

LESSON - 3

THE DEEP WATER

About the author

William Douglas (1898-1980) was born in Maine, Minnesota. After graduating with a Bachelors of Arts in English and Economics, he spent two years teaching high school in Yakima. However, he got tired of this and decided to pursue a legal career. He met Franklin D. Roosevelt at Yale and became an adviser and friend to the President. Douglas was a leading advocate of individual rights. He retired in 1975 with a term lasting thirty-six years and remains the longest-serving Justice in the history of the court. The following excerpt is taken from *Men and Mountains* by William O. Douglas. It reveals how as a young boy William Douglas nearly drowned in a swimming pool. In this essay he talks about his fear of water and thereafter, how he finally overcame it. Notice how the autobiographical part of the selection is used to support his discussion of fear.

CHARACTERS AND PLACES

- Douglas** : Narrator of the story
YMCA Pool : A swimming pool runs by Young Men's Christian Association
Yakima : Yakima is a US city located about 60 miles southeast of Mount Rainier in Washington. It is also a river which has been called treacherous.



BACKGROUND

In this story, Douglas talks about his fear of water and how he finally overcomes it with strong will power, courage, hard work, and firm determination. Once he took courage, the fear vanished. That Shows most of our fears are baseless. Fear creates dangers where there is none. The writer's experiences further confirm the proverbial truth, "Where there is a will, there is away."

INTRODUCTION

Swimming is only one of the numerous hobbies like canoeing, rafting, rock climbing, etc. But it is a tedious exercise. Its popularity can be judged from the fact that it has been included in the Olympics. But water which is the elixir of life is also very dangerous. We all know about the fury of the floods, Tsunamis. When a boat capsizes, only the skilled swimmers survive.

This lesson by Douglas is autobiographical. It gives us a peek into the feelings of a drowning person. He tells us about his harrowing experience when as a young boy; he was tossed into a swimming pool. He was anxious to learn how to swim, but the bitter experience haunted him for several years. Even earlier also he had a horrifying experience. He was with his dad on the sea beach. A huge wave came and buried him under it. He ran out of breath. He decided to master the art of floating on water. But the huge bully gave another push to his fear of water. Long after wards he engaged an instructor who trained him step - by - step to fulfill his desire. But it took him several months to overcome his fear. He learnt, however, a valuable, life-saving lesson that one must try to challenge and overcome the fear itself.

THEME OF THE LESSON

In this essay William O. Douglas talks about his fear of water and how he finally overcomes it by his courage, determination, handwork, strong will power, perseverance and the desire to learn. If these are practiced, we can definitely achieve success in all our endeavors.

MESSAGE OF THE LESSON

In death there is peace. There is terror only in the fear of death. This is the message of the lesson. Roosevelt had said, "All we have to fear is fear itself". All terrors and fears are psychological. We can overcome and conquer it. Only we have to be determined. Douglas conquered the fear of water only by making himself a perfect swimmer.

GIST OF THE LESSON

- William O. Douglas had fear of water since childhood.
- At the age of three or four, he was knocked down and buried by a wave on a beach in California.
- He developed a great aversion to water.
- At the age of ten or eleven he decided to learn to swim with water wings at the Y.M.C.A pool since it was safe at the shallow end.
- A misadventure: While sitting alone and waiting for others to come at the Y.M.C.A pool, a big boy came and threw Douglas into deep end of the pool.
- Douglas swallowed water and went straight down to the bottom of the pool.
- While going down he planned to make a big jump upwards but came up slowly. Tried to shout but could not.
- As he went down the pool second time, he tried to jump upwards but it was a waste of energy.
- Terror held him deeper and deeper.
- During the third trial he sucked water instead of air.
- Light went out and there was no more panic.
- So, he ceased all efforts and he became unconscious.
- He crossed to oblivion.
- When revived he found himself vomiting beside the pool.
- He was in grip of fear of water and it deprived him of the joys of canoeing, boating swimming and fishing.
- Finally, hired an instructor to learn swimming.
- The instructor taught him swimming piece by piece.
- He went to different lakes for trial and found tiny vestiges of fear still gripped him.
- He challenged the fear and swam.
- Swimming up and down the Warm Lake he finally overcame his fear of water.
- He realized that in death there is peace and there is terror only in fear of death.

Answer the following questions in 30 – 40 words.

1. How did Douglas have an aversion to water?

Ans. It was at the age of three or four, Douglas in the company of his father was knocked down and swept over by waves at California beach. Thereafter he feared water.

2. When did the writer join the YMCA pool and why?

Ans. The writer was then ten or twelve years old. He had a childhood fear of water. He wanted to get over this fear. The YMCA had a swimming pool. It offered an opportunity to learn swimming. That's why the writer decided to join it.

3. What did the writer do to learn swimming at the YMCA pool?

Ans. The writer got a new pair of water wings. He tried to gather confidence by looking at the other boys. He would try to paddle with his new water wings. He did two or three times on different days. He began to feel at ease in the water.

4. What did the writer notice when he was sitting alone on the side of the YMCA pool?

Ans. There was no-one else at the pool. The writer was afraid to go in alone. So he just sat on the side of the pool and waited. It was all quiet. The water was still. The tiled bottom was as clean and white as a bathtub.

5. What did the eighteen-year-old boy do to the writer and why?

Ans. The eighteen-year-old boy who was looking a bruise, saw the writer sitting alone on the side of the pool. He cried, "Hi, skinny! How would you like to be ducked?" With this he picked the writer up and tossed him into the pool. However, he later said that he was only fooling.

6. Why was the writer at first not much frightened when he was thrown into the pool?

Ans. The writer went at once to the bottom of the pool. He was frightened, but not much. On the way down, he made a plan. He would hit the bottom and make a big jump. Then he would come to the surface like a cork.

7. How did Douglas feel when all efforts ceased?

Ans. It removed fear. A blackness swept over his brain. It was quiet, peaceful and nothing to be afraid of. It is nice..... to be drowsy..... To float in space and tender arms around like mother's..... now he must go to sleep. The curtain of life fell. He became unconscious.

8. What did the writer remember that he came to himself after the misadventure at the pool?

Ans. He remembered that he was lying on his stomach beside the pool. He was vomiting. The chap who had thrown him in was saying, "But I was only fooling." Someone said. "The kid nearly died."

9. How was the writer affected by his misadventure at the pool?

Ans. It shook the writer badly. After some hours, he was able to walk back home. He was feeling very weak. He was trembling. He shook and cried when he lay on his bed. He could eat nothing that night. A terrible fear filled his heart. He never went back to that pool again.

10. What did the writer finally do to get over his fear of water?

Ans. The writer used every way to overcome his fear of water. Finally, on one October he decided to engage an instructor and learn to swim. He went to a pool and practiced five days a week, an hour each day. In the seventh month he was built a swimmer.

11. What special method did the instructor use to teach the writer to swim?

Ans. The instructor put a belt round the writer. A rope was attached to the belt. It went through a pulley. The pulley ran on an overhead cable. The instructor held on to the end of the rope. Thus the writer went back and forth across the pool.

12. The writer says, "The instructor was finished. But I was not finished." Why?

Ans. The instructor thought he had made a swimmer out of the writer. But the writer was still not finished. He feared that when he was alone in the pool, his old fears would come back to him. So he wanted to try still more in the pool.

13. How did Douglas make sure that he had conquered the old terror?

Ans. The writer visited some of the famous water spots. He swam across them successfully. At last he went to Lake Wentworth in New Hampshire. He swam two miles across the lake. Then he went and camped by the side of the Warm Lake. He swam across to the other shore and back. He shouted with joy. He had conquered his fear of water.

14. What deep conclusion did Douglas draw from his various experiences of swimming?

Ans. During his experiences Douglas had known both the fear of death and the sensation of death. He had come to the conclusion that there is terror only in the fear of death. In death there is peace. Therefore, all one needs to fear is fear itself.

Answer the following questions in 100 words.

1. What was Douglas' fear? How did he overcome that fear?

Ans. When Douglas was three or four years old, he was knocked down by the waves at California beach. The overpowering force of water terrorized him and he developed an aversion for it. The YMCA pool revived unpleasant memories of Douglas' childhood when he was tossed into the pool by a big boy. After this incident Douglas was determined to overcome his fear of water. He engaged an instructor under whose supervision he practiced. The instructor taught him to exhale under water and inhale by raising his nose. This exercise helped Douglas shed

his panic when he went under water. By kicking at the side of the pool Douglas built up his stamina. He spent six months with his instructor and then he decided to be on his own in the pool to ensure that he had fully overcome his fear. When he gained enough confidence he went to lake Wentworth in New Hampshire. Next he swam across Warm Lake confidently practicing different strokes in swimming. In this way his instructor made a swimmer out of Douglas, piece by piece.

2. How did the swimming instructor 'build a swimmer' out of Douglas?

Ans. Douglas was determined to learn swimming to overcome his fear of water. Hence he engaged a professional instructor who well understood the gravity of Douglas' problem and the intensity of the terror that gripped his heart. Instead of teaching him swimming in one go, the instructor built a swimmer out of him bit by bit. First of all, to make Douglas get over his fear of drowning, the instructor put a belt around his waist and attached it securely to a pulley that ran on an overhead cable. For almost three months, he was repeatedly made up go back and forth across the pool. Next he was taught to put his face under water and exhale and also to raise his nose out of water and inhale. Later, for weeks together he was made to kick with his legs at the side of pool. Thus, the methodical proceedings of the instructor built a swimmer out of Douglas inch by inch.

3. What was the 'misadventure' at the YMCA pool that the writer William Douglas speaks about?

Ans. At YMCA pool, a big boy teased William Douglas and tossed him into the pool. Douglas went at once to the bottom. He was frightened but not out of wits. When his first attempt to bounce out of water failed, deep terror gripped him. He summoned all his strength and made a great spring upwards. He opened his eyes and saw nothing but yellow water. He swallowed and choked. With legs paralysed, lungs aching and head throbbing, Douglas was unable to shriek out for help. His very voice got frozen. He went down and down endlessly. He felt the tiles under him. His toes reached out as if to grab them. And then strangely, there was light. His eyes and his nose were out of water. But he started down a third time. He sucked for air and got water. Then all efforts ceased. He relaxed. A blackness swept over his brain. He crossed to oblivion and fell unconsciousness. Later, at some point of time, when he gained consciousness, he found himself lying on his stomach beside the pool, vomiting. This haunting fear followed him wherever he went. He stopped enjoying fishing, canoeing and boating. Finally, he engaged an instructor to train himself to swim.

4. Even after growing up why does Douglas recount his childhood experience of almost having drowned? At a larger level what does this experience teach him?

Ans. Even after attaining adulthood Douglas is not able to forget his brush with almost death. He was about to be drowned as he could not come out of water. He was not even able to shout for help. But he put up a brave front and managed to survive.

The childhood experience had badly affected Douglas. Abnormal childhood experience, both positive and negative, remain with us. Douglas was no different. That being the reason for his recounting all the details. For years the fear had gripped him. But he deserves admiration for his strong determination, his courage and his will to overcome the fear. He finally managed not only to learn swimming but also conquer the fear of water. At a large level he understood that fear of death itself can be extremely scary. Also he understood that he had to take steps to overcome that fear and not brood over it.

5. "All we have to fear is fear itself". Describe Douglas' experiences which led to making of the statement.

Ans. Douglas has experienced both the sensation of dying and terror that the fear of death can cause. Strong will, determination, courage as well as honest labour won over all his terrors and fears. The will to live brushed aside all his fears. In reality all our fears are only psychological, and can be easily won over, if we can control our mind. This realisation makes Douglas resolve to learn swimming by engaging an instructor. This instructor, piece by piece, built Douglas into a swimmer. However, his first step was to drive away Douglas' fear of water, before training him in swimming techniques. When Douglas tried and swam the length of the

pool up and down, small traces of his old terror of water would return. So, he went to Lake Wentworth, dived at Triggs Island and swam two miles across the lake to Stamp Act Island. Finally, he was certain that he had conquered his fear of water.

6. "I crossed to oblivion, and the curtain of life fell." What was the incident which nearly killed Douglas and developed in him a strong aversion to water?

Ans. The incident which nearly killed Douglas occurred when he was ten or eleven years old. He had decided to learn swimming at the YMCA pool, and thus get rid of his fear of water. One morning, when he was alone at the pool, waiting for others, a big bully of a boy tossed him into the deep end of the pool. Though he had planned a strategy to save himself as he went down, his plan did not work. Thrice he struggled hard to come to the surface, but failed each time. He was frightened and got almost drowned in the pool, lost his consciousness and felt that he would die. Though he was ultimately saved, this misadventure developed in him a strong aversion to water.

7. Desire, determination and diligence lead to success. Explain the value of these qualities in the light of Douglas' experience in 'Deep Water'.

Ans. The terror of water followed Douglas wherever he went. To get rid of it, he made a strong determination. He decided to overcome his fear through his will power. He engaged an instructor who would perfect him in swimming. The instructor first helped him drive away his fear, and then gave him many exercises besides teaching him how to exhale and inhale in water.

The practice went on for months together, during which his fear came back to haunt him, but his desire and firm made him persist in his efforts. It was only through sheer determination and diligence that Douglas could not only counter his terror, but also became an expert swimmer.

He swam across and back large distances to ensure that his fear of water did not return. Hence, desire, determination and diligence succeeded in removing his fear of water.

8. What misadventure did Douglas experience at the YMCA swimming pool?

Ans. As the timid Douglas sat alone at the side of the YMCA swimming pool waiting for other people to come, a big boy, probably eighteen years old came there. He asked Douglas whether he would like to be ducked. Saying this, he picked up Douglas and tossed him into the deep end of the pool. Douglas landed inside the pool in a sitting position, swallowed water and went at once to the bottom of the pool. Though Douglas was extremely frightened he had his wits intact so on his way down he started to plan. He decided that when his feet would hit the bottom he would make a big jump, come to the surface, lie flat on it and then paddle to the edge of the pool.

9. Describe the efforts made by Douglas to save himself from drowning in the YMCA swimming pool.

Ans. When his feet hit the bottom of the pool, Douglas summoned up all his strength and made a great spring upwards thinking he would bob to the surface like a cork. But when nothing like that happened, Douglas tried to yell but no sound came out. Now a great force was pulling him under. He was paralysed under water, stiff and rigid with fear. Then in the midst of the terror came a touch of reason that he should remember to jump when he hit the bottom. As soon as he felt the tiles under him he reached out his toes towards them and jumped again with all his strength. Yet again the jump did not make any difference. The water was still around him. Stark terror took an even deeper hold on him and he shook and trembled with fright. He could not move his arms and legs. He tried to call for help but nothing happened. Finally, he ceased all his efforts and decided to relax as blackness swept over his brain.

10. How did Douglas' experience at the YMCA pool affect him and how did he overcome his fear of water?

Ans. Douglas' experience at the YMCA pool had a far reaching effect on him. He never went back to the pool. He feared water. He tried to avoid it whenever he could. And whenever he

went to a pool, the terror that seized him in the pool would come back. His legs would become paralysed. Icy horror would grab his heart. This handicap stayed with Douglas for years. It ruined his fishing trips. He lost the joy of canoeing, boating, and swimming. William Douglas used every way to overcome his fear of water but with little success. It held him firmly in its grip. Finally, one October, he decided to employ an instructor and learn to swim. He went to a pool and practised five days a week, an hour each day. Douglas did succeed in his mission. The instructor made him an expert swimmer.

11. How did Douglas develop an aversion to water?

Ans. Douglas developed an aversion to water in his early childhood. When he was three or four years old, his father took him to a beach in California. The waves knocked him down and swept over him. He was buried in water. He was frightened and perhaps this was the moment his fear of water took root inside his mind. Further, when Douglas was ten or eleven years old, he decided to learn to swim and went to the YMCA pool. Here an incident took place that finally established his aversion to water as a big fear. One day when Douglas was alone at the pool sitting on the edge and waiting for others to come, a big boy threw him into the deep end of the pool.

What followed was a nightmarish experience for him. Douglas tried very hard and applied all his knowledge to come to the surface of the water but to no avail. Somehow he was saved. Thus after this fearful incident, his fear of water got implanted in his heart and mind permanently.

VALUE BASED QUESTIONS

1. The story 'Deep Water' has made you realise that with determination and perseverance one can accomplish the impossible. Write a paragraph in about 100 words on how a positive attitude and courage will aid you to achieve success in life?

Ans. Determination and perseverance is a combination of attributes and abilities that drive people to set goals for themselves and then to take the initiative to achieve these goals. Douglas was able to overcome his fear of water by the values of positive attitude and courage. Initially he was afraid of water but his grit and determination made him get an instructor to train him and overcome his fear. Determination today leads to our success tomorrow. It is that innate quality in our soul, which comes to surface when we face difficult tasks. It is a reflection of our values taught to us by society and circumstances and enables us to overcome all obstacles.

2. Roosevelt said, "All we have to fear is fear itself." Do you agree? Why/why not?

Ans. The quote, "All we have to fear is fear itself", by the American President, Franklin D Roosevelt, it is absolutely true. It is only the fear of consequences which prevents us from taking an action and hampers our progress. William Douglas' fear of drowning makes him develop an aversion to water. Hence, he avoids going near water bodies or indulge in water sports. When he is able to overcome his fear with the help of the instructor, he succeeds. Likewise, there are numerous incidents around us that show how fear cripples the mind of an individual and society, and acts as a barrier to growth.

The other lessons in the textbook also support the view. The bangle makers of Firozabad in 'Lost Spring' fear that the police would put them in jail, so they accept their exploitation, and do not organise themselves into co-operatives. It is only when we are able to overcome our fear, that we can step ahead and progress in life.