

About the Reading:

Parents must teach their children many lessons, from learning to swim to learning to live. This poem, “First Lesson” by poet Philip Booth, is about such a lesson. In the poem, the father writes to his daughter about floating in the tidewater or shallow water before swimming out to the deeper sea.

“First Lesson”
by
Philip Booth

Lie back, Daughter, let your head
Be tipped back in the cup of my hand.
Gently, I will hold you. Spread your arms
Wide, lie out on the stream and look high at the gulls.
A dead-man’s float is face down. You will dive
And swim soon enough where this tidewater
Ebbs to the sea. Daughter, believe
Me, when you tire on your long swim
To your island, lie up and survive.
As you float now, where I hold you
And let go, remember when fear
Cramps your heart, what I told you:
Lie gently and wide to the light-year stars,
Lie back and the sea will hold you.

Writing Situation:

Your middle school’s eighth grade basic education team is asking students to help them choose the literature that eighth graders will study next year in their English classes. The teachers in charge of selecting the poems are looking for things that will have meaning and appeal to students your age as well as being examples of well-written poems. Some of them think the Booth poem you just read should be studied. Others think that is not for students your age but more for adults. Write an essay to the teachers on the eighth grade team telling them whether or not Philip Booth’s poem “First Lesson” is one that should be included in next year’s curriculum.

You should take a clear stand about whether or not the poem should be included and then fully explain your reasons. Be sure you use specific examples from the poem to justify your stand.

Be sure your essay contains the following items:

- an introduction
- supporting details
- a conclusion
- correct punctuation and capitalization
- correct spelling
- correct sentence structure
- legible handwriting

When you are finished writing, go back over your paper carefully. Check for words you may have left out. Look for errors and make sure your paper contains the items listed above. You may use a dictionary but you may not use a thesaurus.