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ABOUT THE BOOK

William Kamkwamba's fascinating and brilliant memoir seamlessly connects the past with the present and future. Through his narrative of invention and self-discovery, readers follow humanity's journey to reimagine what we think we know about the world moving beyond superstition as a means of explanation and toward science as a means of exploration. When famine strikes Malawi after seasonal

and man-made environmental changes make farming next-to-impossible, William's family's sole source of income runs dry, and he is forced to stop attending school. Within the walls of a library, William discovers books on applied mechanics, physics, and electricity that spark his imagination and make him curious about finding a possible solution to his community's problems. After study, persistence, and some improvisation, William manages to build a windmill from scrap metal he finds at the junkyard, together with other found objects. The windmill generates electricity, which provides light and water (via a well) for his community, drastically improving their economic and health conditions. His windmill attracts attention first from local reporters, then from an international audience (including TED). He is a living example of the idea that when we believe, we can, and will, achieve.

WILLIAM KAMKWAMBA graduated from Dartmouth College. The original version of his memoir *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* was a *New York Times* Bestseller and a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year. He divides his time between Malawi and North Carolina.

BRYAN MEALER is the author of *The Kings of Big Spring* and *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, which he wrote with William Kamkwamba. Since publication, the book has received many honors and has been translated into over a dozen languages. He is also the author of *All Things Must Fight to Live*, which chronicled his years covering the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He and his family live in Austin.



Praise for THE BOY WHO HARNESSSED THE WIND

"[An] **inspiring story** of curiosity and ingenuity."

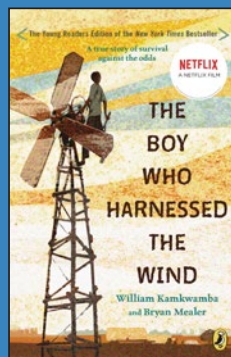
—*Publishers Weekly*

"It is also **sure to resonate with children** who will simply love the curiosity, resilience and resourcefulness."

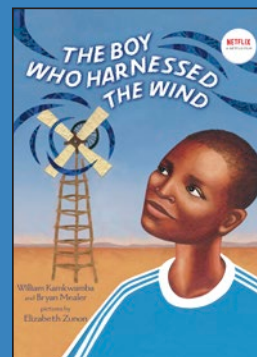
—*Wall Street Journal*

"This is a **dynamic portrait of a young person** whose connection to the land, concern for his community, and drive to solve problems offer an inspiring model."

—*School Library Journal*



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This guide was written by Julia E. Torres. Julia is a veteran language arts teacher and librarian in Denver, Colorado. Julia serves teachers around the country by facilitating teacher development workshops rooted in the areas of social justice, anti-racist education, equity and access in librarianship, and education as a practice of liberation. Julia also works with students locally and around the country with the goal of empowering them to use literacy to fuel resistance and positive social transformation. Julia serves on several local and national boards and committees promoting educational equity and progressivism. She is the current NCTE Secondary Representative-at-large, and she is also a Heinemann Publishing Heinemann Fellow and Educator Collaborative Book Ambassador. Connect with Julia on Twitter @juliaerin80

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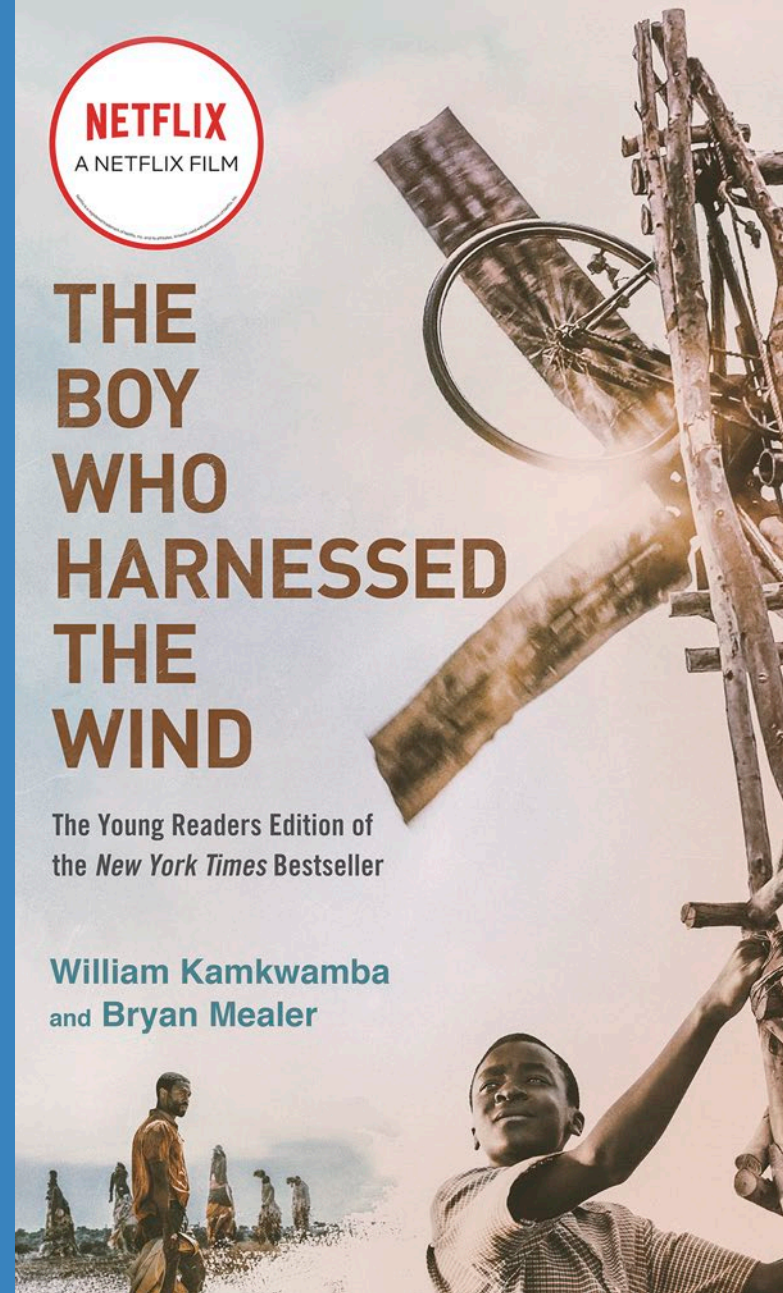
A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO



THE BOY WHO HARNESSSED THE WIND

The Young Readers Edition of
the *New York Times* Bestseller

William Kamkwamba
and Bryan Mealer



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Prologue, Chapter 1-2

1. What can you infer about Malawi from its name, “The Warm Heart of Africa”?
2. What events does William use to explain his view of the relationship between facts and reason, and mystery or magic?

Chapter 3-4

3. Using text evidence, explain why William says he wants to be a scientist. What can you infer about his personality or characteristics from this part of the story?
4. What obstacles does William face to getting reliable access to food, an education, and electricity? Do you have to face similar obstacles, why or why not?

Chapter 5-6

5. How did environmental factors affect food production?
6. How does Chapter 5 illustrate supply and demand? How do people in William’s community react to experiencing food scarcity? What do you think about the fact that many societies still operate using the barter system? What would you trade for goods and services if you did not have money?

Chapter 7-8

7. What connections do you see between the environment, sanitation, health, and nourishment/starvation? Make a cause-effect map with a tree stem and branches for each. For example: floods -->poor harvest

Chapter 9-10

8. Why does William first start visiting the library? Do you have a library in your school community? If so, how is it used? If not, why not?
9. What does William find in the library that inspires him to put his dreams of becoming a scientist into action?

Chapter 11-12

10. How does William begin to gather the pieces for his invention? How does his community react to him as he goes about getting all the parts together? What is his reaction to them?
11. What does William’s windmill allow him to have that he didn’t before? How does life change for him and his family?
12. What is “magetsi a mphepo”?

13. What is one problem William encounters, after inventing the windmill, that he uses curiosity and ingenuity to solve?

Chapter 13-14

14. In Chapter 13, William explains the connection between superstition, magic, and science. Why do you suppose people in his community relied on magic to explain what they didn’t understand?

Chapters 15-Epilogue

15. How does William’s world expand as he travels outside Malawi? What does he begin to dream or imagine as a result of meeting new people, seeing new places, and furthering his education?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

PRE-READING

1. What do you know about Malawi? Find it on the map, then research its history. What tribes and languages existed before colonization? Who first came to colonize the country? What language, customs, religion, did they bring with them? Where did it get its name? When did it get its independence? What was involved in becoming independent? Find a picture of the country that invites viewers to want to know more. Then, annotate the image using Thinglink (or any other resource) to share what you’ve discovered.

DURING READING

2. There are many words throughout the text in Chichewa, a native language of Malawi. Keep a journal or class list of important words and phrases. Draw pictures or symbols to help you remember them. How does your ability to understand the text increase as you become familiar with common words and phrases from William’s language?
3. William Kamkwamba uses metaphors, imagery, similes, and other descriptive language often, in order to bring readers into a world they may not be familiar with. Find examples of figurative or descriptive language like this one from page 33: “We began dancing around in circles and I wasted no time.” Using your own words, say what the quote means. Then, explain the importance of the quote when it comes to plot, characterization (building a character), setting, or conflict.

It Says...	I Think...	And So...
“We began dancing around in circles and I wasted no time.”	He is doing what most fighters do, prancing around in a circle preparing to fight.	This part helps readers visualize the fight before it happens. It builds excitement, but also, suspense.

4. In Chapter 6, William describes his school in this way: “In the center of the floor was a giant hole, where it looked like a bomb had exploded. The walls were chipped and coming apart. A damp breeze blew through the broken windows” (108). Even so, when it becomes clear his family will not have enough money for him to continue going to school, he says [his] “worst fear had come true” (111).

What are some of the drop-out rates for secondary education students in your country? What are some of the reasons children leave school, or are forced to discontinue attending? Consider the statistics for Malawi, from UNICEF, for example, then use the chart to compare to another country you are curious about. What conclusions can you draw about the connection between education rates and economics, health, and nutrition?

<https://wcmprod.unicef.org/malawi/publications-0>

Country	Health Statistics	Education Statistics	Nutrition Statistics
Malawi			
Other: _____			
Other: _____			

Conclusions: In Malawi, I see a connection between _____ and _____. The statistics I’ve found show that _____ and _____. A connection I see between these two pieces of evidence is that _____. Therefore, it seems education is most affected by _____.

POST-READING

5. They say, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” Several times throughout the book, William proves that where there is a problem, he can find a way to solve it; where there is a need, he can find a way to meet it. What is a problem in your community that applied science, or invention might be able to solve? Consider all it took William to come up with a creative solution to his complex problem involving health and sanitation, the environment, economics, and education. Then, think about your problem. What are the causes? What are possible solutions? Consider one of the following options to take action toward solving the problem you’ve identified:

A) Write a letter to a government official who has the power to make or change laws affecting the issue you’ve identified.

B) Research other places in the world, past or present, that have struggled with your same issue. How did they solve it? Could you do the same? Who could you look to for inspiration or guidance?

C) Reflect on ways your community could improve one area addressed in this book: healthcare, environment/agriculture, economics, or education. What could you invent that might make life better for yourself and those around you, not just now, but for many years to come?

Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.3, RL.8.4, W.8.1.A, W.8.1.B, W.8.2.B, W.8.7, W.8.9, L.8.5

Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards
See: “Diversity Anchor Standards”

Additional Resources:

“How I Build a Windmill” William Kamkwamba TEDGlobal 2007
“How I Harnessed the Wind” William Kamkwamba TEDGlobal 2009
DIY How to Make a Paper Windmill That Spins