcome his despair, he fetches arms, tools and other supplies from the ship before it breaks apart and sinks. He proceeds to

build a fenced-in habitation near a cave which he excavates himself.

- ❖ He keeps a calendar by making marks in a wooden cross which he has built. He hunts, grows corn and rice, dries grapes to make raisins for the winter months, learns to make pottery and raises goats, all using tools created from stone and wood which he harvests on the island. He also adopts a small parrot. He reads the Bible and becomes religious, thanking God for his fate in which nothing is missing but human society.
- ❖ Crusoe leaves the island December 19, 1686 and arrives in England on June 11, 1687. He learns that his family believed him dead and there was nothing in his father's will for him.
- ❖ Crusoe departs for Lisbon to reclaim the profits of his estate in Brazil, which has granted him a large amount of wealth. In conclusion, he takes his wealth overland to England to avoid traveling at sea. Friday comes with him and along the way they endure one last adventure together as they fight off hundreds of famished wolves while crossing the Pyrenees.