

“The Bottom of a Swimming Pool” by Annie Johnson

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Annotations & Narrative Feedback Form by Theodore Bong on bottom.

There’s solace in the bottom of a swimming pool, (1) that’s what I used to believe. To me, there was nothing better than feeling the water fill my ears and fold over my head until my feet scraped the concrete bottom. The feeling of disappearing.

Through the lenses of my pink-tinted goggles, underwater was magical. The cracks in the tiling lining the walls, the disembodied legs kicking for stable ground, the sun overhead reduced to a few weak rays barely shattering the water’s surface — it all created such a sublime kind of picture. When it got dark, the lights on the sides of the pool would turn on, dim yellow circles to guide swimmers to the walls. They always reminded me of the glowing eyes of deadly sea dragons, (2) able to devour anyone (even grown-up fourth-grade teachers) in one bite.

Even better, though, was the sound. In the open air, sound was too insistent. The noises of the pool all demanded your attention: the lifeguard’s shrill whistle, the smacking of tiny feet across the ground, the hundreds of voices demanding different things. “Can I get a —” “Owww! Quit —” “Stop splashing!” It reminded me of the school cafeteria, packed full of vicious kids: no rhyme, no reason, too loud to read a book in. But beneath the surface, things were quiet. The sounds that used to overwhelm me lost all their power, garbled and muffled. They intermingled with the sloshing of the water and the gentle blub-blub of air bubbles escaping my nose. It was not random, all the noises worked together to create a symphony. Harmony.

Perhaps the best thing about the bottom of a swimming pool, though, was that at the bottom of a swimming pool, I was alone. I didn’t have to worry about anyone splashing or kicking or shoving me aside. I didn’t have to worry about anyone making fun of my dumb bathing suit or my bug-eyed goggles. I didn’t have to worry about Mrs. Mills pretending not to see me when my hand was raised, or Sasha’s friends giggling when I was the first to finish my times tables. They were all far, far away up on the surface. It was only me. Just me.

I used to wish I could live underwater. Mermaids didn’t have to go to school. Mermaids didn’t call other mermaids nerds or freaks.

But once, when I came up for air, I spotted a girl my age at the other side of the pool. We locked eyes before I went back under, (3) just for a second. I didn’t think anything of it — girls like her usually didn’t want to be seen around me — until I felt a soft tug on my ankle, and I spied her next to me. She actually wanted to talk to me. She wanted to be friends.

So we talked. And I found out that she liked Pokémon and Warrior Cats just like I did. And we begged our parents to give us \$3 so we could buy Popsicles, and we competed to see who could make the biggest splash, and when it got dark and the lights came on, we explored the depths of the pool together. She never once mentioned the scabs on my knees or the gaps between my teeth. She just laughed and said that she liked spending time with me. I liked spending time with her, too. I really did.

I didn't spend so much time at the bottom of a swimming pool (4) after that. How could I when there was so much waiting for me on the surface?

Word Count: 597

Annotations

1. Why did the bottom of the swimming pool provide solace but her home or room didn't?
2. Comparing the lights in the pool to the eyes of dragons (metaphor)
3. Will she have a friend that hangs out with her?
4. She realized that the bottom of a swimming pool isn't the only thing that can provide solace

Your Name: Theodore Bong

Title of Work: "The Bottom of a Swimming Pool"

Author: Annie Johnson

1. Provide a summary of the text.
 - a. The girl finds solace at the bottom of the pool and uses it to escape the hustle and bustle. Since she was alone, I thought she was best at the bottom of the pool. When she held her breath, she found someone she wanted to be her friend, and she began to bond and spend more time with her new friend than at the bottom of the pool.
2. What did you like best about this text?
 - a. What I like most about this text is that it connects very well with the reader by describing emotions that probably everyone has felt. I have felt alone and not joined by other people. This is how I felt when I joined a new team or group. I don't know anyone so I stay in my own little area and avoid others because I don't know them.
3. Share a favorite quote from the text - why did this quote stand out to you?
 - a. "There's solace in the bottom of a swimming pool, that's what I used to believe." This quote stands out to me because it is the first sentence in the text and is a strong one. This quote conveys the understanding that girls find solace in the pool, which carries over to the rest of the story.
4. What feelings did this text evoke for you?

- a. The text evoked feelings of empathy because I have experienced what the girls went through. It's not fun to sit alone while others are having fun in groups. I understand and sympathize with what the girl is going through, thus invoking feelings of empathy.
- 5. If you got the chance to ask the author of this text one question, what would it be?
 - a. If I could ask the author one question, do you have an experience like the girl in the story?
- 6. What idea(s) was the author trying to get across OR what do you feel was the author's purpose in writing this text?
 - a. I feel that the author wanted to show that there are other people who feel the same way so that they can get to know each other.
- 7. What aspect of this text did you most relate to?
 - a. I was most concerned with the part where the girl felt comfortable at the bottom of the pool. When I'm in a new place and I don't know anyone, I'm in this bubble removed from everyone, so I understand.
- 8. What feedback would you give the author?
 - a. It's a feeling most people have experienced, and it shows that we don't have to be alone and can find someone to spend time with, so I'd say this story is very relatable.