

TEXT	ROBINSON CRUSOE (1719)
AUTHOR	Daniel Defoe
THEMES	Survival (unit 4), taking care of yourself (unit 6)
VOCABULARY	Features of a desert island
WRITING	Students write a journal narrative.
SPEAKING	Students agree on a ranking system.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The novel *Robinson Crusoe* was an immediate success and remains one of the most popular stories written in English. Part of its appeal is the directness and simplicity of a gripping tale of someone trying to survive against the odds. But the book works on several levels – didactic, epistolary, confessional – it is a great example of literature that has something for everyone – even detractors who identify the Euro-centric, colonialist and racist attitudes Crusoe embodies. As well as being made into films and TV series, *Robinson Crusoe* has inspired spin-offs such as *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Lost in Space* and *Cast Away*. *Robinson Crusoe* can be seen as the first English novel and its realistic style and first-person narrative established a model for subsequent writers to follow.

WARMER

Find a trailer of a *Robinson Crusoe* movie (the 1997 Pierce Brosnan version, for example) and watch it with the sound turned off. Ask students to describe what they see and imagine the story. A variation would be to use the Tom Hanks film *Cast Away* in the same way. As you are doing the Warmer, look for opportunities to pre-teach/revise some key vocabulary students will probably need when doing the discussion questions, reading and writing activities later in the worksheet, such as: *shipwreck*, *rowing boat*, *survive*, *survivor*, *hunt*, *desert island*, for example. (Point out that the latter means a lonely island in a tropical climate.)

ABOUT YOU

Use the questions to focus on the topics of islands, shipwrecks and survival. Students may well have seen or know about reality series where people have to survive on an island, so this could prove a useful point of reference.

Go through the introduction and ask students what they think Crusoe's priorities are during his first days on the island.

1 You could read the text out loud using background sound effects. Find a 'desert island' ambient track on the internet and play it as you speak. Tell the students to close their eyes and listen to the sounds for a minute before you start reading. They try to imagine the scene.

After reading, students look at the text together and discuss what information Crusoe looks for – for example: *Where is he? Is the island inhabited? What is a good place to make camp?*

2

Possible answers

As these are mostly speculation questions, help students by eliciting ideas and suggestions. You will probably have to help with vocabulary, so it could be a good idea to write any new words up on the board as you monitor the discussion. Students can discuss the questions in pairs, but then open up the discussion for the whole class.

- Elicit ideas about why it might be a good thing if there are people on the island – food, a place to stay, company, etc., but also how he could be in danger – perhaps they are dangerous, violent people who don't like strangers. But if there's nobody there, he will have to make his own home and find his own food.
- Ask students if they would do the same things in the same order and why – or is there something else they think Crusoe should have on his list?
- Possible suggestions could be there was no fresh water, the danger of the sea itself, being too visible to other people, not having defence, the fact sand gets wet and it could be difficult to make a house. Ask students where they would make a camp in this situation.
- Sketch the situation – say Crusoe makes a home and finds food – he can survive. But what other problems might he have? Suggestions could include: being lonely, getting bored, getting sick (there's no doctor or dentist), going a bit crazy ...

VOCABULARY

3

Answers

- 1 barren 2 make 3 uninhabited 4 spot (*beasts* not used)

4

Answers

- There were wild beasts on the island.
- They drank fresh water from the river.
- The museum has a collection of old pistols.
- We found shelter in a small cave.

WRITING

5

The activity involves expanding notes and adding ideas to create a narrative. It can be done individually or in groups. The advantage of groups is to get more ideas. Remind the students of the situation. Ask them to imagine the things Crusoe sees, what he can smell, what he feels, what he touches. They should make notes of their ideas but tell them they don't need to write sentences. Give them about 5–10 minutes to do this. With the whole class, put the first sentence on the board: *Very hot. Looked for food – found some fruit.*

Ask for ideas about how this could be expanded using the notes they have made and add suggestions, for example: *It was really hot, the sun was burning, I wanted water and food so I started looking for fruit – coconuts, or bananas or maybe animals I could hunt and I found some bananas but had to climb a tree to get them.* With your sample sentence point out that they have added ideas and vocabulary and the grammar necessary to describe them. Students continue and do the same with the rest of the notes.

MIXED ABILITY

Weaker students can follow the order of the notes, expanding them to make longer sentences. Explain to stronger students that you want them to start their narrative at the point where he explored another part of the island and saw wild beasts, then go back to the beginning (*very hot to ate some biscuits*) then back to the notes from *came back to heard noises*.

In this way, students need to create more complex time narratives. It might be a good idea for pairs to work on this and share ideas.

SPEAKING

- 6 Check the vocabulary and explain what the items are or show pictures of them. Ideally, prepare a set of pictures of the objects for each group. Apart from helping with vocabulary, the visual image makes the activity more realistic. Make sure students rank the items alone before they start talking about them. This is to avoid their being influenced by other's opinions at this stage. Once they have ranked the items, create groups of five or six students. Explain that they now need to agree on a group ranking and that they should do this by explaining their choices and reaching a consensus. You could do this by setting a time limit for each item (two minutes each, for example). This makes the groups work at the same speed and avoids having one group finish quickly whilst another is still discussing the first item. Monitor the activity, encouraging students to explain their choices, as strong personalities will sometimes dominate the discussion and impose their choices.

MIXED ABILITY

Stronger students can be tasked with taking notes during the discussion and then summarise the final ranking for the whole class, explaining the reasons their group's choices were made.