The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope Study Guide

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope by William Kamkwamba

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

This book is the inspiring autobiography of a Malawian teenager who, in spite of the challenges posed by drought, famine and poverty, designed and built a functioning electrical system in his family home and, as a result, became internationally recognized for his innovative work. As the narrative details the determination with which young William Kamkwamba struggled to make his dreams a reality, it also explores themes related to the value of friendship and the tension between magic and science.

The narrative begins with a short prologue in which William describes his first attempt at getting his windmill to work. The initial suspicion of the towns-people gathered to watch is quickly replaced by excitement and congratulatory enthusiasm when, as the blades of the windmill spin, the light bulb in William's hand (wired to the windmill) illuminates.

The narrative proper, which takes place mostly in the early years of the new millennium (1999-2007) begins with William telling several stories about magic, many of which, he says, were passed on from generation to generation within the family. He says that belief in such supernatural ways and beings shaped and defined life and relationships in the small Malawi farming communities where he grew up, communities that relied heavily on agriculture for both food and income. His narrative descriptions of the circumstances in which he lives, both in terms of his large family and of the community at large are accompanied by occasional references to difficulties of getting consistent power. These references foreshadow William's eventual interest in generating electricity for the purposes of making family life, and the process of farming, easier, more efficient, and more productive.

When William's dream of going to a good school is shattered by both bad grades and famine-triggered poverty, he starts spending his time in the local library in an effort to expand his education and increase his chances of getting into the kind of quality school he wants. This, he says, he wants to do so he can help his family and his community. During his time in the library, he develops an interest in science, and particularly in electricity, becoming fascinated with the possibility of building his own electrical system so he can first power his family's home consistently, and second, build things like a well, which would enable them to irrigate and therefore grow more and better crops. His initial experiments with radios and other electronic devices lead him to believe that it is possible for him to build the kind of machinery he has in mind, using designs self-adapted from those in his books and intended to make use of found materials. Still not in school, he starts regularly searching through the community scrap yard, eventually coming up with almost everything he needs. The assistance of his somewhat wealthier friend Gilbert takes care of the rest, and eventually, after a few errors, William constructs his windmill. At that point, the narrative returns to the Prologue and further portrays the community celebrating William's accomplishment at generating power.

Eventually, word of William's accomplishment spreads. In a relatively short period of time, he receives a substantial amount of publicity that, in turn, leads to an invitation to appear at a prestigious international conference on design and technological innovation.

William's presentation is a hit, and afterwards he is invited to America for both a tour and another presentation. Back at home, now aware of the technological advancements taking place in the rest of the world, William continues to improve his inventions, making his mother's life, and the lives of everyone else in the community, much easier.

The narrative concludes with a description of what William's life has become in the few years since his invention first came into his mind - he has begun attending a school for young African leaders and innovators, and continues to believe in the value and possibilities of his home country, and his home continent.

Part 1 - Prologue, Chapters 1 and 2

Part 1 - Prologue, Chapters 1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

This book is the inspiring autobiography of a Malawian teenager who, in spite of the challenges posed by drought, famine and poverty, designed and built a functioning electrical system in his family home and, as a result, became internationally recognized for his innovative work. As the narrative details the determination with which young William Kamkwamba struggled to make his dreams a reality, it also explores themes related to the value of friendship and the tension between magic and science.

Prologue - A crowd, curious and noisy, gathers to watch as the author/narrator readies the tower, and the wheels and arms at its top, for a trial run. William climbs the tower, (see "Quotes," p. 2) and frees the bladed wheel at the top. Its arms spin faster, the author prays for it to work, and suddenly there is a spark of light in the bulb in his hand. The crowd comments excitedly. "The boy has done it," someone says.

Chapter 1 - William begins this chapter with the comment that, "Before I discovered the miracles of science, magic ruled the world. Magic and its many mysteries were a presence that hovered about constantly..." He describes several forms of that magic, including his father deflecting a curse from a man whose lost merchandise (a load of bubblegum) the young William had eaten without knowing it was stolen. He also narrates legends of magic told to him by both his father and his grandfather, but comments that because he and his family were Presbyterians, they believed that while the power of magic was present in Malawian life, the power of God was greater. He then turns his narrative attention to the activities he shared with his friends Geoffrey and Gilbert, the former being his cousin, the latter the son of a powerful tribal chief. Among those activities were regular trips to the shopping center, to the barber where a consistent supply of electricity could not always be guaranteed, and other games that could be played for free (see "Quotes," p. 20). The chapter concludes with a story, told by William's father, of a Lion and a Leopard who ate an Old Man out of vengeance for his fooling them. His father, William says, "Was a born storyteller, largely because his own life had been like one fantastic tale."

Chapter 2 - William describes his father, Trywell, as a large, exceptionally strong man, nicknamed "The Pope" because of his consistent unwillingness to get involved with prostitutes or any other kind of "loose" woman. He was, however, fond of drinking and fighting, eventually giving it all up and surrendering his will to God after almost killing a man. William also describes how his father and mother, Agnes, met. Agnes was a regular visitor to the market where Trywell had a trading stall. They both found each other attractive but intimidating, saying nothing to each other until one day, Agnes broke her routine and spoke to him. He then visited her every day until she said she'd marry him. Shortly afterwards, and right around the time Trywell had converted to Christianity, his brother John suggested he go into the lucrative farming business (see "Quotes," p.

24), which Trywell did, working hard at all hours to clear his fields and build his home. Once he and his family moved into that home, William comments, he was able to spend more time by himself, during which time his imagination took flight (see "Quotes," p. 39). He describes how, at one point, desperate for physical power after being bullied, he let himself be treated by magical means guaranteed, he was told, to increase his strength. The treatment fails, William is humiliated in a fight - and that, he comments in narration, was his "first and only experience with magic."

This first section of the book introduces its central important figure (narrator William), establishes his situation (an ambitious, energetic young man living in a disadvantaged African country), and the spiritual/moral circumstances within which that situation exists - specifically, the widespread belief in magic as a fundamental force at work in the day to day lives of the Malawi people. This last is particularly important, in that the presence of magic in William's life and work, the general belief by the community in such magic, and the general suspicion of anything that contradicts those beliefs (i.e. science) all manifest one of the book's central themes - the tension between science and magic (see "Themes").

The book's other two major themes are also introduced in this section. First, the book's thematic interest in the power and value of friendship is explored through the portrayals of Gilbert and Geoffrey, both of whom remain loyally supportive throughout William's story even when his actions seem craziest. The book's primary theme, exploring the value of pursuing one's dreams, also manifests here, in William's apparent determination to improve himself (albeit in the apparently misguided way that sees him try magic) but also in the story of William's father and mother. They, in their determination to meet each other and their later determination to marry, serve as examples to both William and the reader of how consistent, persistent pursuit of dreams can result in success. In other words, the narrative diversion into the story of their courtship foreshadows the eventually successful outcome of William's experimentation. One other point about William's parents - it's interesting to note the first name of William's father, Trywell.

Finally, the reference to the problems experienced by the barbershop in obtaining a steady supply of electricity is one of several descriptions of inconsistent electrical supplies in Malawi that foreshadow William's increasing interest in electricity, the intensity with which he delves into that interest, and the passionate need that fuels it (i.e. to help his family and his community).

Part 2 - Chapters 3 and 4

Part 2 - Chapters 3 and 4 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3 - William describes how, when his Uncle John died unexpectedly, he struggled to feel the same sort of grief as everyone else in the family, and in the community (see "Quotes," p. 47). He also describes how his father passed on everything to do with John's business to his oldest son Jeremiah, who wasted all the profits on drinking and partying to the point where the business failed completely. That, combined with a change in the government's priorities, resulting from a change in leadership, meant that for William's family, farming became much more challenging and much less financially rewarding. A short time later, William's uncle Socrates moved into the family compound, bringing with him several daughters and a dog, Khamba, who quickly attached himself to William and joinsed him on his hunting expeditions with Geoffrey and another cousin, Charity. William describes the lessons he learned from hunting (see "Quotes," p. 56), and describes how sometimes, he and Khamba went hunting on their own. One such trip resulted in the successful capturing and killing of several birds, which William immediately took to the "clubhouse" Charity shared with other older boys. Hoping for their approval, William gave them the birds, which they ate. After they finished, however, they dismissed him, and William returned home "to a houseful of girls."

Chapter 4 - In the year 2000, William, turns thirteen, and becomes more interested in older activities, some of which cause him to leave the increasingly loyal Khamba at home. At around that time, he and Geoffrey become interested in radios, taking them apart to see what makes them work (see "Quotes," p. 64) and eventually becoming so knowledgeable and so skilled that they start a small business repairing broken radios. This work, he adds, involves scavenging electricity from discarded, partially used batteries, since there is no consistent electricity in their homes. Being a scientist is much more appealing to William than farming, but because the rest of the children in his family are girls who have to help out at home, he has to help in the fields. He describes in some detail the process of preparing the ground, planting the seeds and harvest that routinely takes place in good years, and the happiness that results from a healthy yield. But, he adds, the growing season of 2000 was very poor - bad weather and lack of traditional government support being the primary factors.

There is clear contrast here between the hard-working, curious William and the lazy, self-indulgent Jeremiah. William never actually says so in his narration, but it's very possible that seeing his cousin waste his life and income was a trigger for William to pursue his goals and dreams with even greater intensity. At the same time, the narrative clearly portrays this phase of William's life as one of connecting with a sense of identity and purpose, the focus and discipline of his work on the radios clearly foreshadowing the same sort of focus and discipline that enables and/or fuels his work on the windmill. Other important elements in this section include the introduction of the loyal Khamba

and the fickle Charity, who is sometimes quite judgmental and dominating, at other times friendly and supportive.

Then there is the reference to the change in government. Politics plays an important role in the narrative, as it does in the lives of the Malawi people, but is not an overwhelming or dominant presence, more of a recurring irritant. There is the sense that in the narrative, William places politics and the people practicing them in the same position as it seems the Malawi people experience them. Both are present but not really relevant to, aware of, or active in the day to day lives of the people even when the entire country is suffering, as it does starting in the following sections. The new government, at least in William's narration, tends to be blind and to some degree amusing, but not particularly well informed, engaged, or empathetic, ultimately leaving the people to their own devices or, what is worse, outright damaging them, as takes place in the following section. This is, perhaps, another trigger for William's independent-mindedness — the new government isn't going to do anything to help, so he'd better help himself.

Finally, there are the hints at the end of Chapter 4 of the famine to come, the circumstances and outcome of which define, in a variety of ways, the circumstances of William's life in the next few sections.

Part 3 - Chapters 5 and 6

Part 3 - Chapters 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 - That same year, William discovers the power and principles of the dynamo (see "Objects/Places - The Dynamo"), studies and takes his exams which, if he passes, will enable him to go on to secondary school, and works in the fields. He becomes aware of just how widespread the famine is becoming, and reveals that even when the corrupt government, led by the fat President Muluzi, makes an effort to help, it mishandles the situation and makes it even worse. Soon people are selling their animals, paying high prices for husks of grain to be used for food and, like the families of both William and Geoffrey, cutting out meals in order to make what little they have last longer. Meanwhile, Muluzi goes on a tour of the country, making promises and commitments he doesn't keep and rallying the people to the support of his policies. The father of William's friend Gilbert, a respected local chieftain, Chief Wembe, is invited to speak at one of Muluzi's rallies, and asks the President for help in preserving the country's food sources. Later, however, he is beaten up for saying something the President didn't like and, fearing further attacks, receives treatment in secret. William worries about what this will mean for his country and his people (see "Quotes," p. 91).

Chapter 6 - As December begins, Trywell makes the decision that the family will eat only one meal a day. William comments that his parents were particularly concerned by the lack of food, because his mother had recently brought home another baby girl. Meanwhile, the family goes into business, making cakes to sell in the market and using the profit to buy food supplies, half of which goes to the family and half back into the business. Meanwhile, and as the business is just getting started, William's oldest sister Annie elopes, triggering blazing eruptions of anger from her father, which eventually subside into a dull sullenness. About a week after Annie's departure, William is sent by bicycle to a food distribution depot, where he is shocked by the desperate things people do to get food (pushing other people down, buying places in line) and is ultimately cheated by the distributors. He makes his way home where, a few days later, he notices people selling their possessions, again in the hope of making some money to pay for food. As Christmas approaches, William, his cousins and his friends feel the lack of food even more intensely, particularly because Christmas has always been a time of feasting, with meat as one of the main dishes. William goes in search of some meat, finding none at Geoffrey's, where he finds his cousin is ill with anemia, or at Gilbert's, where he finds that even the chief's family is suffering. When he visits Charity in his clubhouse, the two of them are so desperate for meat that they go to market and get their hands on a goatskin, which they cook for hours and eventually manage to consume a few mouthfuls, even giving some to Khamba. After a while, the boys' jaws become too tired for them to eat any more, and they give up, with food left in the pot which, William comments, could not be shared. "It was a well known rule," he comments, "that what happened in the clubhouse stayed in the clubhouse" (see "Quotes," p. 113).

In this section, it's important to note how William's determination and contemplations of electricity increase in direct, inverse proportion to the fortunes of his family and his country. In other words, as things get worse he becomes more determined to make them better. His determination and independent spirit are clearly echoed in the actions of his sister Annie, whose departure from what might be described as the norms of tradition and community are received with substantially less support and enthusiasm than William's similarly independent detours. Perhaps this is because William's single mindedness is viewed by his family as at least having the potential to benefit them all, whereas Annie's can be perceived as purely selfish.

In any case, while all this is going on, William's description of his ambitions for school foreshadows events in the following section when he discovers that he is not going to be able to attend the school he wants and in the novel's final chapters (Part 8). At that point, in his life and in the narrative describing that life, he is enabled to attend a school better and more suited to his skills and identity, than any school he ever dreamed of. The lesson here, and of William's life, is clear, as he himself says later in the work (Part 4, Chapter 7). It's every man for himself. Do whatever you have to in order to realize your goals. Go around obstacles rather than be blocked by them, and your life may well become fulfilled in ways you never imagined.

Part 4 - Chapters 7 and 8

Part 4 - Chapters 7 and 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 - William is excited when he hears that the results of his examinations are being released, but disappointed when he discovers that his grades are only good enough to get him into the lowest ranked school. His disappointment eases when he realizes that Gilbert is going to be at the same school. The first few weeks, the entire classroom is filled with excitement, in spite of there being no desks, because the government hasn't purchased them. William is particularly excited by the discovery of Malawi on a map (see "Quotes," p. 123). Soon, however, the effects of the famine are felt, and the class drops in numbers. William himself has to drop out, since his family can't afford the tuition. Meanwhile, the famine gets worse, its effect causing confrontations in William's family and the deaths of hundreds of people. In a radio broadcast, President Muluzi, recently returned from a trip to Europe, says there can be no famine in his country. William comments that this made him realize an important truth - in this life, it is every man for himself.

Chapter 8 - As the famine deepens, William realizes just how long it's been since Khamba had been fed well, and takes him on a hunting trip that unfortunately proves fruitless. Khamba becomes weaker and weaker, and eventually William, with the help of his friend Charity, makes plans to abandon him to death, tying him to a tree and leaving him overnight. The next day, he returns to discover that Khamba died without moving. "When Khamba saw me leave," William writes, "he'd given up his will to live. That meant I killed him." He also says that writing that story down for this book was the first time he'd told anyone what happened. Shortly afterwards, there is a cholera epidemic that kills hundreds. Geoffrey's anemia, meanwhile, is getting worse, in spite of his family receiving a small amount of extra food from William's family, who themselves are becoming ill because of starvation. Eventually, though, first the tobacco crop and then the maize crop begin to ripen, even as the President is finally announcing that Malawi is suffering a famine. Trywell begins making deals based on the impending harvest of the tobacco, and the family soon begins eating some of the maize, sharing it with Geoffrey whose health improves. The well being of the general community begins to improve as well, although there are still desperate people who resort to thievery in order to eat. Trywell urges William to forgive them, because, "Everyone has the same hunger".

The obstacles facing William intensify in this section, but it's interesting to note that he describes them without any sense of lingering self pity. He is clear and frank about the sufferings faced by himself, by his family, and by his community, but he never asks the reader to feel sorry for him, or for any one. The facts are the facts - there was no food, and people were starving. They did what they could and, when it became clear that a good harvest was on the horizon, they did what they did. The implication is that everyone has the right to do what they must to at least attempt to survive. One of William's anecdotes in this section describes a wandering man who came to them at meal time, helped himself to a portion of their food, and went on his way without a word

of protest from the starving family. The only time emotion comes into the narrative of this desperate time in William's life is in his narration of Khamba's death and of his own remorse at causing it. Again, William doesn't state the point outright in his narration, but there is the sense that abandoning Khamba as he did left him with a strong sense of guilt. Maybe that's why he kept the story secret for so long. There is also the sense that he perhaps tries to ease that guilt by, as the opportunity arises, working almost obsessively to improve the lot of his family. Then there are the final words of Chapter 8, used by William's father to refer to the desperate actions of people searching for food, but which can also be seen as a reference, albeit an unconscious one, to William's desire to better his life, and therefore to the book's thematic interest in the pursuit of dreams.

Part 5 - Chapters 9 and 10

Part 5 - Chapters 9 and 10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9 - As the crops mature, activities at the school resume. Gilbert is one of those who returns, but because William still has to have his fees paid, he finds something else to do with his time - visiting the library, where he studies their copies of school textbooks. He also studies books on science (see "Quotes," p. 156), learning about magnetism, electromagnetism, turbines and, eventually, windmills from a book he discovers by accident. William realizes he can use a windmill to bring electrical power to his family, and also eventually serve as a pump for the well, enabling more and better harvests. William determines that he's going to build one, and constructs a model that he successfully tests on one of Geoffrey's radios. With that success under his belt, he plans for a bigger windmill, carefully searching garbage bins in the area, as well as the local dump, for the materials he needs. Meanwhile, the crops get closer to being harvested, meaning there will soon be more money available. He promises himself that he will be back in school soon.

Chapter 10 - As the second school term begins, William returns to school, discovering that he's far behind but working hard to catch up. The question of fees again comes up, and William is dismayed to learn that he has to come up with the fees for his abandoned first term as well. Aware that his father is probably going to be short of money, for a few weeks William sneaks into classes, but is eventually able to attend openly once his father negotiates an arrangement for fee payment depending upon the harvest of the tobacco crop. When the crop is finally satisfied, however, and after all his father's other creditors are paid, there is not enough money left to pay William's fees, and he again has to withdraw, fearfully contemplating his future (see "Quotes," p. 173). He doesn't, however, have time to dwell on his feelings; it's time to harvest the maize, which he does for several weeks, helping to bring in the most substantial crop in years. The family again begins to eat regularly once more, everyone making jokes about how thin they once were. "It was only during better times," William comments, "that we truly acknowledged the bad ones." Once the harvest is brought in, William returns his attention to his windmill, convincing his father, who in turn convinces the rest of the family, that it will bring substantial rewards. William gathers some materials from the scrap yard, does odd jobs to purchase others, and soon has everything he needs but a generator. Broke and frustrated, he is exceptionally happy when Gilbert buys him the equipment he needs. When he takes it home, he puts it next to the other components of the machine (see "Quotes," p. 183).

Two steps forward, one step back. The phrase seems to apply quite aptly here, as William's situation improves, at least to some degree, then loses some of its newly acquired forward momentum as the result of circumstances. It's important to note, however, that William's personal momentum never flags. His desire and his determination grow, perhaps manifesting more strongly than ever the greater the obstacles he faces. Granted, his momentum is occasionally detoured - by harvest, for

example. But no matter what detours or obstacles he encounters, his resolve remains firm. He WILL help his family, his will to succeed and triumph over the challenges he faces fueled by unshakable belief in his dreams. In any case, there is about this section a sense of narrative momentum building and intensifying along with William's personal momentum. In the same way as Gilbert's drive to succeed has increased steadily throughout the narrative, the storytelling (i.e. the recounting of where that drive is taking him) is also moving forward. That increased energy, in turn, generates the sense that an encounter between William's dreams and his reality is coming soon, in fact, in the following section, as the final image of the carefully chosen junk pile in William's room clearly suggests.

Part 6 - Chapters11 and 12

Part 6 - Chapters11 and 12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11 - Piece by piece, component by component, using supplies from his mother's kitchen as well as those taken from the scrap heap, William assembles his windmill with the help of Geoffrey and Gilbert the latter occasionally supplying money for William to buy supplies he needs (i.e. wire, nails). First William assembles the mechanism that will actually convert the wind to electricity and tests it, blowing out his father's radio but realizing the adjustments he needs to make. When the machine is ready, he and his friends search and cut down trees to build a tower upon which to set it, looking through the grove of trees where William recalls having several encounters with magic (see "Quotes," p. 189). As they're constructing the tower and raising the machine to its top, a crowd gathers to watch, teasing the boys as they work. Finally, the tower and the machine are ready. In a replay of the moment from the Prologue, William releases the brake on the windmill, the blades begin to turn, and eventually current flows, lighting the bulb in his hand. Then, and over the next few days, William, his family and his friends accept the excited congratulations of the community. The next phase of William's plan involves extending the electricity generated by the windmill into his bedroom. The generosity of Gilbert and Charity make this possible, and soon his room is illuminated, leading William's parents to ask when the rest of the house could be lit. William comments that it will be soon, adding that once he finds a battery to store the electricity, not only will the family save the cost of kerosene - his work will eventually enable them to pump more water, irrigate more land, and bring in better crops.

Chapter 12 - When a relative asks if the power from the windmill can charge her mobile phone, William answers that it can't, but then realizes there is the possibility of making money from the windmill (i.e. getting people to pay for their phones to be charged) if he can just figure out how to adjust its power levels. As always, he consults his book (Explaining Physics - see "Objects/Places"), makes the necessary adjustments to the machine, and he's in small business. Meanwhile, there are constant repairs and adjustments to be made - to the wires coming into his bedroom, and to the cogs and chains and belts that make up the machine. Then there are switches to design and build, and a circuit breaker and stronger brake system for the windmill's blades to be constructed. Ultimately, though, the reward is worth all the extra work - William comments that one night, his father commented on how proud he was of him.

One of the most important things to note about this section is how William, once William realizes one goal, replaces it with another. He doesn't rest, he doesn't stop, he doesn't take time to congratulate himself (well, maybe not much), and above all, he doesn't develop an ego. He is on a mission, and he still hasn't accomplished his major goals - to build a better life for his family. For him, it seems, the achievement he realizes here is only the first step - there is more, much more, to come. This is, perhaps, a comment on one of the narrative's central thematic perspective on the power of dreams, a suggestion that dreams and goals never stop. They keep self-renewing. The point is not

made to suggest that he doesn't appreciate the recognition of others, particularly that of his father - in fact, see "Quotes", p. 254 for a comment in William's own narrative voice on how much the support of others means to him. The point, rather, is made to suggest that William does not define himself by acclaim, but by how close he is to realizing his dreams and intentions.

Meanwhile, the success of the windmill seems to be making an important statement in relation to one of the book's other thematic concerns, the tension between magic and science. With the success of the windmill, science seems to be making a triumphant statement here, but that sense of triumph is relatively short lived, as narration in Part 7 reveals. Finally, there are the references made in this section to the book's third main thematic interest - in friendship. Again, that theme manifests in the actions and attitudes of Geoffrey, Gilbert, and the appropriately named Charity (although his name was more ironically used in Chapter 3, in which he took William's charity but immediately afterwards got rid of him).

Part 7 - Chapters 13 and 14

Part 7 - Chapters 13 and 14 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13 - As William continues his experiments (at one point trying to get usable gas out of animal feces using his mother's best cooking pot, something that makes his mother very unhappy), there are several further challenges to the happiness of both his family and the community. There is still not enough money to send William to school, forcing him to continue studying at the library. His mother contracts malaria and nearly dies, but saves herself by remembering how much her family needs her. Gilbert's father, Chief Wimbe, dies and the community grieves deeply. Dry weather again sweeps the area, threatening famine and leading the community's fear of magic to return, that fear focusing on William's windmill, which some believe is blowing the rain clouds away. William and Gilbert convince them that that's not the case. And finally, HIV AIDS begins to spread through the area, again triggering superstition and belief in magic, as both a cause and a cure for the disease. There are also positive events - William's successful experimentation with radio transmission, a change in government that results in more support for farmers, William's becoming involved in a local AIDS awareness group, and, as the result of that involvement, his being asked to start a science club at the primary school. The success of his teaching efforts there renews, in him, his dream of being able to help others with his inventions (see "Quotes," p. 235).

Chapter 14 - This chapter details a chain of events that sees William back in school and on his way to attend an important conference. Officials touring the library at the primary school see William's windmill and, after finding out who built it, tell Dr. Mchazime from the Malawi Teacher Training Activity, who comes in, inspects the windmill, and arranges for a series of interviews that give William and his windmill a lot of publicity William says he calls his invention "electric wind." Someone who sees that publicity, Soyapi Mumba, himself starts a process that ends up with William being selected to participate in an important conference on innovation (TED - Technology, Entertainment, Design), which will involve William traveling by air and staying in a hotel, both for the first time. Meanwhile, Mchazime also starts the process of getting William back into school (see "Quotes," p. 239), eventually succeeding in getting him into a nearby boarding school. There, William is both homesick and taunted for being so behind (see "Quotes," p. 247), but he shows his classmates the publicity about the windmill, and they stop teasing him. Eventually, William gets onto the plane for his trip to the conference, excited and happy to discover that he is actually seated next to Soyapi Mumba.

If this were a work of fiction, the pile-up of bad fortune that William faces in Chapter 13 might possibly be described as unbelievable or unlikely. But truth, as the saying goes, is stranger than fiction. It is a sign of not only how strong a human being William is and how strong his family is, but of how many challenges face human beings in Malawi and in Africa, and that he keeps going. It's also interesting to pause for a moment and consider how the obstacles portrayed by William here are, in so many ways, undreamed of in the more established west. Yes, the west has its own problems, but the situation for

Malawi and Africa, at least as portrayed here, is challenging on a fundamental, life-and-death level, and at times on a number of levels, that arguably, many of the west's so-called "sufferings" cannot match.

It's also possible that the chain of positive events experienced by William once his work becomes known could also be perceived as improbable, or coincidental - a school official just happens to visit the school where William volunteers shortly after he constructs a windmill? William just happens to be seated next to one of the men who helped him get to the conference? The point is certainly not made to suggest that William is lying, or that he is shaping events to fit some kind of thematic agenda. In fact, some might look at his story and suggest that what might be called these reward strings are the result of the kind of hard work and dedication William shows throughout his story - indeed, throughout his young life. Ultimately, though, life just sometimes works that way, as William might very well say himself, having survived such intense negativity and realized such potential prosperity.

Part 8 - Chapter 15, Epilogue

Part 8 - Chapter 15, Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Chapter 15 - Arriving at the conference, William is at first overwhelmed by prosperity, technology, large numbers of people, and the dominance of the English language, but soon finds an ally - Tom Rielly, who helps him prepare for his presentation and who takes him to other sessions. At one such session, William listens to a speaker, Erik Hersman, describe Africa "perfectly" (see "Quotes," p. 253). When William makes his own presentation, he is nervous at first and embarrassed about his English, but when he describes how he completed the windmill by saying, "And I try, and I made it," he gets a standing ovation, and the phrase, he says, became a catchphrase of the conference. Afterwards, Tom Rielly helps William gather funds for further experiments and his education. William also encounters Gerry Douglas, an American innovator who spends part of his time in Africa, who arranges for William to attend a better school, and even provides him with a place to live. But before that happens, William returns home, commenting in narration that he used the funds raised at the conference not only to fund further experiments but to also improve life throughout the village, helping the whole community with new roofs and new wells and finally repaying Gilbert for his many investments. In 2007, William is taken on a tour of America. He is shown New York City and shown a wind farm in California, where dozens of giant windmills are doing exactly what William's windmill does in Malawi - capture the power of the wind and convert it to electricity. William comments that for a while, he had been wondering what to do next with his life, but comments that while on the wind farm, he realized he didn't have to decide right away, adding that whatever he did, he "would apply this one lesson ... if you want to make it, all you have to do is try."

Epilogue - William attends another conference in 2008, where word of his work reaches, for the first time, the President of Malawi. He also attends an exhibition on technological innovation in Chicago, but then returns home and does repair work on his windmill - winds have snapped its blades, and termites have eaten into the legs. He then discovers he has been accepted into The African Leadership Academy, a high school for innovators, leaders, and potential entrepreneurs. Before attending the school, however, he travels to Cambridge, England, where he improves his English and marvels at the centuries-old buildings constructed "without the kind of modern technology we have today." This, he says, gives him hope that Africa can improve, a hope he shares with several other students at the Academy, whose accomplishments he lists. He concludes his memoir with an expression of hope for the future of his African homeland (see "Quotes," p. 270).

The book's final chapter and its epilogue suggest several lessons that William's experience can teach. As he himself says, the first and perhaps most important is the concept of trying until success is achieved - of not giving up, of working hard to realize dreams and goals. What might be considered a second lesson manifests in his repeated returns to Malawi, and his continued focus on helping to improve the way of

life of his people - don't let new experiences, new possibilities, and new opportunities (such as those William finds in America) distract you from what is really important, from your own personal truth and identity. A third, and related, lesson shows up in his descriptions of how he repairs his windmill - in the same way as he constructed it, with tools and materials found locally. There are two points of interest here, which might be summed up as "use what you've got" (i.e. work with what you can, don't waste time longing for ideals) and "stick with what works" (i.e. he discovered a process that, for him, does what it needs to do in the environment in which it has to happen). Of course, if he hadn't bent those two rules, at least to some degree, his windmill never would have been built. This is perhaps the ultimate lesson offered by William's experience - recognize limits and boundaries, use them when useful, disregard them when necessary, always relying on dreams and a belief in the genuine greater good to steer action in the right direction.

Characters

The Author (William Kamkwamba)

William is the book's central figure and narrator. His story of struggling with poverty, famine, circumstantial disadvantage and community beliefs and values is in many ways an inspiring one, his success resulting almost exclusively from an exercise of his will. He is a self made man, one whose determination and steadfast commitment is almost archetypal, or universal. His story has a great deal in common with that of some of the greatest entrepreneurs and inventors in human history. It, like so many other such stories, suggests that success does not have to be defined by how many lives are changed, but by the quality of change (i.e. lives genuinely improving) and by the motivation with which that change is pursued - not for power or for status, but simply to enable a better life for more people.

William is unfailingly positive, even during periods in his life (famine, poverty, severe disappointment) which see him at his most vulnerable. Granted, and as he himself says, it's often easy to put a relatively positive gloss on stories of difficult times when those times are over. But this is not necessarily the case with William's narration. His narration, albeit written with a collaborator, is clear, specific, and above all seemingly honest, without sentimentality or self pity. William is compassionate, humble, practical and hard working, a potentially invaluable role model not only for his fellow Africans who, he admits, he hopes to inspire, but for anyone who has a dream, or a goal, and just needs a spark of inspiration to trigger the flame of determination.

William's Father (Trywell Kamkwamba)

William's father is described by his narrator son as a physically strong, committed Christian who gave up a life of self-indulgence once he realized it was essentially going to end his life. Since his rejection of his former lifestyle, he has become a devoted and compassionate family man, although not averse to taking the occasional risk (i.e. gambling on the success of his tobacco crop as he assures his creditors he will be able to pay them).

William's Mother (Agnes)

William's mother is portrayed, for the most part, as being what seems to be a fairly traditional Malawian mother - staying mostly at home, taking care of the children and the meals and the home itself. It's important to note, however, that she and her son share a certain entrepreneurial spirit. When she starts a small business selling cakes in the market square, she is essentially doing what William is doing - doing whatever she can to make the lives of her family better.

Geoffrey, Charity

Geoffrey and Charity are William's cousins, and are portrayed by him in narration as being among his best friends. Geoffrey is perhaps the consistently better friend of the two, loyal and patient and supportive even when he is suffering severely from anemia. The older Charity is, at first, portrayed as something of a selfish bully, but after the famine or perhaps because of it, he becomes more friendly and more supportive. Both play important roles in William's efforts to construct his ideal project, the windmill.

Gilbert

Gilbert is another of William's good friends. The son of the local chief (see "Chief Wimbe" below), Gilbert has slightly higher social status, but is nevertheless warm-hearted and generous. He is not a snob by any means. He is also, at several key points in the narrative, somewhat better off, although he and his family are both hit hard by the famine. He is therefore able to occasionally pay for supplies that the broke William needs. The presence and actions of Geoffrey, Charity and Gilbert throughout the narrative manifest and embody one of the narrative's central themes - its exploration of the value of friendship.

Chief Wimbe

Chief Wimbe is Gilbert's father, the leader of the district in which the home town of William and his family is located. Portrayed as honest, wise, and generous, he also comes across as an outspoken advocate for the well being of his people, his defiant actions at the rally for the President (Chapter 5), gaining him even more respect from many of his fellow Malawians, but earning the violent anger of the President and his security guards. A few months after Wimbe is severely beaten by those guards as a lesson against speaking out against the President, Wimbe dies - yet another indication to William that the government is to be neither respected nor trusted.

President Muluzi

President Mulizi is the corrupt, self-indulgent President of Malawi whose willful ignorance and blindness to circumstances makes the situation of poverty worse for the people of his country. His attitudes and actions trigger, in William, a healthy disrespect for government that, in turn, is fuel for his own burning determination to take matters into his own hands and improve the lives of his family and community himself.

Dr. Mchazime, Soyapi Mumba

These two African men, after learning of William's success with the windmill, recognize him as a potentially influential entrepreneur / self-starter / innovator and set events in

motion to bring him and his inspirational example to the attention of Africa and the world.

Tom Rielly, Gerry Douglas

These two non-African men also see William's success with the windmill as a potential source of inspiration for Africans and others. They also aid William in realizing even greater potential, working towards getting him into and continuing at a school for technological and cultural innovators like him.

Khamba

Khamba is an elderly dog that happens into William's life and quickly becomes his best friend, even though there are times, as there are with any pet, when William becomes irritated by him. In fact, William comes to care for his dog almost in spite of himself, and is both heartbroken and guilt-ridden when the circumstances of the famine lead him to make the painful but seemingly necessary decision to allow Khamba's life to end.

Objects/Places

Africa

Africa, and in particular many of its southern countries, is a land of long-standing poverty, lack of technological innovation, and political corruption and, as portrayed here, feels and sounds in many ways like a world from the past, with its references to faith in magic rather than science, its atmosphere of a pervasive lack of sophistication and general air of raw, teeming need. This fact combines with a second - the fact that the events of the narrative take place in the early years of the new millennium, the early 2000's, to create a startling context for the narrative as a whole. This is the jarring awareness that, in a world where prosperity and technological sophistication is taken for granted by so many, so many others could be living in such subsistence conditions. See "Topics for Discussion - Consider and contrast your life in the year ..."

Malawi

Malawi is the country in Southern Africa where William makes his home. Like so many countries in that part of the world, Malawi is poor, under-developed and overpopulated and plagued with problems associated with drought, disease, and ignorance.

Wimbe

Wimbe is the district in Malawi where the home village of William and his family is located. It is governed by Chief Wimbe, portrayed in the narrative as wise, compassionate, and devoted to the well being of his people.

Masitala

Masitala is the small rural village where William and his family make their home. The people who live here suffer from, among other things, a lack of consistent electrical power. This lack, again among many others, is one of the triggers for William's determination to explore possibilities for science-based improvements to how the community's needs are met.

Magic and Science

In narration, the relative belief in, and valuing of, the two forces of magic and science form the opposing poles of public opinion and experience within which William and his experiments take place. Exploration of the tension between them is one of the narrative's central thematic considerations (see "Themes" below).

Electricity

The power of electricity is a fascination for William who, over the course of the narrative, becomes increasingly aware of its role in the efficient functioning of home and family life, and also increasingly determined to capitalize on electricity's power as the narrative unfolds.

Maize, Tobacco

Maize, a variety of corn, and tobacco are the two main crops grown by William's family. Tobacco is essentially a cash crop, sold for income. Maize is both a cash crop and a sustenance crop, primarily grown to provide food for the family over the long winter months with any excess going towards income.

The Library at Wimbe Primary School

This is where William educates himself once he is forced to drop out of school. At the library, he immerses himself in several books about science and technology, taking inspiration and/or designs for his inventions from them.

Explaining Physics

This book in particular is William's favorite, becoming an exceptionally invaluable "go to" reference any time he's looking for a particular answer to a particular question.

William's Windmill

Constructing a full scale functioning windmill that can provide enough power to supply his family's home is William's primary goal, once he learns of its potential for producing steady electrical power. Over time, and using materials scavenged from almost every possible location including the garbage dump, William constructs his windmill which he continues to develop and improve until it is doing exactly what he wanted it to.

Arusha, Tanzania

William travels to Arusha, to him a surprisingly large city, once word of the success of his windmill spreads. There he is exposed to the intensity and variety of city life for the first time, on occasion taken by surprise but on other occasions not entirely surprised by how similar people are there to those back home.

The TED Conference (Technology, Entertainment, Design)

This is the international conference attended by William once word gets out about his windmill. There he meets influential people like Tom Rielly (see "Important People") who, in turn, enable him to contact more influential people, such as Gerry Douglas, who in their turn, enable William to make an even greater success of his dreams and goals.

Themes

The Power of Dreams

The power of dreams is the narrative's overall thematic interest. As the author himself comments several times and in several ways, most notably in the book's conclusion at the end of Chapter 15, his success is grounded in several important elements. As the narrative portrays them, these include having a particular dream, believing passionately in it, acting on that belief, refusing to let obstacles deter you from taking further action and, perhaps most importantly, continuing to expand the dream beyond the boundaries of what was originally conceived and/or longed for. All these elements are clearly at work in William's life and experience, his success in following his dreams inspiring him to further dreams and to encourage others, through the writing of this book and through furthering his education, to build on and follow their own (see "Style - Perspective"). Further - the eventual success of his personal project, and how both that success and that project provided a springboard for even greater success and larger projects, prove both the value of his personal dreams and the thematic message associated with the narrative of how he made those dreams a reality. Meanwhile, it's important to note that William's dreams, and the actions he takes to fulfill them, are not the only manifestations of this theme. As discussed throughout this analysis, there are several other examples - the determination of William's father and mother to meet each other and the determination of William's sister Annie to break rules, leave her family, and marry both manifest and evoke this theme.

Magic vs. Science

Throughout the narrative, William refers to the belief, commonly held among the Malawi people, that forces of magic and the supernatural are active in their everyday lives. He pays particular attention to this aspect of Malawi life in the book's early chapters, detailing stories of magical encounters, of curses and blessings, of monsters and witches. For him these stories, and the beliefs they represent, are of less personal interest and value than science. For his family, they are superstition and manifestations of weakness, their faith in Christianity and its power much stronger and by far more reliable. For his people, however, much to his emerging and increasing dismay, both the stories of magic and the beliefs (and presumed experience) that gave rise to those stories are foundations of faith and fundamental systems of belief. For them, even science is magic, a situation portrayed in particularly vivid terms in Chapter 13, which portrays many in the community as believing that a recurrence of drought is the result of magic manifested by William's windmill. But for William, for his family, and eventually for the people of the community whose belief in him is hard won and, even after the facts of the windmill's origins and abilities are revealed, somewhat grudging and suspicious, science is the way of the future, a way of bringing both hope and possibility into reality. Magic, or the belief in it, is portrayed in the narrative as the way of the past, a way that leads to failure in the present and hopelessness for the future. Science, on the other

hand, is portrayed as the inspiration of the past that triggers action in the present and shows the way to the future.

The Value of Friendship

Also throughout the narrative, William's pursuit of his dreams and goals is supported and enabled by his friends. That support is both consistent and virtually unconditional in the chief's son Gilbert and William's cousin Geoffrey, somewhat less consistent and slightly less conditional in another of William's cousins, Charity whose name, as noted in "Important People," is occasionally somewhat ironic. In fact, on several occasions, William's forward movement towards realizing his dream of building a windmill continues only as a result of the helpful intervention of his friends. This tying the support of friends and, incidentally, of family so clearly and so thoroughly to the book's thematic emphasis on the value of dreams creates a clear sense of authorial contention that in general, dreams cannot be realized alone - that dreams are built by community, even if that community consists of only two or three individuals. The corollary, of course, is that not only do friendships help with the external manifestations of dreams, they help sustain the inner fire that fuels those dreams. Belief in an ideal or in a purpose can be a lonely thing, as William discovers, as well as a thing worthy of mockery by unbelievers. But having someone, or a group of someones, around who support you in that belief, even though they don't necessarily share it, can be a profoundly valuable source of motivation and inspiration. Having other people believe in him, and act on that belief, helps William believe in himself and inspires him to keep acting on both his own belief and those of others which, in turn, inspires people watching him, knowing him, and reading his story to themselves act on their beliefs. For further discussion of this aspect of the book, see "Style - Perspective."

Style

Perspective

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Tone

The overall tone of the book is one of its more interesting aspects. On the one hand, it is almost entirely subjective, in that it is written entirely from the point of view of its central figure, narrator William. Stories of other persons (i.e. William's father) are included, but are referred to in William's terms - as he heard them, discussed them, and understood them. This draws the reader closely, intimately, and thoroughly into William's story and experience. But perhaps somewhat surprisingly, there is a certain sense of objectivity about the narrative as well, a certain sense of emotional distance. The reader is easily able to appreciate both William's achievement and his struggles, but doesn't necessarily or easily celebrate with him when his dreams are realized (i.e. when the light bulb illuminates during the windmill test in Chapter 11). In some ways, the narrative is almost journalistic in its approach, describing the emotions triggered by circumstances without necessarily opening those emotions to the empathy of the reader. A particularly vivid example of this, other than the aforementioned illuminating of the bulb, is the description of the famine that takes up several chapters starting in Chapter 5. There is the clear sense here that the facts of the famine are being discussed, presented in a very matter of fact way, without going into any sort of deeply felt and/or evocative description of the feelings that the famine awakened in William and his family. Yes, they suffer, and yes

there are tensions, but they are not the focus. It feels as though William experienced the famine, or experiences it now, as something that had to be gotten through, rather than something to be dwelled upon or contemplated in any depth. Ultimately, though, the events of the story and its thematic message are so strong that the relative lack of intense feeling associated with both (perhaps the result of the involvement of a co-writer) is not nearly the handicap that, in other circumstances, it might be.

Structure

The book's format is essentially linear and straightforward, narrating events as they occur and discussing the effects of those events on the lives and actions of William, his family and his friends. The exception is the prologue which takes, as prologues often do, an important incident from the main body of the narrative line (in this case, the first public test of the windmill in Chapter 11) and portrays it before establishing any significant narrative context with the aim of triggering and/or engaging the reader's interest right from the beginning.

In terms of the rest of the book, there is a clear ending and a mostly cohesive middle (although narrative focus does wander at times), but a somewhat vague beginning. This is because there are occasions, particularly in the book's early stages, where William's narrative emphasis seems more broadly based, in that he focuses on the background of his family and the cultural background of his country and community, rather than on the specific chain of events that led to the construction of the windmill. As such, the book feels, at times, like it's more of a broad-strokes autobiography than a narrative of a particular incident arising from a particular set of circumstances. The point is not made to suggest that the more autobiographical sections are less engaging, or ultimately less relevant, than the sections that focus more specifically on the development and construction of the windmill. On the contrary, as discussed throughout this analysis, many if not all of the book's themes are explored in these early sections, said explorations adding additional facets and/or layers of meaning to the book's thematic considerations.

Quotes

"I paused and studied the flecks of rust and paint, how they appeared against the fields and mountains beyond. Each piece told its own tale of discovery, of being lost and found in a time of hardship and fear. Finally together now, we were all being reborn." Prologue, p. 1

"... most of the time we had no money, so we spent our afternoons in hunger and dreams." Ibid, p. 20

"Being born Malawian automatically made you a farmer. I think it's written in the constitution somewhere, like a law passed down from Moses. If you didn't tend the soil, then you bought and sold in the market, and before my father gave himself to the fields, he led the crazy life of a traveling trader." Chapter 2, p. 24

"I became a terrible daydreamer, partly because as I got older, the folktales of my childhood began to pale in comparison to the fantastic goings-on at the farm - things more real and incredible than any fiction my father could have imagined himself." Ibid, p. 39

"...in our culture, when a loved one dies, you're expected to wail and cry properly to show your grief. I can't explain why, but I didn't feel like doing this. And after seeing everyone else, especially my father with his eyes red and face swollen from tears, I began to feel ashamed. So sitting there alone, I forced myself to cry, focusing on my dead uncle until I could feel the tears run hot down my face." Chapter 3, p. 47

"Hunting with my cousins had taught me the ways of the land: how to find the best spots in the tall grass and long the shimmering dambo pools, how to outwit the birds with a strong, smart trap, and the virtues of patience and silence when lying in wait. Any good hunter knows that patience is the key to success, and Khamba seemed to understand this as if he'd been hunting his entire life." Ibid, p. 56

"From the first time I heard the sounds coming from the radio, I wanted to know what was going on inside. I'd stare at the exposed circuit boards and wonder what all those wires did, why they were different colors, and where they all went ... how could music be playing on one end of the dial while the preacher spoke on the other? Who'd arranged them this way, and how did this person learn such wonderful knowledge?" Chapter 4, p. 64

"The first sign of rain is our signal to begin planting. It's like the starting pistol in the great race against God - the moment he says GO! When the first rains fall, you must be ready." Ibid, p. 70

"Only two percent of Malawians have electricity, and this is a huge problem ... once the sun goes down, and if there's no moon, everyone stops what they're doing, brushes their teeth, and just goes to sleep. Not at 10:00 PM, or even nine o'clock - but seven in

the evening! Who goes to bed at seven in the evening? Well, I can tell you, most of Africa." Chapter 5, p. 76

"Our chief was like our father, the man who protected our small area and represented us to the rest of the country. When we heard he'd been beaten, it was as if we'd all been violated, our safety no longer guaranteed. If the government treated our dear leader in such a way, with the hunger bearing down, I wondered if we people would fare much better." Ibid, p. 91

"Three hours of work yesterday became six hours today, all for the same bag of flour." Chapter 6, p. 92

"My parents had never completed primary school. They couldn't speak English or even read that well. My parents only knew the language of numbers, buying and selling, but they wanted more for their kids. That's why my father had scraped the money together and kept Annie in school, despite the famine and other troubles." Ibid, p. 99

"A shallow rain ditch circled the building like a castle moat, and in my misery, that ditch became like the great river Jordan. There I was, standing atop the mountain, peering into the Promised Land. All I had to do was make it across the water." Ibid, p. 103

"As the sun went down that afternoon, we sat around a dead and smoldering fire, content with the warm feeling of meat in our stomachs, because that's what Christmas was all about anyway." Ibid, p. 113

"To think, my whole life and everything in it had taken place inside this little strip. Looking at it on the map - shaded green with roads zigzagging brown, the lake like a sparkling jewel - you'd never guess that eleven million people lived there, and at that very moment, most of them were slowly starving." Chapter 7, p. 123

"The next morning, the hunger woke me up. Little did I know, but my stomach had taken over my entire body, filled every limb and crevice, all the way up to my head like a great big balloon. At some point in the early morning, it had finally burst and revealed its emptiness. It had only been filled with air, and in this nothingness, there was only pain." Chapter 8, p. 133

"No magic could save us now. Starving was a cruel kind of science." Ibid, p. 142

"Each time I swallowed was like returning something that was lost, some missing part of my being." Ibid, p. 148

"It was as if my brain had long ago made a place for these symbols, and once I discovered them in these books, they snapped right into place." Chapter 9, p. 156

"I loved my father and respected him deeply, but I did not want to end up like him. If I did, my life would never be determined by me, but by rain and the price of fertilizer and seeds ... my future had been chose, and thinking about it now scared me so much I wanted to be sick. But what could I do? Nothing, only accept." Ibid, p. 173

"It was like adding the last piece to the great puzzle in my life. The moment I did, a strong gust of wind blew open my door and spun a cyclone into the room, whipping up the pieces in its arms and revealing the finished machine, its blades spinning wildly through the blur of red dust. Or maybe that was only a dream." Ibid, p. 183

"This was the same forest where I'd been convinced I'd been bewitched by the bubblegum man, the same forest where I'd accepted magic and been defeated, and now I was back there to cut down trees to build a ladder to science and creation - something greater and more real than any magic in the land." Chapter 11, p. 189

"The windmill had been such a success that I began to feel a bit of pressure. I began to see myself like a famous reggae star who'd released a smash album, and now had to produce another hit. Each day at the library, I pored over my texts and tried to come up with my next big idea. The fans were waiting - at least I hoped they were." Chapter 13, p. 213

"Seeing your mother like this is like having God steal the sky from over your head. I was certain she was going to die, and witnessing this made it even more emotional. But after several days, her fever miraculously broke. I'd never prayed so hard in my life." Ibid, p.222

"I began to imagine what it would be like if all of those pinwheels had been real, if every home and shop in the trading center each had a spinning machine to catch the wind above the rooftops. At night, the entire valley would sparkle with light like a clear, starry sky. More and more, bringing electricity to my people no longer seemed like a madman's dream." Ibid, p. 235

"'... this is the problem with our system. We lose talent like this all the time as a result of poverty. And when we do send them back to school, it's not a good education. I'm bringing you here because I want the world to see what this boy has done, and I want them to help.'" Chapter 14, p. 239 - Dr. Mchazime

"No matter how foreign and lonely the world was outside, the books always reminded me of home, sitting under the mango tree." Ibid, p. 247

"'Africans bend what little they have to their will every day. Using creativity, they overcome Africa's challenges. Where the world sees trash, Africa recycles. Where the world sees junk, Africa sees rebirth.'" Chapter 15, p. 253- Erik Hersman

"After all those years of trouble ... I was finally being recognized. For the first time in my life, I felt I was surrounded by people who understood what I did. A great weight seemed to leave my chest and fall to the assembly hall floor. I could finally relax. I was now among colleagues." Ibid, p. 254

"We always seem to be struggling to catch up. Even with so many smart and hardworking people, we were still living and dying like our ancestors." Ibid, p. 263

"I stood there at the base of my machine, then scaled the tower rungs ... from the top, I looked out onto the country I loved ... later that night as I lay in bed, I let that daydream spin me off to sleep, the white noise of the machinery like a song my mother would sing. I went to sleep dreaming of Malawi, and all the things made possible when your dreams are powered by your heart." Ibid, p. 265

"My fellow students and I talk about creating a new kind of Africa, a place of leaders instead of victims, a home of innovation rather than charity. I hope this story finds its way to our brothers and sisters out there who are trying to elevate themselves and their communities, but who feel discouraged ... I want them to know they're not alone. By working together, we can help remove this burden of bad luck from their backs, just as I did, and use it to build a better future." Epilogue, p. 270

Topics for Discussion

What dreams do you have that you are working particularly intensely to achieve? Why are these dreams so strong for you? What resources are you drawing upon to achieve them?

How have your friends supported you in your life ... through difficult times, as you build dreams, simply as you live day by day. What difference has their support made in your life? Could you have achieved what you have without them?

What kind of friend have you been to people in need? Have you been a Gilbert or a Geoffrey, unconditionally supportive no matter what? Or have you been a Charity, at times being somewhat sharp, selfish and/or judgmental?

Describe times when friends have been particularly supportive to you. What kind of difference did they make in your life?

Consider and contrast your life in the year 2000 with the life lived by William and his family - no indoor electricity, no indoor plumbing, no farming equipment, famine, poverty. How do react when you learn about the relative lack of technological advancement and/or economic prosperity that existed in Malawi and Africa as recently as a little more than a decade since?

Describe times when you have had to make choices necessary to help you achieve a goal, choices that set you apart from your family and community. How easy was it to make those choices? What support and/or resistance did you get? How did those experiences turn out for you?

William describes his experience of encountering science for the first time as life changing, as though he found where he belonged (see "Quotes," p. 156). Have you ever had such an experience? How did it make you feel? How did it change your life, or affect your choices?