

# Defoe's Lake District

An 18th century view of mountains

Borrowdale



Fell walking



Derwentwater



Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

# Lake District

Daniel Defoe lived at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century. He wrote Robinson Crusoe in 1719. He was born in London and also travelled widely and wrote about his visit to the mountains of Northern England in about 1726. Here is part of what he wrote of the Pennines and Lake District:



This part of the country seemed very strange to us, after coming out of so rich, populous and fruitful a place, as I have just now described; for here we were, as it were, locked in between the hills on one side high as the clouds, and the sea on the other, and the sea itself seemed desolate and wild, for it was a sea without ships, here being no sea port or place of trade.



Here, among the mountains and full of innumerable high hills, it was not easy for a traveller to judge which was highest. Nor were these hills high and formidable only, but they had a kind of an unhospitable terror in them. Here were no rich pleasant valleys between them, as among the Alps; no lead mines and veins of rich oar, as in the Peak; no coal pits, as in the hills about Halifax, much less gold, as in the Andes, but all barren and wild, of no use or advantage either to man or beast... and this part of the country yields little or nothing at all.

Here we entered Westmoreland [now Cumbria], a country eminent only for being the wildest, most barren and frightful of any that I have passed over in England, or even in Wales it self; the west side, which borders on Cumberland [now Cumbria], is indeed bounded by a chain of almost unpassable mountains, which, in the language of the country, are called Fells.

When we entered at the south part of this county, I began indeed to think of the mountains of Snowden in North Wales, seeing nothing round me, in many places, but unpassable hills, whose tops, covered with snow, seemed to tell us all the pleasant part of England was at an end.





# Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

**a** Write the sentence in which you found the word '**terror**'.

**b** From that sentence, suggest what '**terror**' means.

**c** Write a new sentence using the word '**terror**'.

**d** Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to '**terror**'.

**e** Draw a small picture showing what you think '**terror**' means.



# Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: inhospitable	unfriendly

3

# Summarising

(the gist of the story)

To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

**1** Write a heading for your summary.

**2** Now write the main idea in one sentence.  
e.g. "This story tells us..."

**3** Now add some detail to the main idea by writing more sentences after it.

**Finally,  
can you rewrite your  
summary to make it better?**

- 1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.**
- 2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.**
- 3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.**
- 4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?**

**There is  
nothing wrong  
with rewriting; even  
the best authors  
rewrite their  
work.**



# Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

When he entered southern Cumbria he thought that all the pleasant part of England was at an end.

Defoe lived in an age when nice countryside was land that was farmed or had factories and people.

When Defoe entered Cumbria he thought it was the wildest and most frightful place he had ever seen.

Defoe began his trip towards the Lake District from the coal-mining towns of the Pennines.

Defoe was not used to open countryside of the kind we would treasure today.





# Get to the facts

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the facts of the story.



1 What year did Defoe visit the Lake District?

2 What did he think was good about Halifax?

3 What did he think was good about the Andes?

4 What were the mountains of the Lake District called?

5 What was the name of Cumbria in Defoe's day?





# Whys and wherefores

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.



1 How do we know from his writing that Defoe travelled widely?

2 Do you think that Defoe travelled along the valleys or on the peaks? Explain your reasons.

3 Why did Defoe not like the Cumbrian coast either?

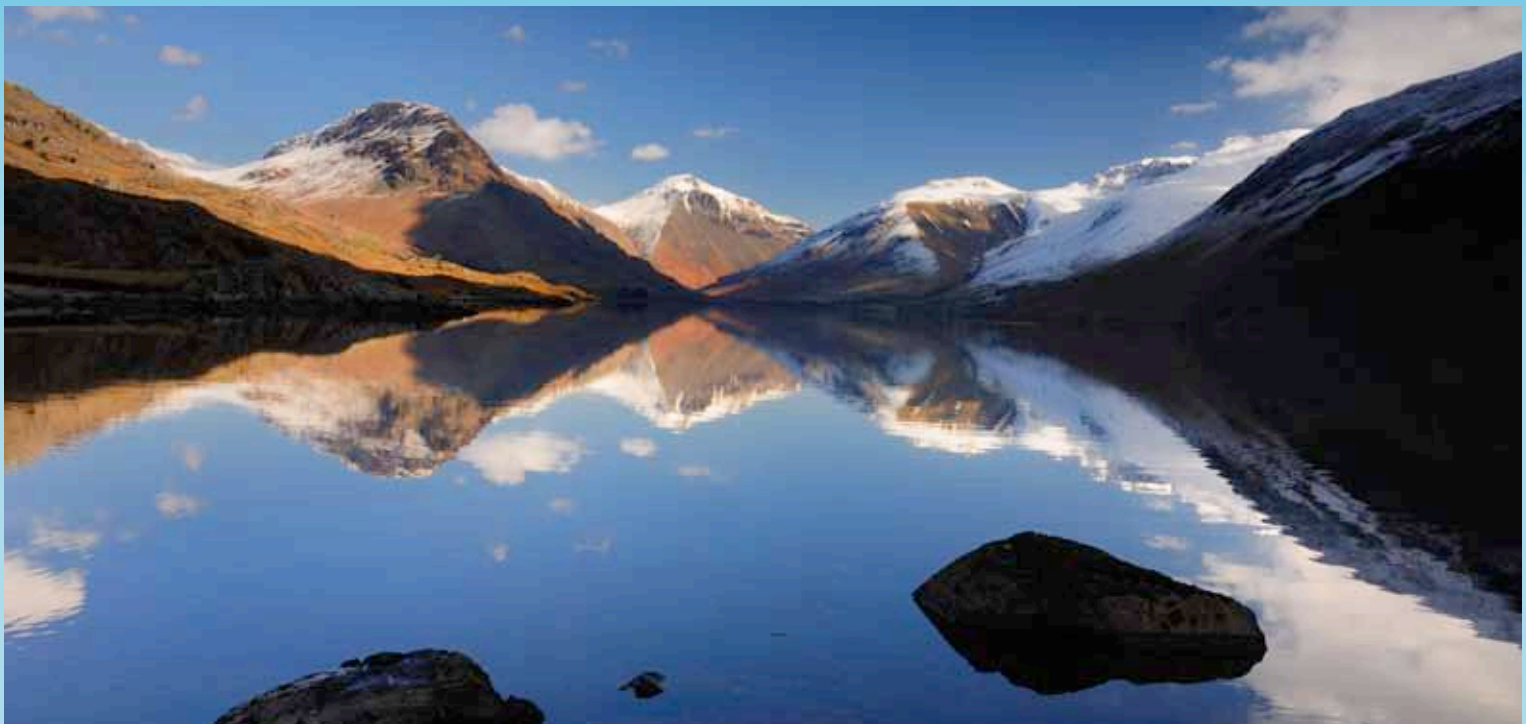
4 Which other British mountains did Defoe not like.? Why was this?



# Opinions matter

Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.

- 1 What kind of land did Defoe like?
- 2 Would you agree with his view of the Lake District? Give your reasons.
- 3 Why do you think people's views of places change over the centuries?
- 4 Do we now think built places are more frightful than natural places?
- 5 Which kind of landscape do you like best? Give your reasons?







# Talking it through

Buttermere

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.



## Discussion topic: Advertising the Lakes

Suppose you had to advertise the Lake District to a group of people who were interested in history. You thought you would tell them about Defoe's visit, and then you read what he had to say. What would you do to make them want to come here?





# Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.



## Fell walking

You are high up in the Lake District, following the fell-top trail. Suddenly you see a bank of cloud coming across the peaks towards you... Now continue the story.

# Daniel Defoe's mountains

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Daniel Defoe