Robinson Crusoe: a self-made man



A self-made man is anyone who is not born into privilege and wealth and yet manages to achieve great personal success in life by using his intelligence and skills. Thanks to his willpower he can overcome all the obstacles he comes across and become the master of his own destiny.

■ Origins of the expression

The phrase was coined by a member of the US Senate in the 19th century to describe manufacturers who had started their business relying only on their own initiative and labour. Over time, the idea was associated with the American Dream, the belief that through hard work and perseverance anyone can become financially successful and improve their position in society. These ideals are traditional in American society: the Pilgrim Fathers who



established the first British colony were Puritans who believed that only hard work and discipline could ensure them God's support and, consequently, material wealth and spiritual salvation.

■ Robinson Crusoe (1719)

The hero of Daniel Defoe's most successful novel best represents the ideal of the self-made man. The story is narrated in the form of a diary and follows the adventures of his protagonist Robinson Crusoe who decides to try his fortune at sea. After several misadventures, he starts his own sugar plantation in Brazil, but, during an expedition, his ship is hit by a hurricane,

to give up: arrendersi to rely (on): fare affidamento (su) reward: ricompensa willpower: forza di volontà and he finds himself on an uninhabited island. He does not give up and starts to build a new life for himself on the island. His success in fighting for survival leads him to consider the island as his own property. This belief also emerges from his relationship with Friday, a man Crusoe rescues



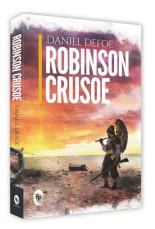
from cannibals. Rather than a friend, Crusoe considers Friday a 'savage' he has to civilise and, as a typical coloniser, imposes on him his own language, culture and religion. After 28 years on the island, Crusoe manages to go back to England and finds out that his plantation in Brazil has made him a rich man: a fair reward for his perseverance in the face of difficulties.

■ The author

Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) studied to become a church minister but decided to become a merchant instead. His business was not successful, however: he went bankrupt and was arrested. In the last years of the century, he started his literary career as a journalist writing articles about issues of the time. Due to his political ideas as well as for his debts, Defoe faced imprisonment several times. He only started publishing novels when he was sixty years old, but, despite their success, Defoe died tormented by his creditors in 1731 in London.



- PAIR WORK Complete the sentences. Then formulate the appropriate question for each one.
 - **1.** The main qualities of a "self-made man" are...
 - **2.** Both the ideal of the self-made man and of the American Dream are based on the principles of...
 - 3. The Puritans thought that God would favour them only if...
 - 4. Robinson Crusoe represents...
 - **5.** In order to survive, Robinson Crusoe starts ...
 - **6.** Crusoe can be seen as a coloniser because he...



Fill in the gaps transforming the word in brackets into a suitable form (noun, verb, adjective).

Robinson Crusoe: the Prototype of the English	a "thing-name", showing the
Coloniser	7(dehumanise) of ethnic
Robinson Crusoe 1	people by the British people, teaches him his own
(representation) a prototype of a culture,	religion 'Christianity', his English language to say
a religion and an ideology. He is the true	'master', 'yes', and 'no'. The ethnic groups of that
Englishman who wants to expand the	island are shown as barbaric and savages. The
English territory and its 2.	relationship of Robinson and his servant Friday
(autonomous). He stands for the English	serves as an 8 (illustrate) of
3(empire), capitalism and	an allegory for English imperialist who imposed
more specifically colonialism. Robinson leaves	his own so-called high culture upon others:
England in search of fortune, goes to Brazil and	Robinson stands as coloniser and Friday is the
owns a plantation, then he wants to expand	symbol of the colonised. Robinson praises himself
his business, just like any 4	for 9. (conversion) the savages
(England) colonist. So, he sails to Africa to get	into civilised people. Robinson cannot see that
slaves who would work for him in his plantation.	the relationship "Robinson-Friday" was "master
The desert island becomes his	and servant", and not "father and son". "Master"
5. (imperial): he kills the	Robinson represents the 10.
savages, proving that he is the true Englishman	(oppression), discriminatory colonist and Friday
who would do anything to 6.	stands for the oppressed, identity-less slave.
(defence) his empire. As a coloniser he saves	Adapted from: https://www.bachelorandmaster.com/
Friday, does not ask the boy's name, but gives him	britishandamericanfiction/robinson-crusoe-prototype-of- english-colonizer.html

GROUP WORK Search the web and find other examples of self-made men in the real world or literature. Share your findings with your class.