

Extract from *Girl Out of Water* by Nat Luurtsema

I feel so happy when I swim, strong and graceful and like everything is right with the world. This is my Thing.

The individual medley is a strange race. Most people are slowest on their breaststroke, fastest on the crawl. I'm the other way around, so I always pull ahead on laps five and six, hopefully opening up enough of a lead that some girl with a devastating crawl time can't catch me on seven and eight.

And here's seven and eight – harder when everyone's so powerful; the water is churning and throwing me about. So much for feeling graceful, this is like fighting water. But I can't sense anyone on the left or right of me. I must have pulled ahead. Excellent: it's all going to plan.

Now it's about hanging on to this lead. I carve my right hand back past my face to make a groove in the water just long enough to turn my head and grab a huge, ragged breath. It's difficult in this choppy water so each time I'm just praying I find air. I can't afford to choke.

Final lap and now I'm completely in my rhythm, I know the end is approaching but I have to keep swimming my hardest so no one catches me. I don't care if I smash my head into the edge of the pool – anything to maintain this speed to the end. My wrist hits something hard with a crack that I feel down to my hip, but I've done it.

I've done it! I've won.

I fling my head out of the water, rip off my swimming cap and goggles, squeeze the water from my eyes and look behind me. That's my first thought: how far behind are they?

But there's no one there.

They're all next to me. Everyone. There is *no one* behind me, no one still swimming.

The girl on my left looks bored, the one on the right is casually cleaning her goggles with spit. Oh my... *One of them is already out of the pool!* I did that once, against a rubbish team in Swindon that was so slow I got out before the last girl had finished. Debs had a go at me for that.

Unsportsmanlike, she said.

Debs! Where is she, where's my coach? Maybe I swam extra lengths by mistake? That must be it. Hilarious, of course that's what happened. Dumb but understandable on a high-pressure day. This is not a Big Deal. Shall I talk to someone, an official? Where is everyone going? Coach! Debs! Hello? No one is looking me in the eye. Did I *die* in that pool, am I a ghost?

I might as well be. I came last. For the first time since I started competing at ten years old, I was the slowest swimmer. I'm weak and cold, my legs heavy as the adrenalin drops out of me. I don't know what to do, where to go...

I have to find Hannah. I look around frantically for her. There she is! She's throwing back her hair, laughing and shaking hands with an official, who's handing her a slip of paper. She must have won her race. She catches my eye and her smile fades.

My best friend and I want to kill her.

To succeed at this task:

- Read the text once to yourself, once aloud to someone and once to yourself again.
 - Answer questions in writing in full sentences (and read through to make sure they make sense).
 - Always give written evidence of why you are giving the answer, for example ‘I think because’
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1. Vocabulary? Write out any words you are unsure about and look them up in an online dictionary. Make sure you understand the word in the context of this text and write a short definition in your own words in your jotter.
 2. What evidence is there that this is an important race for the narrator?
 3. Why does the narrator use a capital letter for ‘my Thing’?
 4. Why does the narrator not believe they came last? What evidence is there?
 5. What is the ‘unsportspersonlike’ behaviour that the narrator refers to? Why is it unsporting?
 6. Why does the narrator feel like that about their best friend? Explain your thoughts.
 7. What conversation could you have with the narrator to make them feel better about losing their race?
 8. Create a HOT question of your own for this text.

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1. Vocabulary? Write out any words you are unsure about and look them up in an online dictionary. Make sure you understand the word in the context of this text and write a short definition in your own words in your jotter.

Your responses to this question will be different. We will check what you have handed in and give you feedback if necessary.

2. What evidence is there that this is an important race for the narrator?

“all going to plan”

“a high-pressure day”

“speak to an official”

All these phrases, plus the atmosphere that the author creates around her words make you understand that this is a big swimming competition for the narrator.

3. Why does the narrator use a capital letter for ‘my Thing’?

Capital letters are used for important things – names, dates etc. She has used a capital letter because swimming is really important for her and she wants to emphasise that.

4. Why does the narrator not believe they came last? What evidence is there?

“swam extra lengths by mistake”

The author of the text makes the narrator seemed shocked that she has come last, she can’t believe that there is no one behind her. We’re made to think that this has never happened to her before and that the only reason she can think of to explain it is that she swam extra lengths.

5. What is the ‘unsportsmanlike’ behaviour that the narrator refers to? Why is it unsporting?

The unsportsmanlike behaviour is that another girl has already got out of the pool while the narrator was still finishing the race.

It’s usually considered to be unsporting and lacking respect in sport to do things like that as everyone is trying their hardest and you wait for everyone to finish.

6. Why does the narrator feel like that about their best friend? Explain your thoughts.

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My take was that they are friends through their love of swimming and always go to competitions together. From this extract, they haven’t been in the same race and Hannah has obviously won her race or done very well, whilst we know the narrator has come last in her race and had expected to win. Even though the narrator doesn’t say it, we are lead to believe that she is jealous of her best friend’s win.

7. What conversation could you have with the narrator to make them feel better about losing their race?

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