



## Early Literature Part II – Syllabus

**Course Description:** An excerpt-based class, students continue a study through early historical literature including an introduction to Shakespeare (1600s), *Don Quixote* (1605), *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1791), and poems by Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) and William Blake (1757-1827). All texts are included as part of the class; no materials are required for purchase.

**Prerequisite:** *Essay Basics* or equivalent experience writing five-paragraph essays.

### Course Outline:

#### **Week One:** Intro to Shakespeare

- Review of the Renaissance
- Shakespeare's England
- Shakespeare's Stage
- Understanding Shakespeare's Language

#### **Week Two:** *Don Quixote*

- A Brief History of Spain & The Story
- The Value of Cervantes' Novel

#### **Week Three:** *The Pilgrim's Progress*

- More of England's History
- Allegory in Writing
- Making Connections

#### **Week Four:** *Robinson Crusoe*

- The Life of Daniel Defoe
- Confessional, Epistolary, and Realistic Fiction
- Intro to The Age of Enlightenment

**Week Five:** *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

- A Brief Background
- More About The Age of Enlightenment

**Week Six:** Poems by Phillis Wheatley

- Wheatley's Historical Significance in Literature
- Why Poetry?
- How Do We Read Poetry?
- Close Reading & Rhyme Schemes

**Week Seven:** Poems by William Blake

- Intro to the Romantic era
- Blake's Influence in Art and Poetry
- More Poetry Analysis

**Week Eight:** Final Response – Five-Paragraph Essay

**Grading Information:** All assignments will be graded using *The Growing Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.



## Early Literature Part II

### Lesson Four: *Robinson Crusoe*

#### SAMPLE LESSON

Perhaps it is easy to believe that prominent and well-loved pieces of literature were a result of ideal circumstances. And although this can be true in some cases, we actually find, upon studying history, that many of the most well-known classics came about under challenges, suffering, and even persecution.

In Lesson 2, we learned about Miguel Cervantes, a man jailed several times and one whose life was nothing short of chaotic. In Lesson 3, we met John Bunyan, a man who was also jailed and persecuted for his faith. I wish we could say that this week's biography would be happier and more enjoyable, but again, we meet a man who faced, like most of us, an incredible number of highs and lows in his life and career.

Daniel Foe was likely born in London, sometime between 1659 and 1662. Due to lack of documentation, not much is known about Foe's life, though some details have emerged over time. During his childhood, Foe experienced some of England's most unusual historical events. 1665 brought the Great Plague of London, killing some 70,000 people. The following year brought the Great Fire of London which gutted numerous parts of central London. Although Foe's house and a few others nearby remained, the rest of his neighborhood was burned to the ground.

Foe's father, James Foe, was a successful businessman. James and his wife were also Presbyterian Dissenters, Christians who had separated themselves from the Church of England. Sadly, Alice Foe passed away around the time that her son was ten. After this, Foe studied at boarding school and was later sent to Charles Morton's dissenting academy, where he likely spent much time studying both the Bible and various writings of John Bunyan.

At first, Foe planned to become a Dissenting minister, but later changed his mind. In 1683, Foe set up shop as a merchant and also published his first piece of literature, a political pamphlet. The following year, he married Mary Tuffley. (The two were married for 47 years and together had eight children.) In the years to come, Foe demonstrated that he was an ambitious man, willing to take on a variety of projects and dealing in numerous business commodities. When Queen Mary and William III took the throne in 1689, Foe

became a close ally and secret agent to William. Unfortunately, some of the Crown's new policies resulted in conflict with France, which played a significant role in Foe's ultimate bankruptcy. In 1692, he was arrested and sent to debtor's prison (a common practice of the day when you couldn't pay your debts!). After his release, Foe may have traveled but was back in England by 1695. By this time, he had added the prefix “De” to his name (for reasons often speculated but unknown), becoming who we now know as Daniel Defoe.

More than 500 titles are attributed to Daniel Defoe. For numerous years, Defoe primarily wrote political material. Caught up in much controversy, Defoe was repeatedly imprisoned by his political opponents for his writings. By 1719, Defoe decided to try an entirely different path—fiction writing. Despite being around 59 years old, he published *Robinson Crusoe*, the novel that gave Defoe a name in the world of classic literature and modern homes alike. Defoe continued to write, publishing both novels and editorials, until his death in 1731. Defoe died with little wealth, wrapped up in multiple financial controversies and lawsuits. It is often believed that his death occurred while he was in hiding from his creditors.

Nonetheless, Defoe is revered as the Father of the English novel. *Robinson Crusoe*, considered one of the first English novels, was immensely successful. Defoe's breakout novel, which tells the tale of a castaway living on a remote island for twenty-eight years, is one of the most widely published books in history. *Robinson Crusoe* spawned so many imitations that its name was later used to define an entirely new genre, known as the Robinsonade. To this day, we remember Defoe for his prolific contributions to literature, despite not knowing many details about his life.

## **MORE DETAILS –**

*Robinson Crusoe* is believed to have been based on the true story of Scottish castaway Alexander Selkirk. The novel follows main character Robinson Crusoe (birth name: Robinson Kreutznaer), the sole survivor of a shipwreck on a remote tropical island. Crusoe is a trader who ran away to sea as a boy. The story is written as if it were Crusoe's biography, beginning with his early years and telling exactly how he ended up alone on an island for twenty-eight years. In fact, Defoe captured this “confessional” style so well that many of the novel's original readers believed that Robinson Crusoe was a real person and the actual author of the book. *Robinson Crusoe* is considered to have launched the literary genre of realistic fiction.

Although it is easy to read the work as such, Defoe did not write *Robinson Crusoe* as mere entertainment. Instead, like many writers, he used the novel to comment on political happenings and personal beliefs. *Robinson Crusoe* was published during The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, a philosophical movement that came about as The Renaissance started to wind down across Europe. (More on this next week!) This movement focused on reason, nature, human happiness, liberty, and freedom. The

novel itself reflects many of these ideas, developing themes of human nature and change. *Robinson Crusoe* criticizes the Spanish colonization of the Americas, discusses ideas of economic individualism, and takes a stance on morality. In addition, Defoe's novel can be seen as a spiritual autobiography, the author portraying his personal spiritual growth in the lead character.

**Assignment 4A:** Read the attached excerpts from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

**Assignment 4B:** In Chapter IV of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe demonstrates one prominent idea of the Age of Enlightenment: that of reason. After having been shipwrecked, Crusoe makes a list of the evil and good of his situation, showing both faith and his ability to use reason in the midst of an unthinkable situation. Make your own evil and good list, following the example in Chapter IV and shown again below. Your list should include at least five (5) evils and their good. Use complete sentences to express each evil and good.

**Example –**

Evil	Good
I am cast upon a horrible, desolate island, void of all hope of recovery.	But I am alive; and not drowned, as all my ship's company were.
I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world, to be miserable.	But I am singled out, too, from all the ship's crew, to be spared from death; and He that miraculously saved me from death can deliver me from this condition.
I am divided from mankind—a solitaire; one banished from human society.	But I am not starved, and perishing on a barren place, affording no sustenance.
I have no clothes to cover me.	But I am in a hot climate, where, if I had clothes, I could hardly wear them.
I am without any defence, or means to resist any violence of man or beast.	But I am cast on an island where I see no wild beasts to hurt me, as I saw on the coast of Africa; and what if I had been shipwrecked there?
I have no soul to speak to or relieve me.	But God wonderfully sent the ship in near enough to the shore, that I have got out as many necessary things as will either supply my wants or enable me to supply myself, even as long as I live.

**Assignment 4C:** *Robinson Crusoe* is an epistolary novel, meaning that it is written as a series of documents, in this case, like a series of diary entries over the course of Crusoe's isolation on the island.

This week, keep a journal just like Robinson Crusoe, using Chapter V as an example to guide you. Your assignment should include at least five days and reference major events that occurred. Each entry should be 4+ sentences and should use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Try to write in a similar way to Crusoe. You should list the events but also attempt to analyze why each event was important and how you reacted to each event. Like Crusoe, try to reflect upon your emotions and ideas in the midst of your weekly events.