

May 28th

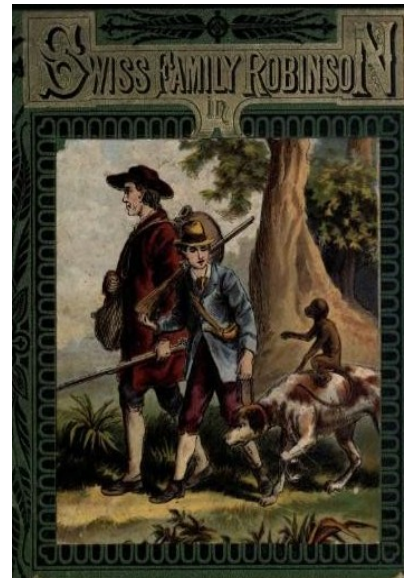
Memory Verse

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:3

Information about today's memory verse can be found in the lesson for 24th May.

Today is the birthday of an author who is very famous for only one book but that book is one of the most popular children's books of all time. The adventure writer Jules Verne loved it so much that he wrote a sequel! Johann Wyss (1743-1818) who wrote *Swiss Family Robinson* was born on 28th May. Despite being written in German, the story in its most popular form is an English translation of a French version!



Every child should read this delightful tale of a shipwrecked Swiss pastor and his family.¹ It is also a delightful tale to read aloud. Below I have written in story form how the book came to be written in the first place.²

Pastor Johann Wyss came in from the cold of the garden. Winter time was approaching and there was a feeling of snow in the air. Herr³ Wyss was a keen garden enthusiast and he had been checking that everything was well in the little garden attached to the Wyss family house. The Wyss family lived in a respectable part of the city of Bern in Switzerland and although the garden was not large, Herr Wyss liked to experiment with plants from all over the world and they often required his time and attention. He removed his muddy boots, hung up his coat and hat and went into the parlour where his four boys were sitting by the fire with their mother.

Herr Wyss looked round at them as he stood warming himself with his back to the fire. Frau⁴ Wyss was busy with embroidery. Next to her sat little Franz, the youngest boy building a castle with his toy blocks. Fritz was making a model of a sailing boat out of card and scraps of wood. Ernest was reading, or trying to read, for his efforts were sadly hindered by Jack. Jack was trying to train the family dog, Juno, to beg, a procedure that seemed to entail a lot of noise on Jack's part and a lot of bumping about and tail wagging on Juno's.

Franz looked up from his blocks. "Father," he said, "you promised to tell us all a story this evening, can you begin now, please?"

Herr Wyss smiled. "I think I am well enough thawed out now, but what is this story to be about, young Franz?"

"About us, of course," replied Franz, "those are always the best stories."

"Oh no!" interrupted Jack "I wanted an adventure story with a shipwreck, wild animals, storms..."

"Not just before bedtime," pleaded Frau Wyss, "poor Franz will have nightmares!"

Ernest looked up from his book. "Dear Father," he began, "if you are going to tell a story I hope it

1 If you do not have a copy or if you only have a very edited version there is quite a good one here:

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Swiss_Family_Robinson_\(Kingston\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Swiss_Family_Robinson_(Kingston))

2 Adapted from material on the [Mothers' Companion flashdrive](#).

3 German for Mr.

4 German for Mrs.

will not just be made up from one end to the other without any information in it. I am sure you could very usefully tell us about many plants and animals, not just some unlikely adventure.”

Herr Wyss smiled. “I don’t see how I can satisfy you all,” he said, “does Fritz have any ideas?”

Fritz looked up from his model. “I am happy with any story, dear Father,” he said, “but it would be pleasant on such a cold evening to hear about a hot country wouldn’t it?”

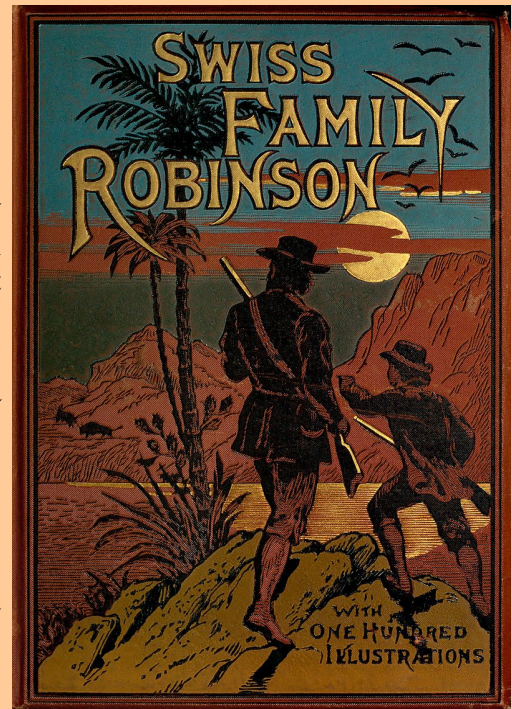
“Hmmm...” mused Herr Wyss, “a hot climate; a shipwreck and wild animals but not so terrifying as to give Franz bad dreams; about us and also to convey useful information... I wonder if I can do it?”

He thought for a moment and then, settling himself in his favourite arm chair with young Franz (the blocks now abandoned) comfortable on his lap, he began:

“For many days we had been tempest-tossed. Six times had the darkness closed over a wild and terrific scene...”

All that winter Herr Wyss kept up the wonderful story. Adventure after adventure befell the shipwrecked Wyss family in the tale, yet each nightly episode ended in homely comfort so that Franz never had nightmares. The imaginary island was wonderfully supplied with an unlikely variety of plants and animals so that the boys learned about creatures that they had never seen and about the uses of strange and exotic plants, quite enough to satisfy Ernest’s interest in natural history. The story never had a proper ending as the children always wanted to hear more about their remarkable imaginary achievements.

The boys remembered those magical winter evenings of story telling for the rest of their lives. When they grew up they wrote down what they could remember of their father’s fireside tales of the wonderful island from their father’s notes. At least two different versions of the story came eventually to be published in book form. For a book, of course, the story had to have a satisfactory ending. Because Herr Wyss never ended the story himself, endings had to be made up for the published forms of the story. The two I have read are very different from each other, but that does not spoil the wonderful story that has fired the imaginations of children for many generations.



Something to do

On May 28th, 1665, Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary: “Thence to see my lady Pen, where my wife and I were shown a fine rarity: of fishes kept in a glass of water, that will live so for ever: and finely marked they are, being foreign.”

It is to be feared that Pepys was wrong. The fish in Lady Pen's aquarium were unlikely to live very long! Keeping “foreign” fish in glass container was only just becoming fashionable at the time and no one had any idea about how to provide the best environment for them. It was not until the 1830s that anyone began to oxygenate the water of an aquarium and in Pepys day the need for water plants

to do this was not understood. Today tropical fish can be kept in a heated aquarium although keeping gold fish is easier as they do not require warm water.



Although goldfish are quite inexpensive, you do have to be careful how you keep them. At first a globe shaped bowl was usual but this is unhealthy for the fish as the surface area of the water is small compared to the volume. This leads to insufficient oxygen being available to the fish as it has to dissolve into the water from the surface of the container. You should ideally have a filter in your tank and this will help aerate the water too.

Don't put too many fish in your tank as this will crowd them and make them unhealthy. A few healthy fish is the best option. Make sure you have some plants. They will help keep the water fresh. A water snail will help to keep the glass clean. Do not over-feed the fish and give them a varied diet. Keep the tank out of direct sunlight. The water in the tank needs changing regularly. You do not need to take out the fish to do this if you are careful and change only a percentage of the water at a time.⁵

If keeping real fish is a bit too hard you can make a good toy aquarium out of a cardboard box such as a shoe box or even a cereal box. Remove the lid of the shoe box and turn it on its side. This is your aquarium tank and the open side is your “glass” viewing window. You can line the inside of the box with blue paper and put brown or yellow on the base. Stiff coloured card can be cut into seaweed or coral shapes. Leave a small amount of card



as a base that can be used to attach the seaweed to the base of your aquarium with glue. Now make some fish. They can be any kind of fish. In a cardboard aquarium the fish don't fight with each other and they don't need different temperatures of water! Cut your fish out of lightweight coloured card. Have an angel fish, a sword fish, a star fish, a sea horse... Make a small hole in each fish near the top and attach a small piece of sewing cotton. Now make holes in the top of your aquarium and thread the pieces of cotton through them. Stick each piece on the top of the aquarium with sellotape. Hang your fish at different heights. You can add real sea shells if you have some but do stick them down with glue.

Finally, when you are satisfied with your watery scene, give your aquarium a realistic finish. Cut a piece of transparent wrapping paper such as cellophane larger than the front of your aquarium. Lay down the box on its flat back. Put the cellophane over the open front. Tape one edge with sellotape. Now tape down the opposite edge. Trim the corners so there is no overlap and then stick down the other two sides. This should give you a good window.

5 More information here: <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-should-i-keep-and-care-for-my-goldfish/>

If you get the chance to visit a big aquarium it is a wonderful experience. Commercial aquariums can provide suitable conditions for tropical salt water fish which are very beautiful. They often have knowledgeable staff who give talks to visitors. Some even have tanks where you can touch certain types of fish or tunnels through which visitors can walk right inside the huge tanks to watch big fish swimming all round and over them! Of course trips to such places are expensive. A cheaper alternative is the kind of garden centre that has an aquarium attached where they sell fish and aquarium supplies. Here well behaved children can enjoy seeing many creatures free of charge.

