

ENGLISH CORE

(Study material prepared by Ms. Udit Mitra)

## Deep Water

- William O. Douglas

1. From which book is the essay *Deep Water* taken?  
- The essay *Deep Water* is taken from the book *Of Men and Mountains* written by William Douglas. This essay is an **autobiographical** account of his childhood experiences related to the **fear of water**.
2. 'It happened when I was ten or eleven years old'. Explain.  
- At the age of ten or eleven, William Douglas decided to learn to swim. He started to go to the YMCA pool at Yakima (USA). One day an eighteen year old boy threw him into the pool. He almost drowned. After that incident (**misadventure**) he developed an acute fear of water. He overcame that fear after a long struggle.
3. What is the full form of YMCA?  
- Young Men's Christian Association.
4. Why was the Yakima river called treacherous? Who said this to Douglas?  
- Douglas had often been warned by his mother that the Yakima river was **treacherous** (that cannot be trusted) as no one could be sure of its depth everywhere and several people had drowned in it.
5. Where did Douglas go to learn swimming? Was it safe there?  
- The YMCA pool was quite safe for swimming. It was only nine feet deep at the deep end (in the middle) and two to three feet deep at the **shallow** (not deep) end. Its depth increased gradually.
6. What had happened at California?  
- When Douglas was three or four years old, his father had taken him to the beach in California. At the beach a big wave had splashed onto them and for a few moments Douglas was completely submerged in water. It was not anything serious and father had laughed it away. But Douglas developed an **aversion** (strong dislike) to water.
7. What was the **misadventure** (unpleasant and shocking experience) at the YMCA pool?  
- One day Douglas was sitting alone by the pool. A **bruiser** (big muscular boy), probably eighteen years old, came along and saw him. The boy called out, "Hey **Skinny** (thin boy)! How'd you like to be **ducked**?" (to push or throw underwater). Then he picked up Douglas and threw him into the middle of

the pool. Immediately Douglas began to drown. However, after some time, people saved him from drowning. He had a narrow escape from death.

8. On the day of the misadventure, why was Douglas sitting alone by the pool?

- That day, when Douglas went to the pool, no one else was there. He was timid (shy, not confident) about going in water alone so he sat on the side of the pool to wait for others.

9. What did Douglas feel and think inside the pool? What was the **plan**?

- When Douglas was thrown into the pool, he began to drown. He was afraid but he was not **out of his wits** (did not lose control over mind). He planned that when his feet touched the bottom of the pool, he would push himself up, come up to the surface, float on the surface and come to the edge of the pool.

When he jumped up, he did not rise up quickly; he began to float upwards very slowly. When he finally reached the surface, he began to go down for the second time even before his nose and mouth could come out of water. Now he was quite afraid. Still he waited to get to the bottom. Then he jumped up again. He floated up very slowly. He became very afraid. All around him there was only water of a dull yellowish color. He **flailed** (moved his arms and legs) wildly but he could not get any rope or ladder to hold and pull himself up. Fear began to overcome him. He wanted to shout but could not do so inside water. He reached the surface and immediately began to come down the third time. He could no longer hold his breath. He began to suffocate. He could not move his legs. He began to lose consciousness. He felt that he could sleep in water, like sleeping in his mother's lap. All fear seemed to vanish. Then he became unconscious.

People saved him from drowning. After some time, he became conscious and returned home.

10. Why had the big boy thrown Douglas into the pool?

- The big boy just wanted to have fun by throwing little Douglas into the pool. He did not really want to harm Douglas.

11. How did the misadventure affect Douglas?

- Douglas was badly shaken by the misadventure. For some days he could not eat or sleep. He felt weak and could not tolerate physical **exertion** (physical labor). He began to experience a strong fear of water. He could no longer get into water; if he did so, he could not move in water as fear seemed to paralyze him.

12. Why did Douglas decide to overcome the fear of water?

- Douglas decided to overcome the fear of water because this fear did not allow him to enjoy activities like **fishing, swimming, boating and canoeing**. The fear **ruined** (destroyed) the chance to enjoy such activities.

13. How did Douglas overcome the fear of water?

- After trying out various methods, Douglas finally decided to learn swimming to overcome the fear of water. He hired an instructor. He began to practice swimming in a pool five days a week, an hour each day. His instructor put a belt on his waist, tied the belt to a rope, attached the rope to a **pulley** (a wheel-like structure on which a rope rests; the pulley makes it easier to pull something tied to that rope) on an overhead cable and held the other end of the rope at the edge of the pool. Douglas could practice

moving back and forth in water. A few weeks later he practiced breathing in and out of water. Then he began to practice moving his legs in water. Thus, he learnt swimming step by step (“**piece by piece**”) from October to April. Finally, the instructor made him swim across the pool and the instructor’s work was complete. But Douglas wanted to see if he could swim alone in the pool and conquer the old terror. In every attempt, he faced tiny **vestiges** (remaining useless parts) of fear but this fear could no longer stop him. After a few months he went to various lakes and practiced swimming alone. Little by little his fear went on decreasing. At last when he swam across Warm Lake, his fear was totally gone. He had overcome the fear of water.

14. What lesson does the childhood experience of Douglas convey?

- The childhood experience of Douglas proves that **fear is the biggest obstacle in the journey of life. Once we are free from fear, we are free in the real sense and we can fulfill our dreams.** As an adult Douglas could get inspiration from this experience to overcome every kind of fear in life.

15. Who had said, “All we have to fear is fear itself”?

- Franklin D. Roosevelt, the American President, had said the sentence mentioned above. Douglas had become friends with Roosevelt in college.

16. What is the term that denotes an irrational and excessive fear of water?

- **Aquaphobia.**

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Find out and write the meaning of the following words:

Treacherous, shallow, subdued, aversion, surf, misadventure, bruiser, skinny, ducked, flailed, nightmare, strategy, sheer, stark, oblivion, haunting, exertion, vestiges, miniature, residual.