



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR

Class: XII	Department: ENGLISH	2026-27
Question Bank	Topic: DEEP WATER	Note:

Summary

This lesson is taken from William Douglas' autobiographical book "Of Men and Mountains," which deals with the subject of conquering fear. He talks about how he finally overcame his early phobia of the sea. The incident in the swimming pool where a bully nearly drowned him as a youngster and the boyhood experience of being knocked down by the waves at the California beach contributed to a dread of water that haunted him even as an adult. He ultimately made the decision to face his anxiety because he was unable to enjoy swimming, fishing, or boating like others. His further attempts to get over the fear, demonstrate his guts and willpower. Therefore, the message being sent to us is that one must get above their fear.

William Douglas, one of the most popular and powerful American Supreme Court Chief Justices in the history, had an enemy since the childhood. He tried to defeat this enemy in all possible ways. First, he tried to overcome this enemy all by himself and later with the help of a trainer. Though he took years to defeat the enemy, finally Douglas killed his enemy. He was not arrested or sentenced for this murder, not because he himself was the chief justice, but because his murdered enemy was his fear of water!

Important Points:

- William Douglas had great passion for water.
- He longed to learn swimming.
- When he was three or four years, he was taken to a Beach in California.
- While surfing on the shore, a huge wave knocked him. He feared water. That was his childhood fear.
- After some years he longed to swim in the Yakima River but his mother warned against that idea.
- Then he found the YMCA Pool the safest place for swimming. Its deepest end was six feet deep.
- He went to the pool and started swimming by imitating other boys.
- One day, while waiting for the other boys to come, a big boy threw him into the deepest end of the water.
- Douglas had the courage to face the situation. He went down and down with a hope to reach the bottom to make a big leap upward.
- Three times he went down and on the third time, he lost consciousness and almost died!
- Douglas gives a vivid description of death which is peaceful.
- Douglas' 'body' floated on the surface. Someone dragged him out of the water and provided first aid.
- After this incident, Douglas tried to avoid water and water sports as much as possible.

- When he grew up, water began to tempt him again.

Instructor

- In October Douglas got an instructor for swimming.
- In three months, his fear began to fade.
- Bit by bit he shed his fears.
- The instructor engaged his feet and hands into swimming.

Getting Rid of Fear

- After the instructor was done, Douglas started self- training.
- He went to the following rivers and lakes:
 - Lake Wentworth (New Hampshire)
 - Triggs Islands
 - Stamp Act Island
 - Tieton - Conrad Meadows
 - Conrad Creek Trail – Meade Glacier
 - Warm lake
- He conquered the fear of water for ever.

RTC / CBQ

Extract based questions

1. It was only two or three feet deep at the shallow end; and while it was nine feet deep at the other, the drop was gradual. I got a pair of water wings and went to the pool. I hated to walk naked into it and show my skinny legs. But I subdued my pride and did it.

1. The author subdued his pride and did it. This shows that he –

- Hated swimming
- Loved swimming
- did not want to swim
- Was forced to swim

A. b

2. What are water wings?

- A pair of wings to fly over the water
- A pair of life saving tube to swim in water
- both a and b
- None of these

A. b

3. He got water wings before going to the pool. This shows that he –

- Was brave
- Was courageous
- was rich
- Was scared

A. d

4. State true or False –

The writer could drown at the shallow end of the pool

A. False

5. Find a synonym of overpower

A. Subdue

2. But I was not finished. I still wondered if I would be terror-stricken when I was alone in the pool. I tried it. I swam the length up and down. Tiny vestiges of the old terror would return. But now I could frown and say to that terror, “Trying to scare me, eh? Well, here’s to you! Look!” And off I’d go for another length of the pool.

1. Find a synonym of trace

A. Vestige

2. Did the narrator actually speak to the terror?

A. No, he said this in his mind.

3. What quality can be seen in the author?

a. Courage

b. Terror

c. fear

d. All of these

A. a

COMPETENCY BASED QUESTIONS:

1. Assertion : Douglas feared water from the beginning.

Reason : The YMCA incident aggravated his fears.

a. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A

b. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A

c. A is true but R is false

d. A is false but R is true

2. Assertion : Douglas decided to hire a trainer to learn swimming.

Reason : He wanted to become a champion swimmer

a. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A

b. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A

c. A is true but R is false

d. A is false but R is true

3. **“My breath was gone. I was frightened. Father laughed, but there was terror in my heart at the overpowering force of the waves. My introduction to the Y.M.C.A. swimming pool revived unpleasant memories and stirred childish fears. But in a little while I gathered confidence. I paddled with my new water wings, watching the other boys and trying to learn by aping them. I did this two or three times on different days and was just beginning to feel at ease in the water when the misadventure happened.”**

i. Choose the correct option with reference to the two statements given below.

- **Statement 1: The author’s father laughed to mock his son’s inability to swim.**

- **Statement 2: The author wanted to swim just to prove to his father that he can swim.**

- Statement 1 is true but Statement 2 is false.**
- Statement 1 is false but Statement 2 is true.**
- Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 cannot be inferred.**
- Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 can be inferred.**

Ans. Option (c)

ii. “My introduction to the Y.M.C.A. swimming pool revived unpleasant memories and stirred childish fears.” It can be inferred that this was a clear case of

- suppression**
- oppression**
- depression**
- repression**

Ans. Option (d)

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS (2 MARKS EACH)

- Why was Douglas’ mother particular that he should not go to the Yakima river? How did she manage to keep the son away?**

The Yakima River was treacherous. Drowning was common in it. By reminding him of each drowning incident, Douglas’ mother kept him away from the Yakima River.

- What made the YMCA pool a safe place to learn swimming?**

The YMCA pool at Yakima was not so deep. At the shallow area it was only three feet deep and at the deepest end it was nine. Moreover, the bottom of the pool was tiled the pool was tiled and the water clear.

- What was the author’s early childhood fear of the water? How did it affect him in the rest of his life?**

The author and his father once went to the beach of California when the former was three or four. While playing in the surf of the sea, the author was knocked down by the water and was buried under it. His breath was gone and a deep fear developed in his mind. From then on, he dreaded water.

- What was the misadventure that happened while William Douglas was making his attempt to learn swimming in the YMCA pool?**

Douglas was attempting to learn swimming in the YMCA pool. He was sitting on the side of the pool waiting for other boys to come. Unexpectedly a big burly boy arrived there, and, seeing Douglas sitting timidly, grabbed him and threw him into the deepest part of the pool and left him to drown. He had nearly died and this incident further cemented his fear of water.

- ‘I was frightened, but not yet frightened out of my wits.’ What does this mean?**

It was quite unexpected that Douglas was thrown into the deepest part of the YMCA Pool. The fact that he didn’t know swimming increased the risk and danger. But Douglas was not ready to be overtaken by the sheer fear of sinking. On the contrary he strengthened his mind and had a clear plan to get to the surface when his feet would touch the bottom of the pool.

6. What were Douglas' plans when he went down the water the first time?

Douglas was frightened at being hauled into the deep water but was strategic even at such a crucial stage. While sinking, he planned to make a leap once his feet touched the tiled bottom of the water and consequently reach the surface and swim to the side and escape. Douglas presents before us the true experience of dying which is not frightening but peaceful. Explain.

Douglas' experience of nearly dying in the YMCA pool taught him an untold mystery about death. He says it is a peaceful experience to die. People generally think of death as a frightening experience. When all efforts to escape from death fail, one is left with no other choice than dying, a sort of peace envelopes him. It wipes out fear, it wipes out terror. There is no more panic. It is quiet and peaceful. Nothing to be afraid of. One feels it nice to be drowsy, and to go to sleep. It is a feeling of being carried gently, to float along in space, with tender arms around us, tender arms like a Mother's.

7. Love for water could never die in Douglas. How did this statement come true to Douglas in the years that followed?

Water was very cruel to Douglas since his childhood. Even though he had been frightened twice, Douglas' love for water was everlasting. After having undergone a fatal experience at the YMCA pool Douglas didn't give up his desire to learn swimming. He waited for his time and overcame the fear of water and made himself a good swimmer.

8. This handicap stayed with me as the years rolled by. Which handicap does the author refer to?

The fear of water that possessed him first on the California Beach and later at the YMCA Pool crippled Douglas. This was an additional handicap for him other than his polio.

9. How did Douglas decide to overcome his fear of water?

After the misadventure at the YMCA Pool, Douglas found his fears for water assuming an alarming height. He decided to overcome this fear by getting effective training from a professional trainer.

10. But I was not finished. What was unfinished for Douglas?

At the end of his rigorous training to swim, Douglas' trainer informed him that his job was completed. Yet Douglas was not entirely satisfied. He had his own fears and anxieties regarding his swimming skills. He wanted to overcome the last bit of fear from his mind.

11. What did Roosevelt mean when he said, 'All we have to fear is fear itself?' How did Douglas realize this in his own life?

President Roosevelt believed that it is only fear we have to fear. People are afraid of fear. Even when the mind wills to do certain acts, fear stops us from doing that. In the case of Douglas, too, he never feared water. On the contrary he had great attachment to water. What he feared was the fear of water. He was determined to get rid of that fear and he did so with perseverance and unrelenting effort. Even when the terror tried to surface, he scorned it and laughed it off.

12. "Only once did the terror return." When did the terror return? How?

When William Douglas was just three or four years, his father took him to a beach in California. While playing in the surf/waves, Douglas was knocked down by a huge wave. Though his father laughed at it, little Douglas caught a fear of water. When he was a teenager, he tried to learn swimming in the YMCA Pool at Yakima but got almost drowned in the pool, instead. He was but not ready to accept his defeat. With the help of an instructor he learnt swimming and finally kept his fears aside.

13. "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.

14. 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.

15. '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.

Additional Questions

1. "Thus, piece by piece, he built a swimmer." How does this statement describe the trainer's amazing skills in training a person like Douglas? OR For the trainer, Douglas was an extraordinarily difficult task. Explain.
2. "Trying to scare me, eh? Well, here is to you."
 1. Who was trying to scare whom?
 2. How did Douglas retaliate?
 3. What is the significance of Douglas monologue here?
3. "The instructor was finished but I was not finished." Explain the significance of this line in connection with the great determination that Douglas possessed.
4. What did Douglas learn about death while drowning in the YMCA pool?
5. What made the YMCA Pool at Yakima appear to Douglas the most suitable swimming spot for him?
6. What was the fear that haunted Douglas after the drowning incident at YMCA Pool?
7. Why did Douglas go on training himself after the instruction was completed?
8. What untold fact did Douglas learn about death in the YMCA drowning experience?
9. What did President Roosevelt mean when he said, "all we have to fear is fear itself?"

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS (5 MARKS EACH)

1. What light does the autobiographical account throw on the narrator's personality?

Value points: Though physically not very strong, his strength of mind comes to the surface. Entire incident of Douglas' close brush with death and his conquering of terror brings out his character traits-presence of mind, tried to manage crisis with cool mind- his struggle to defy the force of water speaks of his positive attitude, did not give up till the end – later in life, his efforts to get over the phobia of water highlight his patience and strong will-power – absolutely determined to shed this fear, he emerged victorious on account of his perseverance and single-mindedness – the larger message that he drew from the misadventure reflects upon his philosophical bent.

2. Describe the efforts made by Douglas to overcome his fear of water.

A: Douglas was in the tight grip of a fear of swimming in water bodies and finally decided to get rid of it. He hired an instructor who taught him swimming piece by piece and when he had learnt it all, he combined all the

pieces together and made Douglas a swimmer. Still, he was not confident, and the terror would seize him time and again. Douglas wanted to get rid of all the fear, he wanted to conquer it. So, he went to various lakes, dived and swam across them. He reverted sarcastically to the tiny vestiges of fear that would grip him time and again until all of it vanished away. Douglas realized that fear was merely a crop of the mind and once he had conquered it, he felt released, free to walk arduous terrains, climb peaks and brush aside fear. Douglas had faced stark terror and then by conquering it his desire to live life grew intensely.

3. “There was terror in my heart at the overpowering force of the waves.” When did Douglas start fearing water? Which experience had further strengthened its hold on his mind and personality’?

Ans. The water waves which knocked down young Douglas and swept over him at the beach in California filled him with fear. He was then three or four years old. All this happened when he had clung to his father. He was buried under water. His breath was gone and he was frightened. His father laughed, but there was terror in his heart at the overpowering force of the waves.

His introduction to the Y.M.C.A. swimming pool revived unpleasant memories and stirred childish fears. He had gathered some confidence when a misadventure happened as a big boy threw him at the nine feet deep end of the pool. His efforts to rise to the surface and paddle to the side failed twice. He would have drowned if he had not been rescued in time. This terror of water overpowered his limbs and made them stiff. His mind was haunted by fear of water. It was, in fact, a handicap to his personality.

4. Give an account of the fears and emotions of Douglas as he made efforts to save himself from being drowned in the Y.M.C.A. swimming pool.

Ans. Douglas was frightened as he was going down. His active mind suggested a strategy to save himself from being drowned in water. He knew that water has buoyancy. He must make a big jump as his feet hit the bottom. He hoped to rise up like a cork to the surface, lie flat on it and paddle to the edge of the pool.

Before he touched bottom, his lungs were ready to burst. Using all his strength, he made a great jump. He rose up very slowly. He saw nothing but yellow coloured dirty water. He grew panicky and he was suffocated. He swallowed more water as he tried to shout. He choked and went down again. His stiff legs refused to obey him. He had lost all his breath.

His lungs ached and head throbbed. He was getting dizzy. He went down to the bottom again. An absolute terror seized Douglas. He was paralysed under water. His reasoning power told him to jump again. He did so, but his arms and legs wouldn't move. His eyes and nose came out of water, but not his mouth. He swallowed more water and went down third time. Now a blackness swept over his brain. He had experienced the terror that fear of death can produce as well as the sensation of dying.

5. How did the misadventure in Y.M.C.A. swimming pool affect Douglas ? What efforts did he make to conquer his old terror? Did he succeed?

Ans. Douglas had nearly died in the swimming pool. For days there was a haunting fear in his heart. The slightest exertion upset him. He avoided going near water as he feared it. The waters of the cascades, fishing for salmon in canoes, bass or trout fishing-all appeared attractive activities. However, the haunting fear of water followed Douglas everywhere and ruined his fishing trips? It deprived him of the joy of canoeing, boating and swimming.

The fear of water became a handicap. He used every method he knew to overcome this fear. Finally, he decided to engage a trainer and learn swimming. In seven months, the Instructor built a swimmer out of Douglas. However, the vestiges of the old terror would return when he was alone in the pool. He could now frown on terror and go for another length of the pool. This went on till July. Douglas was not satisfied. He went to Lake Wentworth and swam two miles. The terror returned only once when he had put his face under water and saw nothing but bottomless water. In order to remove his residual doubts, he hurried west to Warm Lake. He dived into the lake and swam across to the other shore and back. He shouted with joy as he had conquered his fear of water. He finally succeeded in his effort.

6. Comment on the appropriateness of the title 'Deep Water'

OR

Do you think the title 'Deep Water' is apt? Give reasons in support of your answer.

Ans. The title 'Deep Water' is quite appropriate to this extract from 'Of Men and Mountains' by William O. Douglas. The title is highly suggestive and at once focuses our attention on the main theme—experiencing fear of death under water and the efforts of the author to overcome it.

All the details in the essay are based on his personal experience and analysis of fear. The psychological analysis of fear is presented from a child's point of view and centres around deep water and drowning.

The overpowering force of the waves at the California beach stir aversion for water in Douglas. His mother warns him against swimming in the deep waters of the treacherous Yakima River. The nine feet deep water of the swimming pool appears more than ninety to Douglas. However, when he conquers fear he can dive and swim in the deep waters of Lake Wentworth and Warm Lake. Thus the title is apt and suggestive.

7. What impression do you form of William O. Douglas on the basis of reading 'Deep Water'?

Ans. William Douglas leaves a very favourable impression on us. He appears quite truthful and courageous. He gives a detailed account of his fears and emotions as he struggles against deep water to save himself from being drowned. Confessing one's faults and shortcomings is not easy. It needs courage, honesty and will power. Douglas has all these qualities.

His efforts to overpower the fear of water show his firm determination, resolution and strong will power. He has an analytic mind which diagnoses the malady and prompts him to search the cure. He is frightened of deep water, but not yet frightened out of his wits.

In his heroic struggle against fear, terror and panic, he rises to heroic stature. He becomes an idol, a living image of bravery and persistent efforts. He typifies the will not to surrender or yield. His indefatigable zeal is a source of inspiration for all and specially for the youth.

In short, William Douglas impresses us as a frank, truthful, honest and determined person.

EXTRAPOLATION

1. Q. Taking references from the story 'Deep Water', write a paragraph on 'Practice Makes a Man Perfect'.

Ans. Life teaches us many things. We are not well trained or learned person since our birth. Life provides us opportunities to learn. We break the shackles of myths and prejudices to learn more and more. Due to one incident or other, many phobias start ruling one's heart. This is really a pathetic condition. Terrors and fears are a part of life but their phase must be temporary. One needs to practice over and over again till he gets mastery over the issue. This is all about hope, struggle and determination and nothing else. As it is rightly said, 'Faith can move mountains.' So practicing hard for a thing brings fruitful results.

2. Imagine that the bully who threw Douglas into the pool reads this chapter and realizes his mistake. As the bully, write a diary entry penning down your response to Douglas' perseverance and your own feelings of guilt and regret.

Ans.

Dear Diary,

Today, something unexpected happened. I came across a chapter called "Deep Water" and as I started reading, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was about me, about what I did to Douglas all those years ago. The guilt washed over me like a tidal wave, and I felt an immediate pang of regret.

Reading about Douglas's perseverance in the face of fear was both inspiring and humbling. I see now how much strength he possessed, how he refused to let my actions define him. He faced his fear head-on, determined to overcome it, while I was blinded by ignorance and my own insecurities.

I remember that day at the pool vividly. I thought it was just a harmless prank, something that would make me feel powerful. But now, I realize the profound impact it had on Douglas. It wasn't just about being thrown into the water; it was about shattering his trust, instilling fear, and affecting him on a deeper level.

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