

# **A.B.M. College, Golmuri**

## **English Core**

### **I.A. & I.Com.**

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## **Deep Water**

- William Douglas

### **About the Author**

William Orville Douglas (October 16, 1898 – January 19, 1980) was an American jurist and politician who served as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Nominated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Douglas was confirmed at the age of 40, one of the youngest justices appointed to the court. His term, lasting 36 years and 211 days (1939–75), is the longest in the history of the Supreme Court. In 1975 Time magazine called Douglas "the most doctrinaire and committed civil libertarian ever to sit on the court".

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 "Of Men and Mountains" by William O.Douglas. The chapter deals with a young boy William Douglas who nearly drowned in a swimming pool. He talks about the fear of water and how he finally overcame it.

### **Introduction**

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."

## **Summary**

The story, “Deep Waters” tells us how the writer overcame his fear of water and learned swimming with sheer determination and will power. He had developed a terror of water since childhood. When he was three or four years old, the writer had gone to California with his father. One day on the beach, the waves knocked the child down and swept over him. The child was terrified but the father who knew, there was no harm, laughed. The experience bred a permanent fear of water in the child’s sub-conscious mind. Still another incident, more serious, increased his terror. The writer was trying to learn swimming in the Y.M.C.A. swimming pool in Yakima. One day while he was waiting for other boys, a big boy suddenly played a dangerous prank and pushed him into the water. The writer was terribly frightened. He went down nine feet into the water. When he reached the bottom, he jumped upward with all his strength. He came up but very slowly. He tried to catch hold of something like a rope but grasped only at water.

He tried to shout but no sound came out. He went down again. His lungs ached, head throbbed and he grew dizzy. He felt paralyzed with fear. All his limbs were paralyzed. Only the movement of his heart told him that he was alive. Again he tried to jump up. But this time his limbs would not move at all. He looked for ropes, ladders and water wings but all in vain. Then he went down again, the third time. This time all efforts and fear ceased. He was moving towards peaceful death. The writer was in peace.

When he came to consciousness, he found himself lying on the side of the pool with the other boys nearby. The terror that he had experienced in the pool never left him. It haunted him for years and years to come. It spoilt many of his expeditions of canoeing, swimming and fishing. It spoilt his pleasures in Maine Lakes, New Hampshire, Deschutes, Columbia and Bumping Lake etc. But the writer was determined to conquer his terror. He took help of a swimming instructor to learn swimming. The instructor taught him various actions necessary in swimming part by part. He put his face under water and exhaled and inhaled raising it above water. He practiced it for several weeks. He had to kick with his legs a few weeks on the side of the pool. At last he combined all these actions and made the writer swim. He learned swimming but the terror continued. So deep goes our childhood experiences! So fearful is the fear of fear! Whenever he was in

water the terror returned. Hence forward the writer tried to terrorize terror itself. He tried to face the new challenge. When terror came, he confronted it by asking it sarcastically as to what it can really do to him? He plunged into the water as if to defy the fear. Once he took courage the terror vanquished. He faced the challenge deliberately in various places like the Warm Lake. He conquered it at last.

**Gist of the lesson:**

- William O. Douglas had a desire to learn swimming since childhood.
- At the age of three or four, he was knocked down and buried by a wave at 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 was going 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.
- Hired an instructor to learn swimming.
- The instructor taught him swimming piece by piece.
- He went to different lakes to swim 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.

## **Characters & 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.

## **Theme:**

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.

## **SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

### **1. How was YMCA pool safer than the Yakima river?**

**Ans:** YMCA pool was safer because it was 2 or 3 feet deep at the shallow end and while at the other end it was 9 feet deep, the drop was gradual. But the Yakima river was treacherous. There could be high surge anytime in the river.

### **2. How did Douglas develop an aversion to water?**

**Ans:** At the age of three or four, Douglas went to a beach in California with his father. A powerful wave struck him and knocked him down when he was with his father in the surf. This experience terrorized him and the fear stayed even when he grew older.

### **3. What is the ‘misadventure’ that William Douglas speaks about?**

**Ans** The misadventure took place when Douglas went to swim in the Y.M.C.A pool. A big boy about eighteen years old picked him up and tossed him into the deep end. He landed in a sitting position, swallowed water and went at once to the bottom.

### **4. What plans did Douglas make to come to the surface when he was thrown into the pool?**

**Ans:** Douglas was frightened when he was thrown into the water, but he did not lose his wits. He made a plan to come to the surface. He decided that when his feet hit the bottom, he would make a big jump, come to the surface, lie flat on it and paddle to the edge of the pool.

**5. How did the misadventure at YMCA pool affect Douglas?**

**Ans:** Douglas feared water. He never went back to the pool, avoided it whenever he could. The haunting fear of water ruined his fishing trips and deprived him of the joy of canoeing, boating and swimming.

**6. “This experience had a deep meaning for me.” Which experience and why did it have a deep meaning for him?**

**Ans:** The experience that Douglas talks about is the experience of trying and testing himself at different places and thus overcoming his fear of water. It had a deep meaning for him because he had done it after two misadventures in his life and it had given him a lesson of life that any fear can be overcome with determination and perseverance.

**7. What did the author mean by ‘But I was not finished’ after his swimming lessons with the instructor were over?**

**Ans:** The author’s remark meant that he was not sure whether his old terror had left him. He still felt scared and frightened while swimming the length of the pool

**8. ‘I crossed to oblivion and the curtain of life fell’. Why did the author make this remark?**

**Ans:** The author had made three futile attempts to spring up to the surface but as his strength failed and energy exhausted, he gave up and stopped all his efforts. He relaxed and passed into a state of unconsciousness and then there was no fear after that up and down.

**LONG ANSWER**

**TYPE QUESTIONS**

**1. How did the instructor build a swimmer out of Douglas?**

**Ans:** The instructor put a belt around Douglas and attached a rope to the belt which went through a pulley that ran on an overhead cable. He held on to the rope and they went back and forth across the pool for three months, after which his terror of water slackened a bit. Next he taught Douglas to put his face under water and

exhale and raise his nose and inhale Douglas repeated the exercise hundreds of times. Next he held Douglas at the side of the pool had him kick with his legs.

After weeks of practice he could command his legs. Thus piece by piece he built a swimmer out of Douglas and when he had perfected each piece, he put them together into an integrated whole and asked Douglas to swim the length of the pool.

## **2. Why does Douglas as an adult recount a childhood experience of terror and his conquering of it?**

**Ans:** Douglas recounts his childhood experience of terror and his conquering of it because he had two misadventures in life which left a deep impression upon his mind so much so that he never went back to the pool. He feared water and avoided it whenever he could. But even after such a phase in his life he was determined to overcome it and did it with the help of an instructor so it was an achievement for him.

The larger meaning that he draws from this experience is, one should not fear at all and with determination and perseverance any fear can be overcome.

## **3. How does Douglas make clear to the reader the sense of Panic that gripped him as he almost drowned? Describe the details that have made the description vivid.**

**Ans –** Douglas makes it very clear to the sense of the panic that gripped him as he almost drowned by giving the description of his account. He talks about his fear of water as he describes the experiences of emotions and fears when he was thrown into the pool.

Douglas was thrown in a swimming pool by a strong boy. He did not know how to swim. But he decided to jump off the bottom of the pool as soon as he hit it. But he failed in doing so. He was frightened. These nine feet were likely ninety feet. He was suffocating. His lungs were ready to burst. His legs were as if paralyzed. He was getting dizzy. He screamed but only water heard him. The death was before him and then a terror seized him.