

While he is no flashy hero or grand epic adventurer, Robinson Crusoe displays character traits that have won him the approval of generations of readers. His perseverance in spending months making a canoe, and in practicing pottery making until he gets it right, is praiseworthy. Additionally, his resourcefulness in building a home, dairy, grape arbor, country house, and goat stable from practically nothing is clearly remarkable. Crusoe's business instincts are just as considerable as his survival instincts: he manages to make a fortune in Brazil despite a twenty-eight-year absence and even leaves his island with a nice collection of gold. Moreover, Crusoe is never interested in portraying himself as a hero in his own narration. But Crusoe's admirable qualities must be weighed against the flaws in his character. Crusoe seems incapable of deep feelings, as shown by his cold account of leaving his family—he worries about the religious consequences of disobeying his father, but never displays any emotion about leaving. Moreover, as an individual personality, Crusoe is rather dull. His precise and deadpan style of narration works well for recounting the process of canoe building, but it tends to drain the excitement from events that should be thrilling. Finally, while not boasting of heroism, Crusoe is nonetheless very interested in possessions, power, and prestige. When he first calls himself king of the island it seems jocund, but when he describes the Spaniard as his subject we must take his royal delusion seriously, since it seems he really does consider himself king. His teaching Friday to call him "Master," even before teaching him the words for "yes" or "no," seems obnoxious even under the racist standards of the day, as if Crusoe needs to hear the ego-boosting word spoken as soon as possible. Overall, Crusoe's virtues tend to be private: his industry, resourcefulness, and solitary courage make him an exemplary individual. But his vices are social, and his urge to subjugate others is highly objectionable. In bringing both sides together into one complex character, Defoe gives us a fascinating glimpse into the successes, failures, and contradictions of modern man.