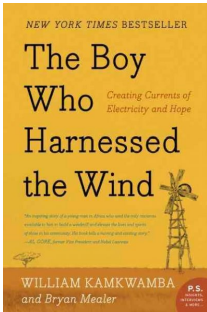




ELPL Lit Kits



The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind

by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer

William Kamkwamba was born in Malawi, a country where magic ruled and modern science was mystery. It was also a land withered by drought and hunger. But William had read about windmills, and he dreamed of building one that would bring to his small village a set of luxuries that only 2 percent of Malawians could enjoy: electricity and running water. His neighbors called him misalacrazy--but William refused to let go of his dreams. With a small pile of once-forgotten science textbooks; some scrap metal, tractor parts, and bicycle halves; and an armory of curiosity and determination, he embarked on a daring plan to forge an unlikely contraption and small miracle that would change the lives around him.

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind is a remarkable true story about human inventiveness and its power to overcome crippling adversity. It will inspire anyone who doubts the power of one individual's ability to change his community and better the lives of those around him.

About the Author: William Kamkwamba was a 2007 TED Global Fellow and a finalist for the Tech Museum Award. He is a student at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Bryan Mealer is the author of *All Things Must Fight to Live: Stories of War and Deliverance in Congo*. He is a former Associated Press staff correspondent and his work has appeared in several magazines, including *Harper's* and *Esquire*. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Discussion Questions:

1. Could you imagine living without electricity? What would your life be like? Describe William's life and compare it to American teenagers and even your own.
2. How did the villagers compensate for not having electricity, telephones, or most of the modern conveniences we take for granted?

3. What is the role of magic in the story? What about education? Contrast the two. Is there room for both in a culture? What about education and religion? How do the two impact each other? How did William's religion influence his outlook?
4. What did electricity and the creation of the windmill mean for William, his family, and his village? What might his accomplishment mean for the world?
5. What motivates people like William to attempt the unthinkable? How would you describe him to someone who's never heard of his achievement?
6. Compare William to his father and to his mother. How are they alike? How did his parents shape William's outlook?
7. Imagine what a handful of Williams with some encouragement and financial backing from government and private sources might accomplish. Offer some ideas.
8. Malawi is an extremely poor nation. What are the causes of this poverty and what exacerbates it? How might these causes and influences be overcome? How has the West—think of organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, run by Americans and Europeans—helped to contribute to nations like Malawi's troubles?
9. William writes of the corruption, greed, nonexistent services, and lack of empathy that turned the drought into a disaster for average people like him and his family. Can you see any similarities with our own culture, both past and present? Think about the American Depression. How did that compare to Malawi's drought?
10. William was desperate to stay in school but could not because of money. Think about American students. Why do you think with all the opportunities for schooling, students are disinterested in learning? In your opinion, what accounts for the differences between William and his American counterparts?
11. Many Americans criticize public schools and some even question the need for them. Others argue that money doesn't matter when it comes to education. How does William's experience address our own debates on the subject? Think about his school, and compare it to American schools. Might William's life be different if he had access to education without having to pay? How so?
12. What lessons did you take away from William's story?