

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind
William Kamkwamba
Memoir
HarperCollins
290 pages
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Generating Electricity—And Hope
By Jacob Z.

Yes, living in poverty is difficult. But imagine how strenuous it becomes during a drought that causes the farms of an entire nation to collapse, yielding no crops.

This is exactly what happened in William Kamkwamba's small village of Mzimba, Malawi during the season of 2000-2001. That year, unfortunate weather patterns destroyed the productivity of the farmlands in Malawi, causing many people to starve to death.

This experience of pain and suffering is well described in the memoir: "Each day the sun rose hot in the sky and showed no mercy on the young seedlings that survived." However, the one problem I had with this section was its lengthiness. Although the famine is a significant part of William's life and lays a foundation for his subsequent actions, this gruesome turmoil lasts for 77 pages.

Because his family could not generate sufficient income, his parents were unable to pay his tuition for secondary school. However, instead of staying home and feeling bad for himself, William was able to explore his field of interest, physics and electricity. Importantly, he made use of his available resources in the public library. At the time, less than two percent of all Malawians had access to electricity, and that electricity was as consistent as the weather. This frustrated William, so he set out to build a wind turbine that could provide electrical lighting for his household.

When William began constructing his wind turbine, the theme of making use of his available resources appeared again. He obtained all of the parts of his turbine without spending a single *kwacha*. Instead of making purchases, he used materials that were lying around his house, such as a broken bicycle, and he frequently visited the village junkyard, where he picked up PVC pipes and pieces of sheet metal.

A characteristic of William's writing that I found captivating was the admittance display of his own lack of knowledge. Admitting that he was not omniscient greatly builds his credibility. William was invited to speak about his turbine at a TED conference, where he experienced Western technology for the first time. Because this was the first time he left Malawi, he did not know much about computers or other consumer technology products. He expressed his learning experience, saying, "It was then I realized what a laptop was. *Of course*, I thought. *It's a portable computer. What a good idea!*" It is perplexing to think that someone as innovative with technology as William is could have designed and constructed an electricity-generating windmill before even knowing what a laptop is.

I honestly believe that any high school student would enjoy this book, regardless of whether or not he or she is interested in science. This is because William does not go in-depth describing many of the scientific processes he carried out. High school students who do not have an interest in the science behind William's turbine will appreciate the simplistic, easy-to-understand style of writing. Students at Blind Brook will be able to make connections between this book and *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah. Both memoirs take place in a developing African nation, where a child is forced to undergo life-threatening hazards that pose serious health risks to him and those around him. Those who enjoyed reading *A Long Way Gone* will certainly feel likewise about *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*.

William's inventive achievements have given him the opportunity to receive an education in the United States. He is currently a senior at Dartmouth College and is expecting to graduate in 2014. Additionally, to support his cause, William has established his own organization, Moving Windmills. According to its website, this not-for-profit organization aims to support economic independence and self-sustainability in Malawi. This includes, food, water and health security, and educational success.

William included photographs and drawings from his childhood throughout the story, significantly increasing the understanding for readers. Readers can recognize that this story is describing true events that William actually experienced. The photos also prove that William is not exaggerating the facts, showing the makeshift homes and shops in the market.

In addition to having a riveting plot and vivid language, this memoir also teaches valuable life lessons. It teaches that unfortunate situations will always improve. It teaches that regardless of any circumstance, people should never give up on their dreams. It teaches that when people call you crazy, the only thing you can do is to use their words as fuel for your ambitions.