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The Swiss Family Robinson

Johann David Wyss · *1812* · *William Henry Giles Kingston translation*

A Swiss pastor, his wife, and their four sons are wrecked on the way to a new land and must make a household on an island. The book is a long lesson in courage, provision, and trust in Providence: a tent, a tree-house, gardens, and a family that will not despair.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

When a family is cast away, what must they do for themselves, and what may they still trust to God, if they are not to become either idle or hopeless?

"if the Lord will, he can save us even from this fearful peril; if not, let us calmly yield our lives into his hand, and think of the joy and blessedness of finding ourselves forever and ever united in that happy home above."

the father · During the wreck, when terror has nearly overpowered the family

The father will not separate trust from work. He tells the boys that God helps those that help themselves, and they ferry stores, build a nest in a tree, plant, hunt, and keep Sunday. The island becomes a school of useful arts and of family loyalty. Kingston's English version is a long, ample retelling: more adventures accrue than in some shorter texts, but the moral center remains provision, courage, and thanksgiving.

KEY CHARACTERS

the father
A Swiss pastor and narrator; he leads by prayer, work, and instruction.

the mother
Practical, sometimes fearful, and the one who proposes the tree "nest"; she keeps the household human.

Fritz
The eldest son, bold in exploration and hunting.

Ernest
Thoughtful, a little indolent at first, useful in knowledge.

Jack
Impulsive and lively, often first into a scrape and a discovery.

Franz
The youngest, who grows up into the island life.

TRUST, AND WORK

> *"if the Lord will, he can save us even from this fearful peril; if not, let us calmly yield our lives into his hand, and think of the joy and blessedness of finding ourselves forever and ever united in that happy home above."*
>
> **the father** · The wreck, Chapter I

> *"You know God helps those that help themselves!"*
>
> **the father** · Chapter I

Grades 6–8

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Wreck

CHAPTER I

A tempest wrecks the ship; the crew flees in the last boat, leaving the family. The father steadies them in prayer and in the work of reaching land.

- The mother is at first overpowered; the father's words about yielding their lives into God's hand revive her courage.
- He also calls them to action: the land is not far off.
- They land with what they can save and give thanks.

> *"You know God helps those that help themselves!"*
>
> **the father** · Chapter I, urging the boys as he goes on deck

02

Stores, a Tent, and a First Sunday

CHAPTERS I–II

They visit the wreck, float out animals and tools, and make a camp. A calendar of Sundays is kept from the day they were wrecked.

- Fritz, Ernest, Jack, and Franz each show a different temper: bold, thoughtful, impulsive, and young.
- A lobster, oysters, and a sucking pig begin the island's larder.
- The father marks Sundays in his almanac so that worship is not lost with the ship.

03

A Nest in a Tree

CHAPTERS III–IV

The mother proposes a safer home. After scouting, they build a house in a great tree, a "nest" above beasts and damp.

- Bridge-building and the carrying of stores are a family labor.
- The tree-house is ingenuity in the service of a household, not a stunt.
- Even comfort is received with thanksgiving, not as a right.

04

The Island Household

THE MIDDLE CHAPTERS

Gardens, livestock, explorations, and new dwellings follow. Dangers come (sharks, wild beasts, storms), and so do discoveries of food and material.

- Each boy is trained in skill and in courage suited to his age.
- The father's teaching mixes natural history, work, and piety.
- They learn that the island will keep them if they will keep at their duty.

05

Years, and a Wider Horizon

THE LATER CHAPTERS

The family grows into a small colony of farms and outposts. Later events (visitors, a chance of return, the sons' futures) test whether the island was only a refuge or a home.

- Thanksgiving and Sunday remain the measure of their time.
- Some of the later adventures are ample in this Kingston telling; they still turn on loyalty and provision.
- The close looks at what a well-ruled household can become, even in exile.

Providence · Work and Provision · Family Loyalty · Courage · Thanksgiving

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–8

1. The hosted text is William Henry Giles Kingston's English version (Project Gutenberg #41659). It is a well-known, substantially expanded retelling of Johann David Wyss, not a word-for-word rendering of the first Swiss edition. Note that on the map and in class.
2. The father's counsel at the wreck is both to yield their lives into God's hand and to work for the land: "God helps those that help themselves."
3. They keep Sundays from the date of the wreck (the father says they were wrecked on the 31st of January in his reckoning).
4. The book is long and episodic; this map follows the household's establishment more closely than every later hunt or outpost.
5. The tone is openly Christian and didactic. That is the book's character, not an extra moral pasted on.

Quotations are verbatim from the William Henry Giles Kingston translation, Project Gutenberg #41659, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-swiss-family-robinson/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.