

Deep Water



William Douglas

INTRODUCTION

The excerpt “Deep Waters” is taken from ‘Of Men and Mountains’ by William O. Douglas. It is an autobiography where William Douglas talks about his fear of water and how he finally overcomes it. The chapter focuses on the fact that childhood fear must never be treated lightly. If they are not tackled, then they make deep inroads into one’s psychology.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William O. Douglas (16 October 1898 – 19 January 1980) was born in Maine, Minnesota and was raised in Yakima, Washington. He was an American jurist and politician.

SUMMARY

In the story Deep Water, the narrator Douglas talks about his fear of water and how he finally overcomes it with his strong will, courage and determination. He had developed a terror of water since childhood. When he was three years old he went with his father to the California beach. One day the small child had experienced huge waves which knocked him down and swept over him. This had made the child terrified but the father knew that there would be no harm to the child so he laughed at him. This experience left a deep impact in the child’s subconscious mind.

Before the child could overcome with his fear another great misfortune

happened which revived unpleasant memories and increased his terror. The child always had an eagerness to learn swimming, so he joined the YMCA pool in Yakima. When he went there for the first time his childish fear were stirred. But slowly and gradually he gathered confidence. He has started feeling comfortable in the water when an incident happened. One day he reached the pool very early and could not find anyone near the pool. So he waits for the other boys to accompany him by sitting on the side of the pool. Just a few minutes later a group of teenage boys arrives at the YMCA. Seeing a young thin Douglas sitting alone on the side of the pool one of the teenage boys picked up the narrator and threw him in the deep end. The narrator was terribly frightened. By this time he was new to swimming and did not know any swimming skills. He went down nine feet into the pool. When he reached the bottom of the pool he did not lose his wits. He tried all his efforts to come up to the surface of the pool but all his attempts went in vain. He tried to catch hold of something like a rope but grasped only water. Deep down inside the water he tried to call for help but no one came out for help as his voice could not reach out and he kept on sinking. As he was continuously trying to get out of the water his lungs ached, head throbbed and he grew dizzy. He felt paralyzed with fear. All his limbs were paralyzed. Only the heart was beating which made him feel that he was alive. Again he tried to jump up. But this time his limbs would not move at all. Now

he has completely lost all the hopes that he will be taken out from the water and thought that his death is near. He gave up all attempts and stopped trying to come out from the water to save his life. He started feeling drowsy as he was tired struggling with water. When he comes back into his senses he found himself lying on his stomach beside the pool vomiting. He could not believe his eyes that he is alive. Even after reaching home safely he could not forget the terrible experience of YMCA. This dreadful incident followed him for several days. And from that he has decided that he would avoid water and will never go back to the swimming pool.

A few years later he came to know about the water of the Cascades. He wanted to get into it. But he could not forget the past happening and whenever he tries to get into the Cascades the haunting fear of water followed him. This terror from water deprives him of the joy of Canoeing, boating and swimming. Finally he decided to get an instructor who could help him to learn swimming. The narrator has learnt all the basic skills that a swimmer must know when he gets down into the water. The instructor has built a swimmer piece by piece. When the narrator had perfected each piece he put them together into an integrated whole. Douglas remained in training with an instructor for several months. But the narrator took a lot of time to gather confidence to swim alone into the deep water. And finally

he conquered his fear of water due to his firm determination.

WORDS/PHRASES & THEIR CONTEXTUAL MEANINGS

Y.M.C.A. – Young Men's Christian Association

Yakima – a place in Washington, USA

Treacherous – dangerous

Bruiser – a person who is tough and aggressive and enjoys a fight or argument

Skinny – a thin person

Paralysed – incapable of movement

Oblivion – the state of being unaware or unconscious of what is happening around one

Ruined – destroyed

Deprived – to take away

Vestiges – traces

Miniature – small size

Canoes – small boats

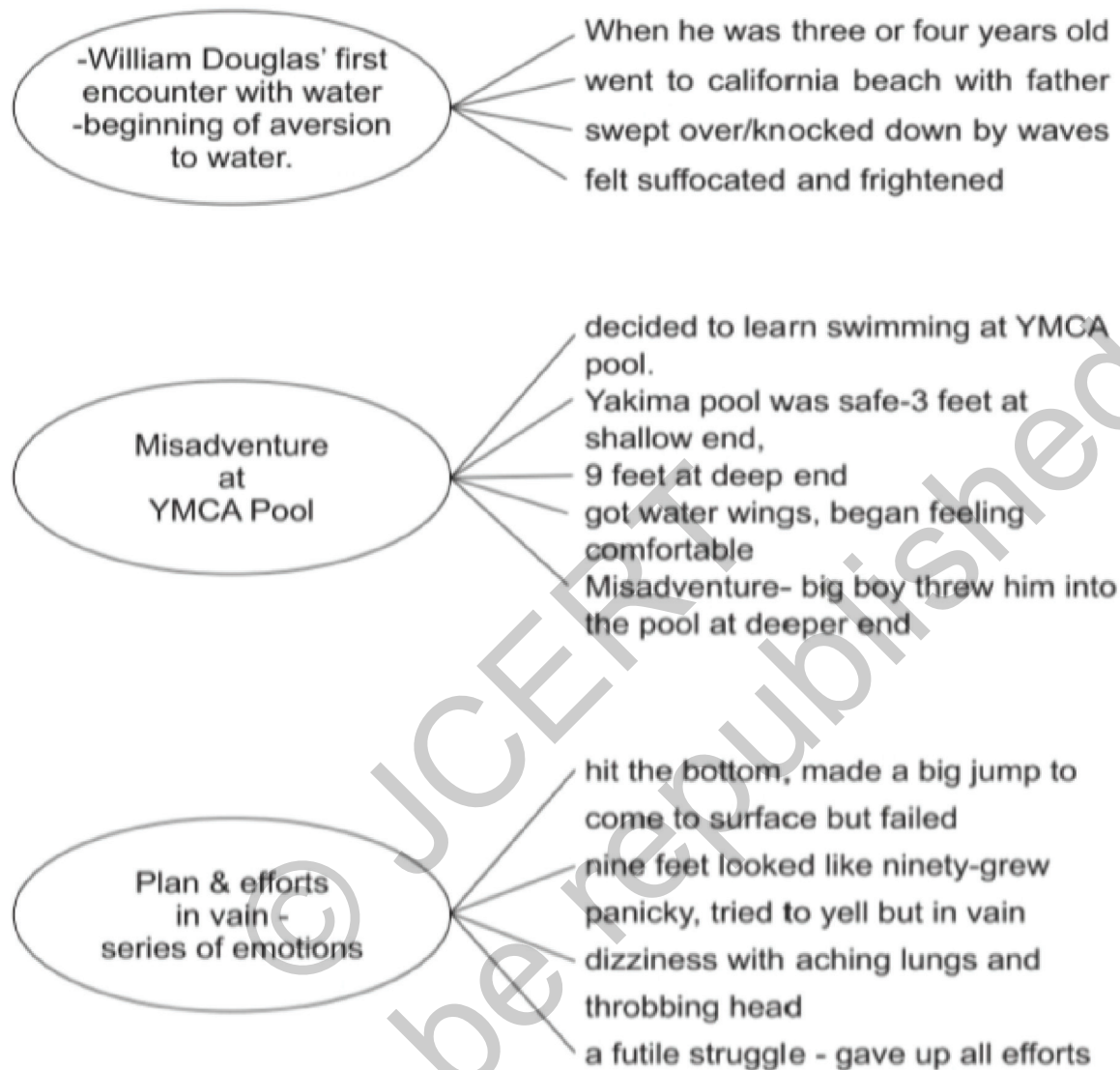
Cascades – waterfall

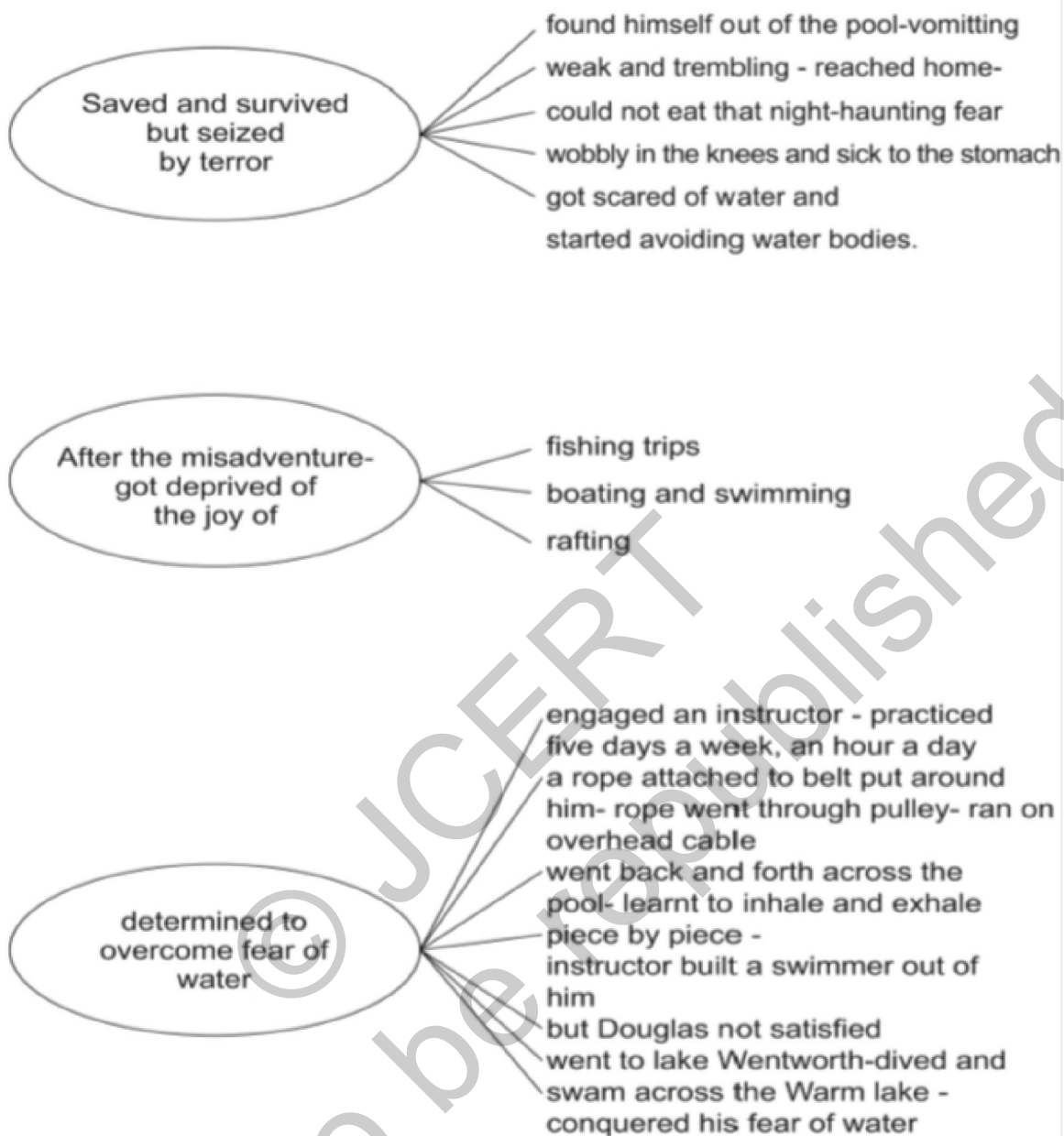
In the midst of – between

Dizzy – faint, unsteady

Strategy – plan of action

Lesson at a Glance





MCQ

Q1- Who is the author of Deep Water?

- A) William Shakespeare
- B) William George Bernard Shaw
- C) William Wordsworth
- D) William Douglas

Ans D

Q2- In which subject has the author graduated?

- A) English and History
- B) English and Science
- C) Science and Social studies
- D) English and Economics

Ans D

Q3- For how many years had the author taught in high school in Yakima?

- A) 2 years
- B) 4 years
- C) 3 years
- D) 5 years

Ans A

Q4- What is the story Deep Water speaking about?

- A) Fear of water and the way to overcome it
- B) Fear of people
- C) Fear of dogs
- D) Fear of swimming

Ans A

Q5- Y.M.C.A stands for?

- A) Young Men's Christian Authority
- B) Young Men's Christopher Association
- C) Young Men's Christian Army
- D) Young Men's Christian Associa

Ans B

Q6- Where is Yakima located?

- A) In Newzealand

- B) In California
- C) In Washington
- D) None of these

Ans C

Q7- Why did he develop a fear of water?

- A) Because of knocking down by waves at a beach
- B) Because of a young boy
- C) Because of instructor
- D) Because of his mother

Ans A

Q8- How did the author learn swimming?

- A) With the help of a rope
- B) With the help of a friend
- C) With the help of his mother
- D) With the help of a swimming instructor

Ans D

Q9- Deep water is an excerpt from which book?

- A) Fear of water
- B) Of Men and Mountains
- C) How to Swim
- D) Fearless

Ans A

Q10- Who threw Douglas into the swimming pool?

- A) A young boy
- B) Instructor
- C) Mother
- D) Watchman

Ans A

Q11- What was the fear in Douglas' mind?

- A) To be defeated
- B) To be pushed
- C) Being drowned
- D) None

Ans C

Q12- How did the instructor make Douglas a good swimmer?

- A) Planning
- B) With the help of ropes
- C) By pushing him into the pool
- D) With the help of ropes and belts

Ans D

Q13- How many times did Douglas try to come to the surface of the pool?

- A) Twice
- B) Once

- C) Five times
- D) Thrice

Ans D

Q14- Why did Douglas hate to walk bare legs?

- A) Ugly looking legs
- B) Fat legs
- C) Because of skin color
- D) Because of skinny legs

Ans D

Q15- "I crossed to oblivion, and the curtain of life fell". What does oblivion mean?

- A) spavilion
- B) changing room
- C) unconsciousness
- D) death

Ans C

Q16- What distance Douglas covered while swimming across the lake Wentworth? A) 4 miles

- B) 3 miles
- C) 5 miles
- D) 2 miles

Ans D

Q17- Where was the lake Wentworth?

- A) In New Hampshire

- B) in Washington
- C) in California
- D) in Washington D.C

Ans A

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Question.1. Which two incidents in Douglas' early life made him scared of water?

Answer. When Douglas was three or four years old, his father took him to a beach in California. There he was knocked down by strong waves, was almost buried under water, and got breathless. Though he hung on to his father, he was quite frightened. Secondly, when Douglas was ten or eleven, a big bully of a boy tossed him into the deep end of the YMCA pool. He could not come to the surface, in spite of all his efforts, and became panicky. These two incidents made Douglas scared of water.

Question.2. What were the series of emotions and fears that Douglas experienced when he was thrown into the pool?

Answer. When Douglas was thrown into the pool, he did not lose heart and planned to push himself up with all his force. He thought that once he came to the surface, he would paddle to the edge of the pool. Thrice, he tried to come to the surface, but unfortunately his strategy did not work and terror gripped him. His lungs were ready to

burst; he was breathless and instead of air, sucked water.

Question.3. How did Douglas make sure that he conquered the old terror?

Answer. After the instructor had trained Douglas in the art of swimming, Douglas was still not sure of himself. He felt tiny vestiges of fear now and then. So, he went to Lake Wentworth and swam. Once when terror returned, he challenged it and did not let it overcome him. Finally, Douglas went to the Warm Lake. There he swam and the fear didn't return to haunt him again.

Question.4. When Douglas realised that he was sinking, how did he plan to save himself?

Answer. When a big boy threw Douglas into the water, he went straight down. He was completely frightened. Still, he did not lose his wits and thought of a strategy to make a big jump when his feet touched the bottom, so that he could reach the surface. He even thought that he would lie flat on the surface and finally paddle to the edge of the pool.

Question5. "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?

Answer. 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. He went down to the bottom and became panicky. Thrice he struggled hard to come to the surface, but failed each time. He almost drowned in the pool. He lost his consciousness and felt that he would die. Though he was ultimately saved, this misadventure developed in him a strong aversion to water.

Question.6. Desire, determination and diligence lead to success. Explain the value of these qualities in the light of Douglas' experience in 'Deep Water.'

Answer. 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." 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 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 will made him persist in his efforts. It was only through sheer determination and diligence that Douglas could not only counter his terror, but also become an expert swimmer. He swam across and back lakes to ensure that his fear of water did not return. He had now completely lost his fear. His desire, determination and diligence succeeded in banishing his fear of water.

Question.7. Why was Douglas determined to get over his fear of water?

Answer. The misadventure of having a near-drowning experience left a deep mark on Douglas' mind. The phobia of water hampered all his joys of enjoying different water sports like fishing, canoeing, boating and swimming. He did not want to live with this handicap and so was determined to overcome his fear of water.