

**CLASS XII | FLAMINGO | ENGLISH**  
**CHAPTER 3 | DEEP WATER | PROSE**

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

William Orville Douglas (1898 –1980), born in USA, was a leading advocate of individual rights. He was a judge at the Supreme court of USA, retired in 1975 with a term lasting thirty-six years and remains the longest-serving Justice in the history of the court.

The following excerpt is taken from Of Men and Mountains by William O. Douglas.

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**THEME**

A real-life personal account of experiencing fear and the steps taken to overcome it.

**SUB-THEME**

Psychological analysis of fear.

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**WORDS/PHRASES & THEIR CONTEXTUAL MEANINGS**

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

Yakima – a place in Washington, USA

Treacherous – dangerous

Drop – slope from the shallow area to the deep area

Water wings - A pair of inflatable waterproof bags designed so that one can be attached to each arm, especially of a child learning to swim

Skinny – thin

Subdued – to overcome

Pride – self-respect

Aversion – dislike

Surf – wave of the sea

Knocked me down – threw him down

Revived – brought back to mind

Aping - copying

To feel at ease – to feel comfortable

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

Specimen – example

Skinny – a thin person

Ducked - push or plunge someone under water

Tossed – threw

Wits – intelligence

Summoned – gathered

Spring – push

Bob – jump  
Tinge – touch of colour  
Suffocating – unable to breathe due to lack of air  
Yell – scream  
Flailed – waved his hands  
Choked – unable to breathe  
Rigid – hard  
Expending – losing, giving out  
Ached – pained  
Throbbled – felt pain in a series of beats  
Dizzy – faint, unsteady  
Strategy – plan of action  
Strike out – extend  
Thrash – hit with force  
Stark – severe  
Seized – gripped  
Shrieking – screaming  
Paralysed – incapable of movement  
Pounding – repeated beating  
In the midst of – between  
Ceased – ended  
Limp – lifeless  
Oblivion - the state of being unaware or unconscious of what is happening around one  
Curtain of life fell – life came to an end  
Wobbly – weak  
Cascades – waterfall  
Handicap - a circumstance that makes progress or success difficult  
Canoes – small boats  
Ruined – destroyed  
Deprived – to take away  
Slack – to reduce  
Shed – removed  
Panic – fear  
Seized – gripped  
Stroke - a particular style of moving the arms and legs in swimming.  
Vestiges – traces  
Miniature – small size

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## **SUMMARY**

In this piece he tells about his fear of water and how he conquered it by determination and will power.

As a child, when he was 3 or 4 years old, he would go to the beach in California with his father. He would get scared by the might of the huge waves which swept over him and it instilled a fear in his sub – conscious mind.

A few years later, in his eagerness to learn swimming, he joined a swimming pool where an incident further increased his terror. He was pushed into the pool by another boy and experienced death closely.

Many years after that incident, he stayed away from water but the desire to go fishing and swimming in nature was strong enough to motivate him to overcome his fear.

He learned swimming with the help of an instructor who ensured that William knew swimming well enough to be able to swim in huge lakes and waterfalls also.

Still, when he would swim, the fear from his childhood experiences, embedded in his sub-conscious mind would grip him over and over again. He wanted to conquer that fear.

He faced it sarcastically, thinking that now, as he knew how to swim, what harm could it do to him. He challenged his fear in the face of it and finally it would vanish.

It was a baseless fear instilled in his sub-conscious mind. This experience was valuable for him. He had experienced terror and death. He overcame it and finally conquered it. William realized that death is peaceful and it is the fear of death that is terrorizing. His will to live life grew intensely as he had overcome his fear and started living fearlessly.

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### **Think-as-you-read Questions (NCERT)**

#### **1. What is the ‘misadventure’ that William Douglas speaks about?**

Ans. The ‘misadventure’ is the incident in which the author at the age of ten or eleven was picked up and thrown into the swimming pool of Y.M.C.A. by a bruiser. The author didn’t know how to swim and was about to drown.

#### **2. What were the series of emotions and fears that Douglas experienced when he was thrown into the pool? What plan did he make to come to the surface?**

Ans. When Douglas was thrown into the water by a big bruiser, initially he was shocked and frightful. He went deep into the water in the same posture in which he was sitting. He was terrified and panic-stricken. But he kept his presence of mind and planned to make a big jump the moment his feet touched the surface and to spring to the surface like a cork. But unfortunately all his three attempts failed and at the end, he felt suffocated and paralysed. He was full of stark tenor and then became unconscious.

#### **3. How did this experience affect him?**

Ans. After the Y.M.C.A. misadventure, Douglas developed a fear of water. This experience became a cause of handicap for him. Whenever he tried to enter the water, the terror which

seized him in the pool would come back. He could not enjoy any water sports such as canoeing, boating, rafting, and swimming. This experience left a haunting fear of water in his heart.

**4. Why was Douglas determined to get over his fear of water?**

Ans. Douglas wanted to live his life to the fullest. This fear was a hindrance to his enjoying the pleasures of life. This fear ruined all his fishing trips. He could not enjoy any water sport like canoeing, fishing, swimming, etc. So he was determined to get over his fear of water.

**5. How did the instructor build a swimmer out of William Douglas?**

Ans. The instructor built a swimmer out of William Douglas bit by bit. The instructor used to tie a belt around his waist and attach it to a pulley with a rope. Every day Douglas practised using this device by putting his head under water and kicking his legs by the side of the pool. Over a period of three months, by imparting strategically planned intense practice, the instructor was able to build a swimmer out of William Douglas.

**6. How did Douglas make sure that he had conquered the old terror?**

Ans. Douglas felt that when he was alone in the pool, tiny vestiges of old fear would return. To make sure that he had got rid of his fear of water, he went to Lake Wentworth in New Hampshire, dived off a dock at Triggs Island, and swam two miles across the lake to Stamp Act Island. After this, he became confident that he had conquered his long-standing fear of water.

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**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS (IMPORTANT)**

**Question.1 Why did Douglas prefer to go to YMCA swimming pool to learn swimming? (Compartment 2014)**

or

**Which factors made Douglas to decide in favour of YMCA pool? (All India 2011)**

Answer. According to Douglas, the YMCA pool was safer compared to the Yakima River. The river was quite deep and there were several cases of drowning reported about it. As against the uncertain depth of the river, the pool was only two or three feet deep at the shallow end. Though its depth was about nine feet at the deeper end, yet the drop was gradual, and Douglas could rely on it.

**Question.2. What did Douglas experience when he went down to the bottom of the pool for the first time? (Delhi 2011,2010)**

Answer. When the author was going down to the bottom of the pool for the first time, those nine feet felt almost like ninety feet. His lungs were ready to burst, but somehow he summoned all his strength and sprang upwards, hoping to reach the surface, but he didn't pop up to the surface like a cork, as he had imagined. When he opened his eyes he saw nothing but water, his hands too grabbed only water.

**Question.3. Why did Douglas go to Lake Wentworth in New Hampshire? (Delhi 2011)**

Answer. Douglas was not satisfied with his practice so he decided to go to Lake Wentworth. There when he was swimming in the middle of the lake, only once did the terror return, but he finally overcame it, and it made him feel better.

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**Long Answer Type Questions (120-150 words)**

**Question.1. Douglas fully realised the truth of Roosevelt’s statement, “All we have to fear is fear itself.” How did this realisation help him brush aside his fear and become an expert swimmer? (Foreign 2014)**

Answer. Douglas had experienced both the sensation of dying and the terror that the fear of death can cause. Strong will, hard determination, courage and toil as well as honest labour won over all his terrors and fears. The will to live brushed aside all his fears.

In reality all our fears are only psychological, and can be easily won over, if we can control our mind. This realisation makes Douglas resolve to learn swimming by engaging an instructor. This instructor, piece by piece, built Douglas into a swimmer. However, his first step was to drive away Douglas’ fear of water, before training him in swimming techniques. When Douglas tried and swam the length of the pool up and down, small traces of his old terror of water would return. So, he went to Lake Wentworth, dived at Triggs Island and swam two miles across the lake to Stamp Act Island. Finally, he was certain that he had conquered his fear of water.

**Question.2. Desire, determination and diligence lead to success. Explain the value of these qualities in the light of Douglas’ experience in ‘Deep Water.’ (Compartment 2014)**

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.

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**DO-IT-YOURSELF EXERCISES**

**1. Understanding the Text**