

CBSE Class 12 English Core

NCERT Solutions

CHAPTER 3

Deep Water

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1. Notice these words and expressions in the text. Infer their meaning from the context.

Treacherous: Unpredictable danger; not dependable or trustworthy

Subdued my prid: To lower or restrain the intensity of self-respect and confidence

Flailed at the surface: To strike or lash out vigorously at the surface of the water while trying to come out

Fishing for landlocked salmon: To go fishing for a specific variety of salmon available in certain lakes

Misadventure: An incident that turns out to be a disaster/mishap

Bob to the surface like a cork: To float or show the characteristics of buoyancy as a cork in water

Curtain of life fell: To indicate that life has ended or a deadly experience

Back and forth across the pool: To swim across the swimming pool from one side to the other

Page No: 27 Think As you Read

1. What is the “misadventure” that William Douglas speaks about?

Answer: William O. Douglas had just learnt swimming. One day, an eighteen year old strong aggressive boy picked him up and tossed him into the nine feet deep end of the Y.M.C.A. pool. He hit the water surface in a sitting position. He swallowed water and went at once to the bottom. He had nearly died in this misadventure.

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

Answer: Douglas was frightened when he was thrown into the pool. However, he was not so frightened as to die. While sinking down he made a plan. He would make a big jump when his feet hit the bottom. He would come to the surface like a cork, lie flat on it, and

paddle to the edge of the pool.

3. How did this experience affect him?

Answer: The fatal experience of drowning had a very strong impact on his psychology. He was deeply perturbed and shaken by the whole experience. A haunting fear of water took control of his physical strength and emotional balance for many years. As he couldn't bear being surrounded by water, he was deprived of enjoying any water-related activity.

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

Answer: Douglas regretted being deprived of enjoying water activities like canoeing, boating, swimming, fishing, etc. The wish to enjoy them and the craving to regain his lost confidence, while being in water, made him try every possible way to get rid of his fear. He was finally able to overcome this mental handicap by getting himself a swimming instructor and further ensuring that no residual fear was left.

2. How did the instructor “build a swimmer” out of Douglas?

Answer: The instructor built a swimmer out of Douglas piece by piece. For three months he held him high on a rope attached to his belt. He went back and forth across the pool. Panic seized the author every time. The instructor taught Douglas to put his face under water and exhale and to raise his nose and inhale. Then Douglas had to kick with his legs for many weeks till these relaxed. After seven months the instructor told him to swim the length of the pool on his own and he could do so .

3. How did Douglas make sure that he conquered the old terror?

Answer: The swimming training was over, but Douglas was not confident about his swimming. He was worried about how to overcome the fear. He was determined to completely get rid of it forever. He swam alone in the pool. He went to Lake Wentworth to dive. There, he tried every possible stroke he had learnt. He fought back the tiny traces of terror that gripped him in middle of the lake. Finally during his diving expedition in the Warm Lake, he realised that he had truly conquered his old terror.

Understanding the Text

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.

Answer: Once Douglas was sitting alone at the Y.M.C.A pool waiting for others to come. Then there came a strong aggressive boy. He tossed him up and threw him into the deep end of the pool. Douglas went deep and swallowed water. He was at the sitting position at the bottom. He was frightened but was not so much as to die. On the way down, he had a strategy in his mind. When his feet touched the bottom, he would make a great spring upward. Then he would paddle to the edge of the pool, but he came up slowly. He opened his eyes and saw dirty water. He was deeply frightened. His legs seemed paralyzed. A great force was pulling him down. A stark power overpowered him. He shrieked in the water but only the water heard him. After feeling the tiles under his feet, he jumped with all his might but it made no difference. His lungs ached and heart throbbed. Stark terror took him in its grip. His legs and arms could not move. He again tried for the third time. He searched for air but swallowed water. He felt drowsy and ceased all efforts. He started forgetting everything around him. It seemed he was about to leave this world and he lay unconscious.

2. How did Douglas overcome his fear of water?

Answer: After his misadventure in the pool at the Y.M.C.A, Douglas was amidst the fear of the water. He realised that his fishing trips, canoeing, swimming and boating were over. He tried his best to overcome it but the fear of drowning followed him everywhere. Finally he decided to engage an instructor to learn swimming and to overcome his fear. He went to the pool and practiced five days a week, an hour each day. The instructor put a belt around him and a rope was attached to the belt. The rope went through a pulley that ran an overhead cable. the instructor held one end of the rope and Douglas went back and forth across the pool. On each trip some of the terror would seize him up. After three months, the tension began to decrease.

Piece by piece he shed the panic. The instructor taught him to put his face under water and exhale. He also learnt how to raise his nose and inhale.

This exercise was repeated hundreds of times. Now he was able to shed part of the fear that seized him under water. He went to lake Wentworth Triggs island and Stamp Act island. He swam two miles across the lake. Now he was determined and he swam on. He shouted with joy .He had conquered 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 his experience?

Answer: Douglas had two childhood experiences of terror. One at the California beach when the waves knocked him down and swept over him. He was terror stricken. At the other occasion he was thrown into the deep end of the Y.M.C.A pool by a strong aggressive boy. A stark terror overpowered and gripped him. It followed and haunted him wherever he went. He realized that his joys of fishing, canoeing, boating and swimming had ruined. Keeping in view its severe consequences, he engaged an instructor who trained him in swimming and Douglas was able to conquer his fear.

This experience had a deeper meaning for Douglas. As he had experienced both the sensation of dying and the terror that the fear of it can produce, he learnt the will to live with great intensity. This experience can only be realized by those who have faced to conquer it. This exactly happened with Douglas. He knew: "In death, there is peace, there is terror only in the fear of death." Thus what matters most is the will to live. As Roosevelt said "All we have to fear is fear itself." So one must not give up. One must face the challenges. The will to live is great and it can take man to touch the highest peaks of life.

Page No: 30 Talking about the text

1. "All we have to fear is fear itself". Have you ever had a fear that you have now overcome? Share your experience with your partner.

Answer: Roosevelt has appropriately said "All we have to fear is fear itself." These words have a deeper meaning for all of us. It implies that we are scared of fear itself. Those who have undergone this experience of fear, they can only appreciate its worth. William O. Douglas had faced it twice in life. He had a terrible fear of water. He could not go for swimming, canoeing, boating and rafting. He realized that it would ruin his career since it was following and haunting him wherever he went. So he took training in swimming and got rid of the fear of water.

Like Douglas. I too had a terrible experience in my life.

A small tributary flows near our village. During the summer vacation, we used to go there for swimming and bathing. Very often, we were made cautious by the villagers not to bathe in it since there is a deeper hole inside the stream. But we never bothered. One day we took out our clothes and plunged into it. By chance, the water was overflowing the bank and the current was fast. While diving, two among us got stuck into the hole. We cried out for help.

We were going deeper and deeper. We thought that it was the end of our life. However, one of the boys was able to come on the surface of the water and was seen by the villagers. They came and helped us to come out of the water. But this enabled us to challenge the fears of life and we felt armed against all the mishaps.

Talking about Language

1. If someone else had narrated Douglas' experience, how would it have differed from this account? Write out a sample paragraph or paragraphs from this text from the point of view of a third person or observer to find out which style of narration would you consider to be more effective? Why?

Answer: If a third person had narrated Douglas' experience, the impact of the story would have lost the reader's deep connection with the main protagonist and his fear of water. The narrator then would be passively telling the story from the perspective of an observer. The incident of drowning in the water could never have successfully communicated the feeling of the "stark terror" that Douglas underwent.

In third person narrative, the 8th and 9th paragraph of the story would be as follows:

"He flailed at the surface of the water, swallowed and choked. He tried to bring his legs up but they hung as dead weights, paralyzed and rigid. A great force was pulling him under. He screamed, but only the water heard him. He had started on the long journey back to the bottom of the pool."

"He struck at the water as he went down; expending his strength as one in a nightmare fights an irresistible force. He had lost all his breath. His lungs ached. His head throbbed. He was getting dizzy. But he remembered the strategy – he would spring from the bottom of the pool and come like a cork to the surface. He would lie flat on the water, strike out with his arms, and thrash with his legs. Then he would get to the edge of the pool and be safe."

So, it is only the first person narrative that keeps the reader gripped to the story. It makes the experience more relevant and tangible for the reader. It engages him by making him go through the experience along with the protagonist. The desperation and helplessness of being in water, which had almost become fatal, the mental and physical agony of trying to survive the crisis, the long struggle of overcoming the fear bit-by-bit and the jubilation of conquering it at the end; all make the reader feel part of the experience. The first person narrative makes the story a fast-paced and urgent reading for the readers. All this would have been lost had it been a third person narrative or from the point of view of an observer.