

CLASS XII

DEEP WATER

By William O Douglas

Understanding the Lesson: 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!

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 by his father. 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. The Yakima River is treacherous. Then he found the YMCA Pool the safest place for swimming. Its deepest end was six feet deep, the bottom was tiled, the drop towards the deep part was gradual, water was clean and there were other children swimming. 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.

He got a trainer and learnt swimming. After the completion of the training, he went to various rivers, pools, lakes and swam alone and got rid of his fear. 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. After the instructor was done, Douglas started a 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 forever.

1. How did William Douglas overcome his fear of water?

With an instructor and an overhead cable connected to his waist, Douglas began to learn to swim. He dipped his head, exhaled underwater, inhaled on surface, kicked with legs, and even swam in isolated or treacherous waters to overcome hydrophobia.

2. Describe the misadventure that made Douglas hydrophobic.

Once, a bully pushed Douglas into the deep end of the YMCA pool. Gripped by paralyzing fear, in vain, Douglas tried to spring upwards to the surface twice. He almost lost consciousness before he was saved. This misadventure made Douglas hydrophobic.

3. "All we have to fear is fear itself." Discuss.

Indeed, William O. Douglas' *Deep Water* justifies President Roosevelt's assertion that all we have to fear is fear itself. William O. Douglas' aversion to water began with his mother's warnings about the Yakima River and a childhood sea holiday where he first experienced the power of water. The misadventure at the YMCA pool, where a bully pushed Douglas into the water nearly drowning him, turned the fear into a phobia. However Douglas decided to challenge this handicap. With the help of an instructor, and using a pulley connected by a belt to his waist, Douglas re-learned how to swim in a pool. He learnt to dip his head, exhale underwater and inhale on resurfacing. Even after the trainer declared success, Douglas tested his skill in treacherous and unfamiliar waters till his phobia vanished completely. Thereafter, William O. Douglas realized that once the 'fear of fear' disappeared, true success awaited.

Answer the following in about 30-40 words.

1. Why did mother warn Douglas against River Yakima?
2. Why did Douglas have an initial aversion to water?
3. What factors made Douglas decide in favour of YMCA pool?
4. 'And then in the midst of the terror came a touch of reason.' What did Douglas mean by 'touch of reason'?
5. 'I jumped with everything I had'. Why did Douglas jump? Did the jump make any difference?
6. Why did he decide to engage an instructor?
7. How did the instructor build a swimmer out of Douglas?
8. When did he feel he had completely conquered his fear of water?
9. What larger meaning did the experience have for Douglas?
10. What proves that the narrator found himself in the grip of fear of water even when he grew up?

Points for the Textual Long Answer Questions

1. 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.

Douglas thrown into the end of the pool by a big strong boy- landed in a sitting position- decided to make a jump once he reached the bottom of the pool- was frightened but not scared out of his wits- but nine feet depth appeared deeper- before he touched the bottom, his lungs were ready to burst- gathering strength tried to jump- but came up slowly- on opening his eyes saw nothing but water- tried to scream- tried to thrash at the surface of the water-legs seemed to hang as dead weight-only sign of life was his pulsating head- tried a third time-no difference- then he just let go- description vivid –reader knows that he was under panic.

2. How did Douglas overcome his fear of water?

Douglas overcame his fear of water by sheer determination- childhood experience and the experience at the pool-indelible print on his mind- decided to overcome and engaged an instructor- practised five days a week – an hour each day – tied with a rope suspended from a pulley - learned breathing techniques – build stamina –swam tirelessly up and down the pool- bit by bit the instructor built a swimmer in him- not sure of his confidence- went to Lake Wentworth- swam across two miles to Stamp Act island- only once he felt the terror- but he confronted it and swam on-now assured that he had overcome his fear of water.

3. Why does Douglas as an adult recount a childhood experience of terror and his conquering of it? What larger meaning does he draw from this experience?

OR

Douglas fully realized the truth of Roosevelt's statement 'All we have to fear is fear itself'. How did this realization help him brush aside his fear and become an expert swimmer? (Board 2014)

Douglas as an adult, recounts his childhood experience of terror- to make us understand that it had a larger meaning to him in life- he felt that unlike death, fear is not peaceful- he had experienced both the sensation of dying and the terror that fear of it could produce- adventure in life is possible only without fear- lack of fear develops self-reliance and independence- by sharing his experiences- wishes to instruct others who are scared like him to be determined to overcome it.

VALUE BASED QUESTIONS [Note: follow the format of an article/speech]

Write in three paragraphs. Introduction – body (relate to the lesson in 2 – 3 sentences – write the name of the lesson and the author) – conclusion.

Q1. 'Few things are impossible to diligence and skill.... great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance'. –Samuel Johnson. William Douglas tried hard to learn swimming, but every time something happened to deter him. However he never gave up and showed great perseverance. With these thoughts in mind, write an article on the topic 'patience and Perseverance always Pays' in 100 words.

Value Points: - Success is not a matter of luck or genius- depends on adequate preparation and indomitable determination-All achievements of man so far - are instances of resistless forces of perseverance - Robert Bruce, the king of Scotland and Robin Hood learnt this principle by watching the spider slipping down countless times but climbing up again - Edison said 'I never did anything by accident, they came by hard work' - We find fulfilment in achieving something after great struggle- negative attitudes should be cast aside.

Q2. "All we have to fear is fear itself". William Douglas had developed a phobia of water and he realized that fears are very difficult to overcome, unless they are tackled. Keeping this in mind, write an article on the topic 'Conquering Fear is the beginning of Wisdom'.

Value points: The fear of failure often cripples one's creativity and initiative - Kites rise against and not with the wind - Failure is a great teacher-harsh and best - Making mistakes is not a crime but repeating one is - The best way is to analyze your fears and evolve a strategy to overcome it - It is best to be frank and honest to yourself.

Q3. 'Practice can be defined as tuning one's mind, soil and body to certain activities uniformly aimed at achieving certain requirement more smoothly and unsatisfactorily' is often stated. In 'Deep water' William Douglas hires a trainer who makes him practice each step of swimming thoroughly. It was only after months of practice that Douglas got confidence. Keeping this in mind, write an article of 100 words on the topic 'Practice Makes Perfect'.

Value Points: Practice is a bioscope which gives us a clear view of the challenges and prepares us in the right direction to accept the challenges - Our Olympic winners – Mary Kom-has proved that no hurdles can deter them - Helen Keller-Born deaf and blind and almost mute-fought to fight her handicaps-became a writer, activist and speaker - Several successful doctors, teachers and professionals- do exceptionally well due to constant practice - Practice leads to confidence and faith- leads to perfection.

Q4.It is the spirit of adventure that distinguishes man from other species. The desire to explore, to climb, to dive has always beckoned man. William Douglas learns to swim to quench his thirst for adventure. Write an article on 'The Spirit of Adventure' in 100 words.

Value Points: Ever since human life came into existence- the unknown has attracted man - Either it has struck fear or it has irresistibly drawn him towards itself - Great explorers, inventors- have led the way because of the pioneering zeal and indomitable spirit - It is this spirit which has been steadily advancing the frontiers of human knowledge - It makes it possible for man to lead fuller lives - Whether it is science or medicine- the spirit of adventure –man has come up with the ideas which have moved and transformed the world.

Q5. The importance of tests is a necessary step towards any kind of success. Tests do determine one's ability and knowledge. William Douglas was declared to be an expert swimmer by his professional trainer but he was not satisfied. He wanted to test himself in different situations. He tested himself in different situations. Only then he was satisfied that he had learnt swimming. With these thoughts in mind, write an article on the 'Importance of Tests' in 100 words.

Value Points: Tests and exams –integral part not only of school curriculum- but also very sphere of life - The fear or challenge of tests- spurs the students to struggle and eventually succeed - Tests usher in competition-helps in concentration - If there is no test- there is no desire left for bettering the best - Tests determine the strengths and weaknesses of students and guides them to take remedial action - They test all skills of the students- so they are indispensable.