**Quest**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quest>

In [mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythology) and [literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature), a **quest**, a [journey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travel) towards a goal, serves as a [plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plot_(narrative)) device and (frequently) as a symbol. Quests appear in the folklore of every nation[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quest#cite_note-1) and also figure prominently in non-national cultures. In [literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature), the objects of quests require great exertion on the part of the [hero](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero), and the overcoming of many obstacles, typically including much travel. The aspect of travel also allows the storyteller to showcase exotic locations and cultures (an objective of the narrator, not of the character).[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quest#cite_note-2)

The hero normally aims to obtain something or someone by the quest, and with this object to return home.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quest#cite_note-3) The object can be something new, that fulfills a lack in his life, or something that was stolen away from him or someone with authority to dispatch him.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quest#cite_note-4)

Sometimes the hero has no desire to return. Gulliver in Gulliver’s Travels is forced to return to England. A return may, indeed, be impossible.

The quest object may, indeed, function only as a convenient reason for the hero's journey. Such objects are termed [MacGuffins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacGuffin). When a hero is on a quest for several objects that are only a convenient reason for his journey, they are termed plot coupons.

**Historical examples**

An early quest story tells the tale of [Gilgamesh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh), who seeks a secret to eternal life after the death of [Enkidu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enkidu), including the search for an emerald.

Another ancient quest tale, [Homer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer)'s [*Odyssey*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odyssey), tells of [Odysseus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odysseus), whom the gods have cursed to wander and suffer for many years before [Athena](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athena) persuades the [Olympians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve_Olympians) to allow him to return home. Recovering the [Golden Fleece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Fleece) is the object of the travels of [Jason](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jason) and the [Argonauts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argonauts) in the [*Argonautica*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argonautica). [Psyche](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cupid_and_Psyche), having lost Cupid, hunted through the world for him, and was set tasks by Venus, including a descent into the underworld.

**Robinson Crusoe**

**Daniel Defoe** [**http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/crusoe/themes.html**](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/crusoe/themes.html)

Context: Daniel Defoe was born in 1660, in London. As a boy, Daniel witnessed two of the greatest disasters of the seventeenth century: a recurrence of the plague and the Great Fire of London in 1666. These events may have shaped his fascination with catastrophes and survival in his writing. In 1683, Defoe became a traveling hosiery salesman. Visiting Holland, France, and Spain on business, Defoe developed a taste for travel that lasted throughout his life.

Defoe began writing fiction late in life, around the age of sixty. He published his first novel, *Robinson Crusoe,* in 1719, attracting a large middle-class readership. *Robinson Crusoe* was based on the true story of a shipwrecked seaman named Alexander Selkirk and was passed off as history.

**Plot Overview**

Robinson Crusoe is an Englishman from the town of York in the seventeenth century, the youngest son of a merchant of German origin. Encouraged by his father to study law, Crusoe expresses his wish to go to sea instead. His family is against Crusoe going out to sea, and his father explains that it is better to seek a modest, secure life for oneself. Initially, Robinson is committed to obeying his father, but he eventually succumbs to temptation and embarks on a ship bound for London. Crusoe goes on several trips and goes through some success and some danger until one time he ends up shipwrecked off of the coast of Africa. Crusoe soon learns he is the sole survivor of the expedition and seeks shelter and food for himself. He returns to the wreck’s remains twelve times to salvage guns, powder, food, and other items. Onshore, he finds goats he can graze for meat and builds himself a shelter. He erects a cross that he inscribes with the date of his arrival, September 1, 1659, and makes a notch every day in order never to lose track of time. He also keeps a journal of his household activities, noting his attempts to make candles, his lucky discovery of sprouting grain, and his construction of a cellar, among other events. After recovering, Crusoe makes a survey of the area and discovers he is on an island. He finds a pleasant valley abounding in grapes, where he builds a shady retreat. Crusoe begins to feel more optimistic about being on the island, describing himself as its “king.” He trains a pet parrot, takes a goat as a pet, and develops skills in basket weaving, bread making, and pottery. He cuts down an enormous cedar tree and builds a huge canoe from its trunk, but he discovers that he cannot move it to the sea. After building a smaller boat, he rows around the island but nearly perishes when swept away by a powerful current. Reaching shore, he hears his parrot calling his name and is thankful for being saved once again. He spends several years in peace.

One day Crusoe is shocked to discover a man’s footprint on the beach. He first assumes the footprint is the devil’s, then decides it must belong to one of the cannibals said to live in the region. Terrified, he arms himself and remains on the lookout for cannibals. He also builds an underground cellar in which to herd his goats at night and devises a way to cook underground. One evening he hears gunshots, and the next day he is able to see a ship wrecked on his coast. It is empty when he arrives on the scene to investigate. Crusoe once again thanks Providence for having been saved. Soon afterward, Crusoe discovers that the shore has been strewn with human carnage, apparently the remains of a cannibal feast. He is alarmed and continues to be vigilant. Later Crusoe catches sight of thirty cannibals heading for shore with their victims. One of the victims is killed. Another one, waiting to be slaughtered, suddenly breaks free and runs toward Crusoe’s dwelling. Crusoe protects him, killing one of the pursuers and injuring the other, whom the victim finally kills. Well-armed, Crusoe defeats most of the cannibals onshore. The victim vows total submission to Crusoe in gratitude for his liberation. Crusoe names him Friday, to commemorate the day on which his life was saved, and takes him as his servant.

Finding Friday cheerful and intelligent, Crusoe teaches him some English words and some elementary Christian concepts. Friday, in turn, explains that the cannibals are divided into distinct nations and that they only eat their enemies.

On December 19, 1686, Crusoe boards the ship to return to England. There, he finds his family is deceased except for two sisters. He marries, and his wife dies. Crusoe finally departs for the East Indies as a trader in 1694. He revisits his island, finding that the Spaniards are governing it well and that it has become a prosperous colony.

**Characters:**

**Robinson Crusoe**

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. The Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau applauded Crusoe’s do-it-yourself independence, and in his book on education, *Emile,* he recommends that children be taught to imitate Crusoe’s hands-on approach to life. Moreover, Crusoe is never interested in portraying himself as a hero in his own narration. He does not boast of his courage in quelling the mutiny, and he is always ready to admit unheroic feelings of fear or panic, as when he finds the footprint on the beach. Crusoe prefers to depict himself as an ordinary sensible man, never as an exceptional hero.

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. Though he is generous toward people, as when he gives gifts to his sisters and the captain, Crusoe reveals very little tender or sincere affection in his dealings with them. When Crusoe tells us that he has gotten married and that his wife has died all within the same sentence, his indifference to her seems almost cruel.

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. 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.

**Friday**

Probably the first nonwhite character to be given a realistic, individualized, and humane portrayal in the English novel, Friday has a huge literary and cultural importance. If Crusoe represents the first colonial mind in fiction, then Friday represents not just a Caribbean tribesman, but all the natives of America, Asia, and Africa who would later be oppressed in the age of European imperialism. At the moment when Crusoe teaches Friday to call him “Master” Friday becomes an enduring political symbol of racial injustice in a modern world critical of imperialist expansion. Recent rewritings of the Crusoe story, like J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and Michel Tournier’s *Friday,* emphasize the sad consequences of Crusoe’s failure to understand Friday and suggest how the tale might be told very differently from the native’s perspective.

Aside from his importance to our culture, Friday is a key figure within the context of the novel. In many ways he is the most vibrant character in *Robinson Crusoe,* much more charismatic and colorful than his master. Indeed, Defoe at times underscores the contrast between Crusoe’s and Friday’s personalities, as when Friday, in his joyful reunion with his father, exhibits far more emotion toward his family than Crusoe. Whereas Crusoe never mentions missing his family or dreams about the happiness of seeing them again, Friday jumps and sings for joy when he meets his father, and this emotional display makes us see what is missing from Crusoe’s stodgy heart. Friday’s expression of loyalty in asking Crusoe to kill him rather than leave him is more heartfelt than anything Crusoe ever says or does. Friday’s sincere questions to Crusoe about the devil, which Crusoe answers only indirectly and hesitantly, leave us wondering whether Crusoe’s knowledge of Christianity is superficial and sketchy in contrast to Friday’s full understanding of his own god Benamuckee. In short, Friday’s exuberance and emotional directness often point out the wooden conventionality of Crusoe’s personality.

Despite Friday’s subjugation, however, Crusoe appreciates Friday much more than he would a mere servant. Crusoe does not seem to value intimacy with humans much, but he does say that he loves Friday, which is a remarkable disclosure. It is the only time Crusoe makes such an admission in the novel, since he never expresses love for his parents, brothers, sisters, or even his wife. The mere fact that an Englishman confesses more love for an illiterate Caribbean ex-cannibal than for his own family suggests the appeal of Friday’s personality. Crusoe may bring Friday Christianity and clothing, but Friday brings Crusoe emotional warmth and a vitality of spirit that Crusoe’s own European heart lacks.