

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind by William Kamkwamba (3/26/12)

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?