English writer, pamphleteer and journalist, he is the founder of the English novel with his *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and other works. A prolific and versatile writer, he wrote more than 500 books, pamphlets and journals on crime, politics, marriage, psychology, religion and the supernatural.
1. D. Defoe’s LIFE & WORKS.

2. ROBINSON CRUSOE a realistic novel.

3. INTERPRETATIONS of the novel.

4. CURIOSITIES & LEGACY.
1. D. Defoe’s
LIFE & WORKS.
1659-1661: Daniel “Foe” (his original name) was probably born in London – in his early life he experienced first-hand some of the most unusual occurrences in English history...

- in 1665 over 70,000 were killed by the *Great Plague*;
- in 1666 the *Great Fire* hit his neighbourhood hard, leaving only his and two other homes standing in the area;
- in 1667 a Dutch fleet sailed up the Medway via the River Thames and attacked Chatham (Second Anglo-Dutch War).

1680: he entered the world of business as a merchant, dealing in general woollen goods and wine.
DANIEL DEFOE

• **1692**: he was arrested for debts (at times due to dishonest financial dealings), then released, and probably travelled in Europe and Scotland till **1695**, when he was back in England using the name *Defoe* in order to sound more gentlemanly. Two years later he began his political and pamphleteering activities.

• **1703** (*3rd* July): he was arrested again and placed in a *pillory* for 3 days due to his widely misunderstood pamphlet *The Shortest Way with Dissenters* in favour of religious tolerance.

People threw flowers at him, not the customary harmful and noxious objects! Sent to Newgate Prison he was soon released.
1703: in *The Storm* he collected the accounts of people who, like himself, had witnessed the *Great Storm*, the only hurricane ever to have made it over the Atlantic Ocean to the British Isles at full strength.

The tempest caused severe damage to London and Bristol, uprooted millions of trees and killed over 8,000 people, mostly at sea.

1703-1713: in his *Review*, a triweekly periodical, he expressed his opinion on current political and economic topics.

1719-22: he published *Robinson Crusoe* and *Captain Singleton* (1720), followed by *Colonel Jack* and *Moll Flanders* (1722), whose lead characters are rogues and criminals!
DANIEL DEFOE

- **1722**: he published *A Journal of the Plague Year*, a complex historical novel often read as if it were non-fiction for his account of the *Great Plague* of London, based on the memories of his uncle Henry Foe.

- **1724**: his final novel *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* was published.

- **1731**: he died in London, probably while in hiding from his creditors. He was interred in Bunhill Fields, City Road, London, where his grave can still be visited.
2. ROBINSON CRUSOE
a realistic novel.
THE
LIFE
AND
STRANGE SURPRIZING
ADVENTURES
OF
ROBINSON Crusoe,
Of Tork, Mariner:
Who lived Eight and Twenty Years,
all alone in an uninhabited Island on the
Coast of America, near the Mouth of
the Great River of Oroonoque;
Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, where-
in all the Men perished but himself.
WITH
An Account how he was at last as strangely deliv-
er'd by Pyrates.
Written by Himself.

LONDON:
Printed for W. Taylor at the Ship in Pater-Noster-
Row. MDCCXIX;
The novel is a **fictional autobiography** of the title character, a **castaway** who spends **28 years on a remote tropical island** near Trinidad, encountering cannibals, captives, and mutineers before being rescued.

It was probably inspired by the real story of a Scottish privateer and Royal Navy officer, Alexander Selkirk, who spent four years and four months as a castaway on the Pacific island of Más a Tierra in Chile (named **Robinson Crusoe Island** in 1966).

Robinson proves himself to be the hero of Defoe’s time, a self-made man, resourceful and self-confident, practical-minded and determined, who trusts in God and in Providence.
The book was published on 25\textsuperscript{th} April 1719:
- in 8 months it had run through four editions;
- within years, it had reached an audience as wide as any book ever written in English!!

By the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, no book in the history of Western literature had more editions, spin-offs and translations (even into languages such as Inuit, Coptic and Maltese), with more than 700 such alternative versions, including children’s versions with mainly pictures and no text.

The term “\textit{Robinsonade}” was coined to describe the genre of stories similar to \textit{Robinson Crusoe}.
3. INTERPRETATIONS of the novel.
According to James Joyce Robinson is “the true prototype of the British colonist. ... The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe: the manly independence, the unconscious cruelty, the persistence, the slow yet efficient intelligence, the sexual apathy, the calculating taciturnity”.

He attempts to replicate his society through the use of European technology, agriculture and even a rudimentary political hierarchy. He often refers to himself as the “king” of the island and at the end of the novel the island is referred to as a “colony”.

The master-servant relationship between Crusoe and Friday can be seen in terms of cultural imperialism:
- Crusoe, the “Enlightened” European
- Friday, the “savage” in need of redemption from barbarity.
In his 1966 essay, the literary critic Jeffrey W. Hunter speaks of Robinson not as a hero but as an everyman who begins as a wanderer, aimless on a sea he doesn’t understand, and ends as a pilgrim, crossing a final mountain to enter the promised land.

The book tells the story of how Robinson becomes closer to God, not through listening to sermons in a church but through spending time alone with only a Bible to read.

A leitmotif of the novel is the notion of Providence: Crusoe often feels guided by a divinely ordained fate, thus explaining his robust optimism in the face of apparent hopelessness. Defoe also foregrounds this theme by arranging highly significant events in the novel to occur on Crusoe’s birthday.
Karl Marx analysed Crusoe in his classic work *Das Kapital*: in Marxist terms, Crusoe’s experiences on the island represent the inherent economic value of labour over capital. Crusoe frequently observes that the money he salvaged from the ship is worthless on the island, especially when compared to his tools.

For the literary critic Angus Ross, instead, Defoe’s point is that money has no intrinsic value and is only valuable insofar as it can be used in trade. There is also a notable correlation between Crusoe’s spiritual and financial development, possibly signifying Defoe’s belief in the Protestant work ethic.
4. CURIOSITIES & LEGACY.
A CURIOSITY: about PIRATES!

- Defoe was fascinated by pirates and their stories: he is believed to have published *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the most notorious Pyrates* (1724) which contains biographies of contemporary pirates.

- Influential in shaping popular conceptions of pirates, it is the prime source for the biographies of many well known pirates such as the infamous English pirate Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard and Calico Jack.

- It introduced many features which later became common in pirate literature, such as pirates with missing legs or eyes, the myth of pirates burying treasure etc.
LEGACY

• At the age of 59 Defoe embarked on what was virtually a new career, producing in *Robinson Crusoe* the first of a remarkable series of novels and other fictional writings that resulted in his being called the father of the English novel.

• In his works
  - the characters are middle-class people with real names;
  - the setting is realistic, both outside and inside;
  - the plot revolves around everyday adventure of real people;
  - the form makes use of everyday language;
  - the readers are middle-class people who enjoy the depiction of their own world.

• These features would characterise the MODERN NOVEL.