

MIND MAP

SUMMARY OF THE STORY

“Deep Water” is an extract taken from the book, ‘Of Men and Mountains’ written by William Douglas. In this extract, the author talks about his fear of water and thereafter, how he finally overcame it.

The writer begins the story by informing us that he had decided to learn swimming at the Y.M.C.A in Yakima when he was ten or eleven years old. The Y.M.C.A pool was not dangerous as it was only two or three feet deep at the shallow end and nine feet deep at the other. The author reveals his first fearful experience in the water when he was barely three or four years old and his father took him to the beach in California. He hung on to his father but still the powerful waves knocked him down and swept over him, leaving him breathless. Terror of the overpowering force of waves was inflicted in his heart.

The second incident happened when he was 11 years old. He was at YMCA pool sitting by the pool side. A big bully boy threw him into the deep end of the pool. The narrator nearly drowned.

These two incidents developed fear of water in the narrator’s mind. He had to work very hard to overcome his deeply ingrained fear of water that he had got infected with at the YMCA pool after the tragic incident. The fear spoilt all his excursions with his friends. Whenever he accompanied his friends to Cascades, Tieton, Warm lake, the fear of water seized him, his legs paralysed and icy horror clutched his heart.

Finally, one October, he decided to learn swimming from an instructor. He practised in a pool five days a week, an hour each day. The instructor put a belt around him and attached a rope to it. He held on to the end of the rope as the author swam across the pool.

The terror returned to the author every time his instructor relaxed his hold on the rope. Gradually, he learnt to exhale under water and then raise his nose and inhale. Eventually, the fear of putting his head under water left him and then the instructor taught him to kick with his legs. At first, his legs didn’t work properly, but then bit by bit he could command them. Finally, in April, the instructor was convinced that he could swim the length of the pool. He had created a swimmer.

Despite the approval of his instructor, the author was dubious whether he would still be traumatised when he was alone in the pool. The fear did come back when he tried swimming alone but he fought it by swimming longer. He was still not fully satisfied and decided to go to Wentworth in New Hampshire. He dived off a dock and Triggs island and swam two miles across the lake to Stamp Act Island. Only once he felt the terror return when he was in the middle of the lake. But he paid no heed to it. At his first opportunity, he went up the Tieton to Conrad Meadows, up the Conrad Creek Trail to Medade Glacier and camped in the high meadow by the side of Warm Lake. The next morning, he swam across to the other shore and back. For the first time, he was sure that he had conquered his fear.

This experience gave Douglas great perspectives. He felt that only those who have known terror and conquered it can understand how he felt. He realized that there is peace in death and that the terror is only in the fear of death. He experienced both the feeling of dying and the terror that the fear of death can produce. Now that he had conquered his fear, he felt absolutely free and released.

3. DEEP WATER

by William Orville Douglas

CHARACTER SKETCH: William Douglas

William Douglas had great passion for water. Since childhood he had a mind for swimming but had for aversion for water when a wave swept over and buried him. On the second occasion, at the age of ten or eleven, a big boy tossed him up and threw deep in the pool that created stark fear in his mind.

The terror of water followed him everywhere he went. But he was determined to get rid of his fear and was able to do so through his continuous efforts.

To get rid of it, he made a strong resolve. He decided to overcome his fear through his will. He engaged an instructor who perfected him in swimming. The instructor gave him hundreds of exercises and taught him to inhale and exhale. Then after three months or so, he was able to dive, swim back and across the lake and recede his terror.

Thus, through his efforts, Douglas was able to overcome it. Getting terrible fear and having conquered it, his will to live became intense. He started enjoying every minute of living. His experience and ultimate conquest of his far is a lesson for all the readers.

CHARACTER SKETCH: Instructor

The instructor has no name in the account “Deep water”, but comes across as a man of strong will and determination who plays an instrumental role in making Douglas a confident swimmer. It was due to his efforts that William Douglas was able to overcome his fear. The instructor built a swimmer out of Douglas piece by piece. For three months he held him high on a rope attached to his belt so that he could go back and forth. He also taught him the technique of inhaling and exhaling in water.