The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind. Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope
By William Kamkwamba (and Bryan Mealer)

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Hostos Book-of-the-Semester Project
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I. Pre-reading Activities

A. Predicting: Considering the Title of the Book

The title of the book is *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind. Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope*. By William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer

What achievement is referred to in the title? What does it mean to you? What is the result of this achievement? How can electricity generate hope?

Write a paragraph in response to these questions and share what you have written with a partner.

B. Viewing Interviews Online

1. William Kamkwamba: How I Built a Windmill/Video on TED.com
   www.ted.com/.../william_kamkwamba_on_buidling...
   January 17, 2009

2. Video: A Conversation with William Kamkwamba ‘14/Dartmouth Now
   now.dartmouth.edu/.../video-a-conversation-william-kamkwamba-1...
   January 23, 2012

Go to these links and watch the two interviews. Discuss with a partner how what you see in these interviews adds to your understanding of the title. Consider these questions:

What did William build in his backyard?
Where did the TED.com interview take place? How was William’s English then?
What did William tell the Dartmouth interviewer? What is his status at this college? When will he graduate? How is his English now?

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C. **Mapping the Action**

William comes from the country of Malawi, which is located in East Africa. He spent his childhood near the city of Kasungu, where he lived with his family on a farm.

1. Using the key, find Malawi on this map of Africa. Do some research and report to the class on the following:

   a. what countries Malawi shares its borders with
   b. what the topography of Malawi is like
   c. what kind of economy Malawi has
   d. how large Malawi’s population is
   e. what Malawi’s basic problems are
2. Look at the map of the world on this page. William is now a student at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire, in the United States. Look at the distance from Malawi to the Northeastern region of the United States. Point out on the map where New Hampshire is located in the United States, and find the approximate mileage between Malawi and New Hampshire. In addition to the physical mileage, consider the kind of “distance” you believe William traveled between his country and the state of New Hampshire. What cultural and technological differences did he have to negotiate in order to make this journey? What other kinds of differences may have become a factor in his life? In what ways was his journey an advantageous one and in what ways may it have been disadvantageous for him?
II. **Reading Activities**

**Prologue**

**Journal Entry**

Through the rhythm of “action words” in the short, assertive sentences of the **Prologue**, the reader cannot fail to appreciate William Kamkwamba’s **anticipation** of what is about to happen and understand at the same time the **hard work** that got him there, the **great challenge** that he had to meet along the way, as well as the pure joy of being “**reborn**” that this **success** signifies: “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” (1-2).

As you read further, what questions do you hope William will answer? How, in your own life, has a success made you feel “reborn”?

*Free-write in your journal a response to these and other questions that your reading of the Prologue may have generated in your mind.*
Chapter One

A. **General Understanding**

**Note-taking**

*Find out as you read:*

1. why William was afraid the witch doctor would do something bad to him and how his father saved him. How did his father react when he told William not to worry anymore?
2. what story his father would tell William about Chief Mwase and the Battle of Kasungu. What did the Ngoni fail to appreciate about the Chewa? What was the moral to the story?
3. what happened to William’s Grandpa’s grandmother when his Grandpa was a little boy? What was done soon after to assure the people’s safety?
4. how William learned to respect the wizards but to believe in God. Who made sure William understood the lesson he had learned?
5. how William and his friends Geoffrey and Gilbert played with each other when they were boys. How did they manage to play these games when they were without money and “spent [their] afternoons in hunger and dreams” (21)?
6. what moral William’s father’s story about the Lion and the Leopard led to. Why does his father make sure the children understand the story’s lesson?

B. **Open to Discussion**

*Discuss these questions in small groups.*

1. While explaining how he, Geoffrey, and Gilbert played with each other when they were children, William says, “Children everywhere have similar ways of entertaining themselves. If you look at it this way, the world isn’t so big” (19). Do you agree with William’s conclusion? Why or why not?

2. William explains further that he and his friends had to build the trucks they played with from “wire and empty cartons of booze” (19) while children in America bought their toys ready-made and fully assembled in the shopping malls. Which children do you think are more fortunate? The children who create the toys they play with or the children whose parents buy for them the toys they play with? Why?

3. The folktales William’s father told him and his sisters all had a moral to them, but most of the protagonists were animals: the Lion and the Leopard, the Snake and the Guinea Fowl, etc. Why do stories about animals make such an impact on children? Why does the moral in the Lion and the Leopard have such an impact on William? Would it have had the same impact on you? Why or why not?

C. **Analogies**

William uses many analogies in his writing. When he tells us that something is “like” (or “as if”) something else, it gives us a concrete picture of his view of the world. Look at these analogies with a partner and evaluate their effectiveness based on the context in which they appear.

1. My father’s father was so old he couldn’t remember when he was born. His skin was so dry and wrinkled, his feet looked **like they were chiseled from stone**. His overcoat and trousers
seemed older than he was, the way they were patched and hung on his body like the bark of an old tree. He rolled fat cigars from maize husks and filed tobacco, and his eyes were red from kachaso, a maize liquor so strong it left weaker men blind.

Grandpa visited us once or twice a month. Whenever he emerged from the edge of the trees in his long coat and hat, a trail of smoke rising from his lips, it was as if the forest itself had taken legs and walked. (p. 9)

2. “When Grandpa was a boy, his grandmother was attacked by a lion. ...Villagers heard her cries and quickly sounded the drum...They call this emergency beat the musadabwe, meaning, ‘Don’t ask questions, just come!’ It’s like dialing 911, but instead of police, you’re calling other villagers” (9).

3. “By the time Grandpa and others arrived with their spears and bows and arrows, it was too late. They saw the lion – its body the size of a cow – drag his grandmother into the thorny trees, then toss her body into the bush like a mouse” (9).

D. Journal Entry
Free-write in your journal on one of these topics.

1. What stories did your parents tell you when you were a child? How did these stories help you to understand and cope with the world that surrounded you?

2. Describe the portraits that William writes about his father and other family members in this chapter. What portraits can you write about these same individuals who had an impact on your upbringing? In what ways would they be similar to or different from William’s?
Chapter Two

A. General Understanding

Note-taking

*Find out as you read:*

1. what kind of life most Malawians lead “like a law passed down from Moses” (25). What was the alternative lifestyle that William’s father (Trywell) first chose?
2. what dictator ruled Malawi for more than 30 years. What public sign of affection between couples in love were banned by this dictator?
3. what missionary helped end slavery in Malawi. What group had arrived in Malawi from Mozambique more than a hundred years before to take control and enslave the Chewas?
4. what country Malawi won its independence from. What is the date of Malawian independence?
5. why William’s father fought 12 men and won at an Independence Day concert. What famous reggae star was performing?
6. how William’s father met his mother (Agnes) and soon married her. What event made him change his lifestyle and turn to God?
7. why William’s father followed his brother John’s advice and became a farmer. When did William’s “childhood” begin?
8. what farmers in Malawi grow. What is the main crop that their lives depend on mostly?
9. why William treasured his bedroom. How many other children were there in his family?
10. how William’s father saved James’s life. How did William think of magic as a result?
11. what Phiri’s nephew Shabani tried to do for William. What did William learn from this incident?

B. Open to Discussion

Discuss these questions in small groups.

1. In this chapter, Trywell, William’s father, saves his employee James from the potentially mortal blows of Phiri, another employee. In what way did William’s father show not only his physical strength but also his good character? Do you believe he was a good employer? Why or why not?

2. Do you believe in magic? Why or why not? Shabani gave William a magic potion that would increase his physical strength. Only a few days after he started taking the magic potion, William picked a fight with a boy twice his size and was badly beaten. What lesson did William learn about magic and “bad medicine” (48) as a result? How do you think the ideas he has about magic will start to change from that point on as he learns more and more about science?

C. Analogies

Look at these analogies with a partner and evaluate their effectiveness based on the context in which they appear.

1. “Being born Malawian automatically made you a farmer. I think it’s written in the constitution somewhere like a law passed down from Moses” (25).
2. “Lake Malawi is one of the biggest in the world and nearly covers the entire eastern half of our country. It’s so vast it has waves like an ocean” (26).

3. “Even before entering the rows of wooden stalls, her heart would pound like the chiwoda drums of her childhood dances. Making her way across, it took everything inside her to keep from grinning. But my mother couldn’t let on; she was no easy fish to catch” (32).

4. “It was the closest she’d ever been, and the sight of her skin made his heart go mad, as if it was trying to run away” (33).

5. “Then came a voice, piped in like a loudspeaker from heaven. It said: ‘These things will destroy you. Turn to me.’

When my father awoke in the morning, his entire body was trembling like a baby bird’s. The dream, plus all the advice and warnings of the past week, seemed too great a message to ignore” (36).

6. One afternoon I was playing in the yard when I heard a frightening noise coming from the fields, like the sound of twenty leopards roaring. I raced down to find Phiri nose to nose with another worker named James. Phiri was breathing heavily and ready to attack. His hands were in fists and the veins in his arms bulged like tree roots. When he opened his mouth to scream, the earth below our feet seemed to tremble in fright. Someone said Phiri had given James money to buy some items in Kasungu. But James wasn’t educated and couldn’t read or count, so the shopkeepers cheated him and kept their pay. (p. 42).

... Seeing no vines nearby, my father instead ran over to Phiri and wrapped him up in his arms. Phiri kicked and screamed like a tethered animal, but my father held on tight. (p. 43)

D. Journal Entry
Free-write in your journal on this topic.

In this chapter, William says that when he was a little boy, he was not a good athlete and not very strong. He tried to become strong through the use of a magic potion.

Did you ever want to change something about yourself that you didn’t like? What didn’t you like about yourself, and what did you try to do to change it? Did you succeed? Why or why not?
Chapter Three

A. **General Understanding**

**Note-taking**

*Find out as you read:*

1. what sad event occurred in William’s life in January 1997. Why was it difficult for William to show his cousin Geoffrey his respect?
2. what is different about Malawian graves. What does William say this distinguishing characteristic is like?
3. why the dictator Banda cared about the farmers and the land. Why was the district in which William grew up especially important to Banda?
4. how Bakili Muluzi, the new president, differed from Banda. What effect did this different approach have on farming in Malawi?
5. how the dog Khamba became William’s pet. What did Khamba enjoy doing with William?
6. what happened to Charity when he climbed the *nkhaze* tree. How did William’s mother help him, and what did he promise her after the next hunt?
7. what hunting with his cousins taught William. Why was it so important to learn the virtues of patience and silence?
8. what William invented as part of his hunt? How was he successful?

B. **Open to Discussion**

*Discuss these questions in small groups.*

1. In this chapter, William talks about how difficult it was for him to cry when Uncle John, his father’s brother, died. He also explains how ashamed he was when he saw his father cry for the first time.

In many cultures around the world, men who cry are considered weak. What is the prevailing attitude in your culture? What is your attitude? Is it a sign of strength or weakness when a man cries?

2. We see how Khamba becomes William’s pet in this chapter: William said to Socrates, “I’m no friend to a dog,” and Socrates replied, “Tell that to him” (57). In many instances, the dog becomes the master. Why do you believe this happens when an individual has a pet?

C. **Analogies: Writing Incentive**

Choose an analogy discussed in one of the previous chapters, and use that analogy – and the sentence in which it appears – as the first sentence of your own original paragraph.

D. **Journal Entry**

*Free-write in your journal on one of these topics.*

1. No matter what the cultural attitude towards crying, it is very difficult to see a mother or a father cry – for the first time, especially. Do you remember the first time you saw your mother or father cry? What was the situation? Was the crying “justified?” Did your attitude towards this parent change in any way? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. We live by the motto, “A dog is man’s best friend.” If you have a dog as a pet, describe your relationship with your dog. Do you agree with the motto? Why or why not? If you have never had a dog as a pet, would you agree with this motto based on your observations of the relationships between friends and family members and their dogs? Why or why not? If you have other animals as pets (e.g. cats, horses, goats, sheep, rabbits, birds, snakes), would you be able to replace the word “dog” in the motto with name of your pet’s species (e.g. “A cat/horse/goat/sheep/rabbit/bird/snake is man’s best friend”)? Why or why not?
Chapter Four

A. General Understanding

True or False?

Work with a partner. Write T if the sentence is true and F if it is false. If it is false, rewrite the sentence to make it true.

_____1. When he turned 13, William started to hunt more and more and stopped hanging out at the trading center.
_____2. William found that he was quite competitive in the game of bawo.
_____3. In this age of television, Malawians don’t care too much about their radios.
_____4. Trial and error was the way in which William learned about the source of white noise.
_____5. William and Geoffrey had all the traditional tools they needed to work with radios.
_____6. In order to gain knowledge about radios, William and Geoffrey ruined a lot of radios.
_____7. No one in their community recognized William and Geoffrey for the knowledge they had acquired.
_____8. William’s desire to become a scientist came from his work on radios.
_____9. Maize is the biggest crop in Malawi.
_____10. May through September is winter time in Malawi.
_____11. 2008 was an especially wonderful season for farmers in Malawi.

B. Open to Discussion

Discuss these questions in small groups.

1. To learn about radios, William and Geoffrey started taking old ones apart in order to see “how they worked” (67). After experimenting by trial and error and ruining a lot of radios along the way, he and Geoffrey became specialists and started a small business fixing people’s radios. How were both William and Geoffrey following the scientific method while acquiring knowledge about radios? In addition, why did William’s questions to drivers about how cars work and how trucks move take him one step above these drivers who never posed these questions but were merely content that the vehicles provided the transport they needed? Did William, who was interested and able to “solv[e] these mysteries” (71), have the mind of a scientist?

2. The impending drought in 2000 reassured William that “being a scientist was worlds better than [a life in] farming” (72). What problems with agriculture and governmental aid to farmers at that time must have inspired William to realize how he would channel his knowledge of science?

C. Analogies: Writing Incentive

Discuss the analogy in the quotation below. Then use the sentence in which it appears as the first sentence of your own original paragraph: Put yourself in William’s father’s shoes and share what he must have been thinking when he seemed to have been talking to the sacks of grain.

“As for our own farm, we managed to fill only five sacks with grain that barely filled one corner of the storage room. One night before bed, I saw a lamp flickering inside and found my father there...
alone, staring at the sacks as if he'd just asked them a question. Whatever they told him, I'd find out soon enough” (78).

D. **Journal Entry**  
*Free-write in your journal on this topic.*

William’s father was evidently very distressed about the situation he and his family would probably soon encounter. Have you or your parents ever been in a similar situation involving the welfare of your family – not knowing where the next meal would come from or how you would be able to pay the rent? What did you do in order to prevent the situation from escalating? Did you resort to prayer? Did you end up speaking to objects?
Chapter Five

A. General Understanding

True or False?

Work with a partner. Write T if the sentence is true and F if it is false. If it is false, rewrite the sentence to make it true.

_____1. William learns that most people don’t care about how things work, as long as they work.
_____2. Working with the bicycle dynamo William learned a lot about electricity.
_____3. Most Malawians go to bed at 7 every evening because electricity is too expensive.
_____4. Deforestation has nothing to do with the energy problem in Malawi.
_____5. Going to high school would be an important rite of passage for William.
_____6. Gilbert’s father did nothing to help the people who came to him for food.
_____7. The Malawi government and the international community were in large part responsible for the lack of surplus grain.
_____8. William’s father sold the family’s goats in order to have money to buy maize.
_____9. President Muluzi understood his countrymen’s needs.
_____10. Chief Wimbe’s constructive criticism of the government’s efforts was well received by the President’s men.

B. Open to Discussion

Discuss these questions in small groups.

1. In this chapter, William talks about two energy problems Malawians have with electricity and deforestation. How are these energy problems interrelated? Do you know of other regions in the world that have the same problems? What is being done to address them?

2. Chief Wimbe, Gilbert’s father, was beaten by President Muluzi’s mugs after he praised the president for the good job he was doing in the continent of Africa but reminded him at the same time that there was also a terrible war occurring in Malawi: the war against hunger. Could anyone have phrased this criticism of the president more eloquently? How did the way in which Chief Wimbe was treated reflect Malawians’ true situation as citizens?

C. Analogies

Look at these analogies with a partner and evaluate their effectiveness based on the context in which they appear.

1. “But no matter where I was assigned, classes would begin in January. When they did, it would be like passing over an important threshold in becoming a man....And to me, this would usher in another important milestone: for once, I could finally ditch the schoolboy short pants of primary school and walk tall in trousers” (84).

2. “Down the road, it was the same story. When I returned an hour later, all the gaga was gone. Right then a kind of shock went through me, like someone shaking me awake in the middle of the night, and I began running home” (89).
3. “Sure, I’d been aware of the drought and poor harvest and news from the opposition, but it was as if the troubles were happening to someone else” (89).

4. “But after seeing people fighting for gaga, it was like my eyes had been opened wide and a great fear had made its way in. As I ran down the trail toward my house, I felt it grow inside me like a fist around my stomach. Once I stopped at the storage room door, it tightened its grip: out of the five bags we’d filled with grain, only two were still there. In my mind, they were already gone” (89).

5. “I looked down and saw my ridges were small and uneven, as if they’d been dug by a slithering snake” (91).

D. Journal Entry
Free-write in your journal on one of these topics.

1. Because of the drought, William’s father had to round up the family goats – including Mankhalala, William’s favorite one – and sell them at the market. How would you feel if an animal you loved had to be sold or possibly slaughtered so that you could have food to eat? Have you ever been faced with such a situation?

2. Chief Wimbe is beaten after he gently criticizes the president. Have you ever witnessed the beating of an adult you adore, someone who in fact was your protector? How was that beating a violation of you as well?
Chapter Six

A. General Understanding

True or False?

Work with a partner. Write T if the sentence is true and F if it is false. If it is false, rewrite the sentence to make it true.

_____1. The drought changed the eating habits of William’s family.
_____2. A lot of hope was reflected in the newborn baby’s name.
_____3. William’s father and mother knew nothing about starting a new business.
_____4. William’s sister Annie had a traditional marriage.
_____5. Although Annie was missed, in her absence there was one less mouth to feed in William’s family.
_____6. The drought made people more corrupt.
_____7. On Christmas during the drought Charity and William feasted on goat’s skin.

B. Open to Discussion

Discuss these questions in small groups.

1. According to Chewa customs, daughters do not eat with their fathers and sons do not eat with their mothers. In fact, they eat in separate rooms. In addition, daughters never hug their fathers and sons never hug their mothers. Such behavior would be considered immoral.

Nevertheless, because of the famine and the need to save kerosene and make the most of the little food that was available, the whole family ate together for the first time. Can you think of any changes of customs that your family had to implement in order to respond to an economic or political condition? Do you think that once these changes are made – even as temporary measures – they may end up being permanent changes?

2. William and his sisters were surprised that their parents had a new baby to feed: Tiyamike (meaning “Thank God”). This is because in Chewa culture, it is impolite to ask any questions about the body. So, even if a mother is getting heavier, there would be no way of asking after her health because of the weight gain.

Are there any similar taboos about the body in your culture? If so, what are they? Can you imagine how this custom in Malawi would affect life in America?

3. When William’s sister Annie surprised the family with her elopement, she gave up not only the rest of her secondary school education, for which her father had scraped together money in order to keep her in school, but also her right to never be able to live at home again (i.e. if she didn’t get married and the arrangement with her boyfriend failed).

What would happen in your culture? Would a daughter’s elopement dirty the family name and bring shame to the family?
C. **Analogies**

*Look at these analogies with a partner and evaluate their effectiveness based on the context in which they appear.*

1. “All day the smell of sweet cakes filled our compound, invading every room and drifting into the fields….The smell seemed to enter my body *like a spirit, slithering into my empty belly and stretching its legs, using its elbows to get comfortable*” (102).

2. “But this time was different. My mother had scraped away every last drop to use *as if wiping it clean with a sponge.* No VP, only the bare pot” (102).

3. “I could hear my father stomping up and down the yard, his nostrils flaring *like an angry ox.* I didn’t dare leave my room, for fear he’d whip me just for being there” (105).

4. “My father’s spirit seemed to disappear in the days after my sister left. He was no longer his upbeat, optimistic self, and his laughter was noticeably missing from the compound *as if the wind had come along and stolen one of our houses*” (106).

5. “All around me people appeared weak and exhausted, *as if they hadn’t slept.*….If things went badly for them here, they probably wouldn’t get any better. As the air became thicker and hotter, they began to wilt *like potted plants in the sun*” (108).

6. “That morning, my mother had dipped into her inventory and given me a cake for the journey, which had sat *like a stone in my empty stomach.* But after many hours in line, I became very hungry and weak myself. The heat from the other bodies was *like being surrounded in fire.* People began smelling bad, and my head felt *like a plastic jumbo,* caught in the wind and drifting into the sun. Even my fingers were sweating” (108).

7. “With little else to do, I handed him my money, grabbed my maize, and ran for the door, *as if I’d just robbed the place.* Despite being cheated, I felt *like I was on top of the world, the jackpot winner.* But my joy quickly turned to fear as I stepped outside into the mob” (110-111).

8. “At home, my sisters and parents welcomed me back *like a hero from the war.* I must’ve looked exhausted, and my clothes were stretched and dirty. I tossed the bag onto my father’s scale and confirmed I’d been robbed. I’d only received fifteen kilos of maize, half a bag, but at least that would feed us for another week” (111).

9. “Standing on the porch one morning during a heavy rain, I watched a line of people walking slowly past *like a great army of ants.*…They stopped to rest every few meters, exhausted from hunger, before hoisting their heavy loads and continuing on” (111).

D. **Journal Entry**

*Free-write in your journal on this topic.*

William’s sister’s elopement could have resulted in her shame and her family’s shame. Have you ever done anything that could have brought such shame to your family that living with them again would be out of the question? How would you feel if that were the case – if your breach of a family custom resulted in your not ever being able to live under the same roof as your parents and siblings again? How
would you cope with this situation of no longer being allowed to enjoy the intimacy of the first people who had loved and nurtured you in your life journey?
Chapter Seven

A.  **General Understanding**

**Note-taking**

Find out as you read:

1. which boarding schools William wanted to go to
2. why he could not go to these schools
3. why traders like Mr. Mangochi was not giving the farmers the prices they were used to getting
4. how William was able to convince Mr. Phiri, the headmaster of Kachokolo, that he should be able to wear sandals (not the proper footwear) for the time being
5. what subjects William and his classmates were studying during the first semester
6. the subject that William liked the most and why that was so
7. why William had to drop out of school
8. how many students, according to Gilbert, remained enrolled in school after the grace period was over
9. how William’s father reacted to the president’s denial in the radio interview of the situation in Malawi

B.  **Open to Discussion: Working with Quotations**

*Read the quotations and discuss the questions in small groups.*

1. “In two years I can take my Junior Certificate Exam,” I answered, thinking aloud. “Then I can transfer to a better school. You’ll see me soon in Kasungu. Don’t laugh at me now.”
   “Good luck,” he said, laughing anyway.
   That’s what I would do, I decided. I’d study and become the best student at this village school, then take my JCE exam and impress them all. At Kasungu and Chayamba, they’d be on their knees begging me. In the meantime, there was one good thing about going to Kachokolo. Gilbert had also been assigned there (his grades had also stunk). I thought about the two of us walking to school together, and that made me feel more excited. I had two weeks to prepare. (pp. 122-123)

   How does William face his failure to get into the high school of his choice? Is his attitude a good one for anyone dealing with a disappointment? Why or why not? What does his reverie about walking to school with Gilbert say about him?

2. “‘Here at Kachokolo,’ he said, ‘you’ll be given the knowledge to help your country and make it proud.’ We certainly were a fine bunch, all of us eager to learn and squirming with excitement. At that moment, I was certain I was experiencing the greatest day of my life. I couldn’t stop smiling” (129).

   How does William’s joy on the first day of high school reflect the value he places on education?

3. “We ran our fingers over our country, and I marveled at how small a place it was compared to the rest of the earth. 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” (131).
How does the first time William sees Malawi on the map provide him with a mature perspective of the problems that his country faced?

4. “My own problems didn’t seem so important; the hunger belonged to the entire country. I decided to put faith in my father’s word, that once we made it through the hunger, everything would be okay. But first we had to make it through the hunger. And as Geoffrey had said, it was hard enough just worrying about tomorrow” (134).

How does hunger take on a major role in William’s thinking? Have you ever been hungry? Do you believe that only people who have been hungry can understand what hunger is? Why or why not?

5. “‘Some men are blind,’ my father replied. ‘But this one [the President of Malawi] just chooses not to see.’ … That afternoon, the ways of the world suddenly became more clear. Whereas I was still confused as to how the hunger had been allowed to happen, this much was certain. Every man for himself. We were on our own” (139).

How does William’s father’s remark about the President of the country reflect his wisdom? Are the “ways of the world” teaching William a good lesson? Why or why not? Should it be “every man for himself” or “every man watching out for the needs of the other” when a country is crippled by the effects of a famine?

C. Analogies

The analogies in the following passages all show the effects of the famine on Malawians. Discuss how the analogies in the narrative make William’s descriptions of the hungry people all the more poignant.

1. “His clothes looked borrowed as if they belonged to someone else” (133).

2. By late January, the GAGA was finally gone. The people who’d depended on this for nsima turned instead to pumpkin leaves, and here the real starvation began. Famine arrived in Malawi.

   It fell upon us like the great plagues of Egypt I’d read about, swiftly and without rest. As if overnight, people’s bodies began changing into horrible shapes. They were now scattered across the land by the thousands, scavenging the soil like animals. Far from home and away from their families, they began to die.

   The same people I’d seen carrying their belongings to the trading center now stumbled past us in a daze, their eyes swimming in their sockets. The hunger ravaged the body in two different ways. Some people wasted away until they looked like walking skeletons. Their necks became long and thin like the dokowe birds that drank near the river, not even strong enough to hold up their heads. Others were stricken with kwashiorkor, a dreadful condition a body gets when there are no proteins in the blood. Even as these people starved, their bellies, feet, and faces swelled with fluid like ticks filling with blood.

   The starving people didn’t say much as they passed. It was as if they were already dead, yet still looking to fill their stomachs. They moved carefully along the roads and through the fields, picking up banana peels and discarded cobs and stuffing them into their mouths. (pp. 134-135)

3. The crowds continued to pour in from the bush. More than ever, they now converged at the trading center like herds of crazed and wasting animals driven together by fire. Women
with thin, ashen faces sat alone, pleading with God. But they did it quietly and without tears. Everywhere the anguish was silent because no one had the energy to cry. Elsewhere in the trading center, children with swollen stomachs and strange copper hair clustered under storefronts. A few traders still spread tarps in the mud and sold grain, but the units had become smaller and smaller. Its price was like gold, like buying the universe and stars in one half kilo. Crowds gathered round, but mostly to stare in stunned silence, as if watching a dream in heaven. Those with energy still screamed and begged. (pp. 137-138)

D. Journal Entry
Free-write in your journal on one of these topics.

1. William’s failure to get into the secondary school of his choice is a great disappointment to him. Nevertheless, he faces this failure with an optimistic spirit. Have you ever been disappointed by a failure? What was this failure and how did you face it – positively or negatively?

2. It is not easy to be a witness of people suffering from hunger – especially when the little that you have to eat is what still separates you from them. Although the United States is much wealthier than Malawi, there are many hungry people on the streets of our big cities. How have you dealt with people’s hunger? What do you do when you see a child begging for bread?
Chapter Eight

A. General Understanding

Completion Exercise

Work with a partner. Complete each sentence with its appropriate ending found in the box below.

1. When William saw his dog Khamba, it was like a “hammer in [his] stomach” (141) because _________________________.
2. When William saw Khamba dead, he said that _____________________________________.
3. William’s sister Mayless almost died from _________________________________________.
4. During the famine, while the crop was growing, William’s father was able to cut deals with the traders in town based on _______________________________________.
5. After almost five months of suffering in Malawi, the president _______________________________________.
6. William described the president as _____________________________________________.
7. When healthy crops started growing, some of the men who had to leave their land in search of food for their families couldn’t farm their own fields and ended up becoming ___________________________________________.

   a. he had done a terrible thing
   b. the tobacco crop once it was dry
   c. he had no food to give to the starving animal
   d. “a funny guy”
   e. thieves
   f. finally announced on the radio that the hunger crisis was an “emergency”
   g. cholera

B. Open to Discussion: Working with Quotations

Read the quotations and discuss the questions in small groups.

1. “No magic could save us now. Starving was a cruel kind of science ... My father must’ve been thinking about this, because he turned to my mother and said: ‘My family is mine to look after. If we’re supposed to die, then we die together. These are my principles. God is on my side’” (151-152).

   The rivalry between science and magic comes to a head during the famine. If starving is a “cruel kind of science,” what would you call a “kind” kind of science? William’s father brings another value system into the discussion: religion. Where do you believe religion fits in the “continuum” that exists between magic and science?

2. “Meanwhile, out in the maize fields, the stalks were now as high as my father’s chest. The first ears had begun to form, revealing traces of reddish silk on their heads. The deep green leaves had begun their fade to yellow, along with the stem. While men withered and died all around, our plants were looking fat and strong” (154).

   Malawians were subject to this kind of irony when the crops started to grow. Where else in the world might this kind of irony have persisted in a similar situation?
3. “Should we kill them?” I asked. “Perhaps call the police?” My father shook his head. “We’re not killing anyone,” he said. “Even if I called the police, those men would only starve to death in jail. Everyone has the same hunger, son. We must learn to forgive.” (p.159)

How does William’s father become his “moral compass” during his childhood? Do you agree with his principles and his way of living in the world? Why or why not?

C. Analogies: Writing Incentive
Discuss the analogy in the quotation below. Then use the sentence as the first sentence of your own original paragraph.

“The baskets of dowe and steaming pumpkins were like a great army marching to save us from certain defeat” (158).

D. Journal Entry
Free-write in your journal on this topic.

I could feel the tears hot in my throat, but I swallowed them down. Charity turned to me. “Don’t be so upset,” he said. “It’s just a dog.” “Yah,” I said. “Just a dog.”

...“I did a terrible thing,” I whispered, walking faster.
“He was old,” Geoffrey said. “He was going to die anyway.” “I did a terrible thing.”

...“So long, Khamba,” I said. “You were a good friend.”
We filled the hole with soil and left no marker, even concealed the patch with grass and branches. When Charity and I got home, we told no one about what we’d done. Even after all these years, it’s remained a secret, until now. (pp. 146-148)

William’s account of the death of Khamba has remained a secret until now. Have you ever kept a secret for such a long time that when you did reveal it, you revealed it first to a more “distant” public as, in this case, to a community of readers? What was the secret and what did telling it do for you? What reaction did you receive from the people you told it to? In your opinion, did William do “a terrible thing”?
Chapter Nine

A.  **General Understanding**

**Note-taking**

*Find out as you read:*

1. what William says about reading  
2. the kinds of textbooks he found in the library  
3. what kind of independent study course he started to follow  
4. how William learned about electricity  
5. how William taught himself to read textbooks in English  
6. how magnets contributed to William’s understanding of electricity  
7. where William learned about windmills  
8. how Archimedes, a scientist, not a military general, saved the Greek city of Syracuse from the attack of the Romans  
9. how windmills and water pumps would make life much easier in Malawi  
10. how William built his windmill and what William did to find tools such as a drill, pliers, and a flathead screwdriver

B.  **Open to Discussion: Working with Quotations**

*Read the quotations and discuss the questions in small groups.*

1. “Turning the pages (of Malawi Junior Integrated Science book – used by Form Four students), I came across a picture of Nkula Falls on the Shire River, located in southern Malawi. I’d always heard about the hydro plants, but never knew how they worked. Simply by asking enough people in the trading center, and at home, I knew that water from the river flowed down the country until it reached the ESCOM plant, where it produced electricity. But how and why this worked, I had no clue” (162).

Discuss how asking questions like “[H]ow and why [does] this work?” is the first important step in the pursuit of knowledge.

2. But *Explaining Physics* was much more difficult to read than *Integrated Science*. It was filled with long and complicated words and phrases. Over the next week, I struggled with the text but managed to figure out every few words and was able to grasp the context. For instance, I’d be interested in an illustration labeled “Figure 10,” so I’d go through the text until I found where “Figure 10” was mentioned and study the sentences around it. For words that had no translation in Chichewa, I’d write them down and go to Mrs. Sikelo (the teacher who ran the library).

“Can you look up the word *electroscope* in the dictionary?”  
“Okay,” she said. “Any others?”  
“*Kinetic energy* and *diode.*”  
“I think you’re going above and beyond your fellow students. They’re not studying this stuff.”

“I know, but I want to know about this.”  
“Well, keep it up. Come back if you need more help.”
... Even if the words sometimes confused me, the concepts that were illustrated in the drawings were clear and real in my mind. The various symbols – those for positive and negative, dry cells and switches in a circuit, and arrows indicating direction of current – made perfect sense and needed no explanation. And through them, I was able to grasp principles like magnetism and induction and the differences between AC and DC. 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.

I kept this book for a month and studied it daily, most often while ignoring my independent studies. It was like delicious food, and I seemed to want to share my knowledge with everyone I encountered.

... “Excuse me,” I interrupted. “It’s really not the same. A color television uses three electron tubes and a screen with fluorescence. It’s right here in my book.”

(pp. 165-166)

Why can William be described as a perfect student? Would you recommend the strategy he uses to decode and understand what he reads in English to other English language learners? Why or why not?

3. No more skipping breakfast; no more dropping out of school. With a windmill, we’d finally release ourselves from the troubles of darkness and hunger. In Malawi, the wind was one of the few consistent things given to us by God, blowing in the treetops day and night. A windmill meant more than just power, it was freedom.

Standing there looking at this book (i.e. Using Energy), I decided I would build my own windmill. I’d never built anything like it before, but I knew if windmills existed on the cover of that book, it meant another person had built them. After looking at it that way, I felt confident that I could build one, too.

(p. 169)

It is through a book that William first gets the idea to build the windmill. William says the “windmill meant more than just power, it was freedom.” How was the book he read about it (Using Energy) the source of “power” and “freedom”? Would you define education that way, too? Why or why not?

4. I’m not sure where I got my confidence, but I knew this was a great plan. However, I had none of the materials I needed or the money to buy them. So to pull this off I had to do what I did with my radio experiment – I had to go and find them on my own.

... (the scrapyard) Now that I had an actual purpose and plan, I realized how much bounty lay before me. There were so many things: old water pumps, tractor rims half the size of my body, filters, hoses, pipes, and plows.

(pp. 175-176)

How does having a “purpose and a plan” nurture the confidence of an individual who wants to build something? Why is having confidence not enough on its own and having a well-defined purpose and plan are essential ingredients for the person’s eventual success?
C. **Analogies: Writing Incentive**

*Discuss the analogy in the quotation below. Then use the sentence as the first sentence of your own original paragraph.*

“For the next month, I woke up early and went in search of windmill pieces like exploring for treasure” (175).

D. **Journal Entry**

*Free-write in your journal on this topic.*

I tried to explain about windmills and my plan to generate power, but all she saw were pieces of plastic stuck to a bamboo stick.

“Even children do more sensible things,” she said. “Go help your father in the fields.”

“I’m building something.”

“Something what?”

“For the future.”

“I’ll tell you something about the future!”

It was pointless to explain. What I needed now was a bicycle dynamo or some kind of generator, and I had no idea where I was going to find such a thing.

(p. 170)

At the beginning, William’s mother did not see eye-to-eye with him about the work he was doing. How have you dealt with a parent’s (or other adult figure’s) misunderstanding of the important work you were doing? If you have not ever had this problem, what advice would you give to anyone who has been frustrated by such “opposition?” Would you just keep quiet as William did (because “It was pointless to explain”) and then just quietly go about your business?
Chapter Ten

A. General Understanding

Answering the Questions

Work with a partner. Write complete sentences in response to these questions.

1. Why did William have to drop out of school again?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

2. Why did William’s father say, “Today, I’m a failure to my whole family” (183)?
_____________________________________________________________________________________

3. Why did William not want to “end up just like [his father]” (183)?
_____________________________________________________________________________________

4. When did William start to look for windmill pieces again?
_____________________________________________________________________________________

5. How did William convince his father to give him his bicycle?
_____________________________________________________________________________________

6. Why didn’t William permit anyone from his family to come into his room?
_____________________________________________________________________________________

7. How did William’s father explain to his sisters that for the time being William did not have to work in the fields?
_____________________________________________________________________________________

8. How did Gilbert help William get the important pieces he needed to build the windmill?
_____________________________________________________________________________________

B. Open to Discussion: Working with Quotations

Read the quotations and discuss the questions in small groups.

1. I had no time to wallow and grieve. The maize was ready, and my father needed all hands in the fields. I went into the harvest with a mixed heart. I was so convinced I’d never go
to school again that entering the maize rows seemed like surrender, like walking into prison and locking my own door. But at the same time, my God, we were finally harvesting our food.

... Harvests were always wonderful occasions, a time to think about all the mornings you awoke at 4:00 A.M. with the spiders in the toilet and hyenas in the fields – all the hard work of digging ridges, planting, and weeding and long days in the sun. We harvested all day with a satisfied mind, and at night we slept like a lion with a belly full of food. Harvests are a time to remember your sacrifice.”
(pp. 183-184)

In what way does the “harvesting process” William describes here make us think of the process of pursuing an education? What is the “harvest” of the educational process?

2. “More and more, going to the scrapyard began to replace school in my mind. It was an environment where I learned something each day. I’d see strange and foreign materials and try to imagine their use” (187).

Is there more than one way of going to school? Was William’s “going to the scraipyard” a full replacement of the formal school experience? Why or why not? What did this pursuit add to the learning process? What part of the learning process may have been lacking here?

C. Close Reading: Creating Role Plays
Reread this passage closely with the members of your group. Then prepare a role play in response to the questions that follow.

Even days when I tried sneaking past, someone would spot me through the open window and yell, “There goes the madman off to smoke his chamba!”

Chamba is marijuana.

Luckily I did have a few supporters and well-wishers. But Geoffrey had accepted an invitation from my uncle Musaiwale to work at the maize mill in Chipumba, and that meant that Gilbert was the only person who didn’t laugh. Finally I decided that whenever someone shouted from the schoolyard, “William, what are you doing in the garbage?” I’d just smile and say, “Nothing, only playing.”

These students immediately told their parents about the crazy boy in the scraipyard, and soon my mother was getting an earful in the trading center. Now when I came home with my pieces, she stared at me and shook her head. One day she came into my room quite worried.

“What’s wrong with you?” she said. “Your friends don’t behave this way. When you go to Gilbert’s house, you don’t see this kind of thing. I mean, look at this room! It looks like a madman’s room. Only madmen collect garbage.”

That night she told my father, “He’s never going to find a wife like this, and even if he does, how will he care for her and feed his family?”

“Leave the boy alone,” my father said. “Let’s see what he has up his sleeve.”

(p. 189)

Take the conversation between the mother and the father further. Why did William’s father have such confidence in his son’s potential? What did he imagine William would accomplish? Why was William’s
mother so resistant to understanding her son’s project? What were her fears? What does William’s mother say to her husband now?

D. **Analyses: Writing Incentive**

Discuss the analogy in the quotation below. Then use the sentence as the first sentence of your own original paragraph.

“While Gilbert went home, I ran back to my room and placed the dynamo next to the other materials. It was **like adding the last piece to the great puzzle in my life**” (193).

In your paragraph, take William’s point of view and explain what he meant. How was “place[ing] the dynamo next to the other materials” like “adding the last piece to the great puzzle in [his] life”?

E. **Journal Entry**

Free-write in your journal on this topic.

“That’s right,” I said. “I’m lazy, misala, but I know what I’m doing, and soon all of you will see” (191)

Have you ever been in William’s situation – where others did not understand the importance of what you were doing (or even thinking) and thought that you were “lazy” and totally letting time pass by without really doing anything? Did you have as much courage as William had and were you able to say, “I know what I’m doing, and soon all of you will see”? Or, did you need William’s or someone else’s “support” in order to be able to say that? How did you resolve the issue and make yourself understood?
A. General Understanding

Sequencing the Events

Work with a partner. What happened when William finally got the windmill ready for the job it was to do? Put the events and actions in the box in chronological order. Under the box, you will see that the sequence has been started for you.

1. Collected bottle caps (16) – another hour (bottle caps = washers to help secure the bolts)
2. Performed a test run
3. Built the tower
4. Arranged the fan, blades, bolts, and the dynamo in a neat row outside the house
5. Went through the process of heating, melting, and reheating (nearly 3 hours)
6. Experienced a power surge
7. Dug three holes three meters deep
8. Cut down trees to build a ladder
9. Nailed reinforcements like rungs in a ladder
10. Wrapped the bottom of the poles in black plastic *jumbos* to fend off the termites
11. People from the town gathered
12. Raised the machine
13. And there was electric light!
14. Held the reed and bulb in his hand
15. A gust of wind blew
16. Jerked bicycle spoke loose and blades began to turn

(See Answers below.)

B. Open to Discussion: Working with Quotations

Read the quotations and discuss the questions in small groups.

1. “I walked around the windmill, staring at it from every possible angle, as if it were a strange beast.
   “It’s beautiful,” I said.
   “Shall we?” he [Geoffrey] asked.
   “We shall.”
   ...
   For two days the windmill remained on the pole, hidden behind the house and out of sight. In the meantime, Geoffrey, Gilbert, and I set out to build my tower. In the early morning, we met in front of my house, grabbed an ax and pangas, and walked into the blue gum grove behind Geoffrey’s house. 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.

(pp. 197-199)

William emerges victorious on the side of “science and creation.” Do you think any sadness accompanied William’s recognition that “science” or “something greater and more real than any magic in the land” had been his salvation? Why or why not?

2. By sundown, the tower was built. It stood sixteen feet high and was steady, but from a short distance away, it appeared more like a wobbly giraffe who’d had too much kachoso.

... “Electric wind!” I shouted. “I told you I wasn’t mad!”

... “How did you manage such a thing?” they asked.

“Hard work and lots of research,” I’d say, trying not to sound too smug.

... “Eh, you proved everyone wrong,” she said, smiling. “But I admit, I did worry about you.”

“What if the wind stops blowing?” asked Rose.

“Well,” I said, “the light goes off, and I’m stranded. But I’m already thinking of a plan for having a battery.”

Once I had more wire and a car battery, I explained, I could store electricity for the times when the wind stops blowing. It could also provide light for the entire house. It would have to be done little by little, but once complete, it would save my parents the money they normally spent on kerosene, and that was just the beginning. The next machine would pump water for our fields. One day, windmills would be our shield against hunger.

[Excerpted from pp. 200 – 209]

What is your definition of a visionary? Would you agree that William is a visionary? Why or why not?

C. Analogies

Look at these analogies with a partner and evaluate their effectiveness based on the context in which they appear.

1. “After I’d gathered sixteen Carlsberg caps, I brushed them off and hurried back home. I hammered them flat and drove bolts through their center. They worked perfectly. I then wired three-foot lengths of bamboo against each blade like bones, for reinforcement. Once assembled, the wingspan of the blade system was more than eight feet across” (195).

2. “I walked around the windmill, staring at it from every possible angle, as if it were a strange beast” (197).

3. “By sundown, the tower was built. It stood sixteen feet high and was steady, but from a short distance away, it appeared more like a wobbly giraffe who’d had too much kachaso” (200).
D. Journal Entry

*Free-write in your journal on this topic.*

It is sometimes a sad moment in our lives when we learn that the “magic” of the childhood stories that put us to sleep no longer has any bearing in the more adult world of “science” and knowledge. How have you been able to reconcile the push and pull of the forces of magic and science in your own life? Have you found room for both? Why or why not?

| ANSWERS: |
| ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ → ______ |
Chapter Twelve

A. **General Understanding**

**Scanning**

*Work with a partner. Scan the text to find out why the following items are significant in William’s research.*

1. mutual induction
2. Michael Faraday
4. a cyclone
5. a belt from a milling machine
6. a pulley

B. **Open to Discussion: Working with Quotations**

*Discuss the quotation in small groups. Then write the monologue described below.*

“I’m now standing in the living room of the Honorable Papa Kam-kwamba,” I said, in a deep, serious voice. “Mister Kamkwamba, this room used to be so dark and sad at this hour. Now look at you, enjoying electricity like a city person!”

“Oh,” said my father, smiling. “Enjoying it more than a city person.”

“You mean because there’s no blackouts and you owe ESCOM nothing?”

“Well, yes,” said my father. “But also, because my own son made it.”

Finally, Geoffrey returned from Chipumba with a good belt that worked beautifully. At last, no more injuries on the job! Even better, no more getting out of bed in the early mornings to climb up the tower. Instead, when the first crow of the cock stirred me from my dreams—which it always did—the steady hum of the spinning machine would sing me back to sleep. But that cock was a persistent one, and often, not even my windmill could guarantee my rest.

... It was no use. Conquering darkness on the farm was hard enough, but a noisy chicken— that was impossible.

(Excerpted from pp. 214 – 222)

You are William’s father. Write a monologue that expresses the feelings you now have about your son’s success.

C. **Analogies**

*Choose an analogy discussed in one of the previous chapters, and use that analogy—and the sentence in which it appears—as the first sentence of your own original paragraph.*
D. **Journal Entry**

*Free-write in your journal on this topic.*

William’s best friends Geoffrey and Gilbert support him totally throughout his project. They are always there for him no matter how much criticism he receives from others. Write about your best friends and in what ways they have been important to you.

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*The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*

*Study Guide prepared by Robert F. Cohen*

*Hostos Book-of-the-Semester Project*

*Fall 2013*
Chapter Thirteen

A. General Understanding

Answering the Questions

Work with a partner. Write complete sentences in response to these questions.

1. Why was William afraid he would become like the other drop-outs, “‘grooving’ through life, just living off small ganyu and having no real plan” (224)?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

2. What did William do in order not to fall into the same kind of lifestyle as the other high school drop-outs?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

3. How did the idea of building a radio station come to William?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

4. What theory did he first want to test when he was figuring out how to build a transmitter?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

5. Why did William believe he needed an amplifier? What was Geoffrey’s fear?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

6. How did William try to address the country’s deforestation problem with goats’ poop?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

7. What disease almost took William’s mother’s life after she returned from a visit to her family in Salima?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

8. After Gilbert’s father, Chief Wimbe, died, what sound resonated throughout the whole village?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

9. After President Muluzi stepped down, why did the plan of the new president (Bingu wa Mutharika) to subsidize fertilizer throughout Malawi fail?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
10. In what form did people’s fear of more misfortunes sweep Malawi and William’s village?

11. How did people start to view William’s windmill before they knew that a new famine would be averted?

12. How did magic also get in the way of controlling the spread of HIV and AIDS?

13. How did William and some of his friends join together in the fight against AIDS?

14. What did the teachers at Wimbe Primary invite William to do?

B. Open to Discussion: Working with Quotations

Read the quotations and discuss the questions in small groups.

1. “If the first people to experiment with great inventions such as radios, generators, or airplanes had been afraid of being arrested, we’d never be enjoying those things today. ‘Let them come arrest me,’ I’d say. ‘It would be an honor’” (227).

   How is “freedom” a permanent partner in William’s quest for knowledge?

   Why is it ironic that William was now being blamed for his magic when it was through science that he had achieved his goal? What does it take to get people to start to think critically, especially when they are subject to problems affecting their physical survival?

C. Analogies

Look at these analogies with a partner and evaluate their effectiveness based on the context in which they appear.

1. “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” (225).
2. “Slowly, as if being deflated of air, my mother then slipped back into the darkness. Every time she came back, she’d scream my sister’s name again. 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” (235).

D. Close Reading
Reread this passage closely with the members of your group. Then discuss the questions that follow.

The windmill not only allowed students to listen to music and news, but they could also charge their parents’ mobile phones. Each Monday, I told them about the basics of science and explained the importance of innovation, like how ink was first made by using charcoal. I also demonstrated the cup-and-string experiment featured in my books, to help explain how a telephone works.

I walked them through the steps of how I’d built everything using simple scrapyard materials, and I hoped I’d inspire them to build something themselves. If I can teach my neighbors how to build windmills, I thought, what else can we build together?

“In science we invent and create,” I said. “We make new things that can benefit our situation. If we can all invent something and put it to work, we can change Malawi.”

I later found out that some of the students had been so inspired by the windmill in the schoolyard, they went home and made toy windmills themselves.

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.

(pp. 248-249)

Track William’s progress from teacher to educator to visionary. In what ways can an individual’s vision sometimes drive him mad? Is there a fine line between a “madman’s dream” and the dream of a visionary?

E. Journal Entry
Free-write in your journal on one of these topics.

1. William did not want to give in, but he sometimes thought that “forgetting dreams [could be] easy” (224) if there were too many distractions in life to pursue them. Have you found this to be true in your own life? For instance, how hard is it to pursue an education when there are so many other things you have to do in order to survive?

2. We see in this chapter how William’s failures gave him the insights needed for future successes. Is experiencing failure a necessary ingredient for achieving success? Why or why not? What experiences with failure in your own life have been conduits to success?
Chapter Fourteen

A. General Understanding

Telling the Story

*Use the following cues to tell what you learn about William’s life starting in November 2006:*

Malawi Teacher Training Activity (MTTA)

Dr. Hartford Mchazime

Everson Maseya, Radio One

*Daily Times*

Ministry of Education

Soyapi Mumba (Baobab Health)

Mike McKay (Hacktivate)

Emeka Okafor (TEDGlobal 2007)

Arusha, Tanzania

Madisi Secondary

Mr. Rhonex Banda

B. Open to Discussion: Working with Quotations

*Read the quotations and discuss the questions in small groups.*

1. When William first went to Madisi Secondary, he was bullied by the other boys, who taunted him with statements like “The old man thinks he’s funny. You’ve spent too much time with your cows, herd boy” (261). However, when William decided to end this bullying once and for all and show them the newspaper article about his windmill, they applauded him and congratulated him. Would the same thing happen in the United States? Or, would the boys here then call him a “nerd”?

2. “In a way, it took having these reporters come to my house to make our town finally accept my windmill. I don’t know, but I think it was a kind of validation. After the radio and newspaper coverage, the number of visitors to my house increased tenfold” (255).

   Why do you believe William needed “validation,” especially from the people of his town? How is this kind of validation important for the development of one’s own self-respect?

3. “The airplane was bright and clean, and the air-conditioning felt so cool and pleasant on such a hot day. What a great place to be! As the plane taxied toward the runway, I gripped the seat, smiling big, I was certain everyone knew it was my first time. The people seated around me were so well-
dressed and confident. They had important things to do, and their busy lives required them to travel in airplanes across the world. As the jet accelerated down the runway and lifted its nose in the air, I pressed my head back in the seat and laughed.

“I guess I was one of them, too.” (263)

How may the validation he received from his townspeople have given William the confidence he needed to say, “I guess I was one of them, too”?

C. **Open to Discussion: From Quotations to Point-of-View Writing**

*Discuss the quotations in small groups. Then prepare one of the role plays suggested here.*

1. “Dr. Mchazime was an older man with gray hair and kind, gentle eyes. But when he spoke, his command of language was large and powerful. I’d never heard anyone speak such good Chichewa, and when he spoke English, it was simply inspiring” (250).

You are William. Explain in a monologue why perfect diction in whatever language one speaks is so important to you. How is speaking in such a way the mark of a truly accomplished person? Present your monologue to the class.

2. “I want to tell you something,” he said. “You may not realize, but your son has done an amazing thing, and this is only the beginning. You’re going to see a lot more people coming here to see William Kamkwamba. I have a feeling this boy will go far. I want you to be ready” (251).

Imagine you were the parent Dr. Mchazime was talking to. How would you react? What feelings would it have triggered in you about your child? About yourself? Write a monologue in which you express these feelings. Then present the monologue to the class.

3. “Dr. Mchazime told us that as a boy he had endured his own setbacks with education. His father had also been a poor farmer who’d struggled to feed and clothe his family. But his father had learned the value of an education. While working in the gold mines of Rhodesia, he’d been denied several opportunities because he’d never gone to school. That failure seemed to haunt him the rest of his life” (253).

How do you think this story affected William’s father when Dr. Mchazime told it to them? You are William’s father. What thoughts ran through your mind as you heard Dr. Mchazime tell his story? Write a monologue and then present it to the class.

4. “I think this chap should be sent back to school,” [Dr. Mchazime] said. “He needs to continue his education and develop his abilities. That way these inventions will be credible and people will respect what he’s doing. Without education, he’s limited” (255).

You are Dr. Mchazime. Write a monologue in which you continue his “argument” and you take his reasoning further. Then present it to the class.

5. “Mchazime, this chap is a genius,” they shouted.

“Yes,” he answered, “and 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” (252).
You are the President of a community college in a very poor neighborhood. Your students can hardly afford to go to school even with the financial aid they receive. How do you try to convince a major educational foundation to give you a $5-million-dollar grant to improve the quality of education at your school? Use Dr. Mchazine’s words as a source of inspiration. What do you say in a letter to the foundation? After you have written the letter, present it to the class.

D. **Analogies**
Choose an analogy discussed in one of the previous chapters, and use that analogy – and the sentence in which it appears – as the first sentence of your own original paragraph.

E. **Journal Entry**
*Free-write in your journal on this topic.*

“Really, after five years of being a dropout, I was grateful to be in school. But after a couple of weeks in this strange place, plus the loneliness from being away from my home and family, I became a little sad. Often after class, I’d hide away in the school library, where the books filled rows and rows of shelves. I’d find a chair and study my lesson books in geography, social studies, agriculture, biology, English, and math. I became lost in American and African history, and within the colorful maps of the world. No matter how foreign and how lonely the world was outside, the books always reminded me of home, sitting under the mango tree” (262).

For William, his books are now his best friends. How does reading a book give you an escape from the world you live in? What kinds of books give you this “freedom?” If reading a book does not offer you this release, why do you believe this is so? What do you depend on for such an escape?
Chapter Fifteen

A. **General Understanding**

*Answering the Questions*

Work with a partner. Write complete sentences in response to these questions.

1. When William arrived in Tanzania, what did he see that was the same as Malawi and what did he see that was different?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

2. What did Tom Rielly suggest to William when he first arrived at the TED Conference?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

3. What was William carrying around his neck that Tom copied onto his computer?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

4. What did Tom first show William about the Internet? What word did William first do a search on?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

5. What was the most amazing thing about TED for William?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

6. Who were the Africans? Where were they from and what had they accomplished?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

7. How did Erik Hersman sum up what was special about the Africans?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

8. How did William feel for the first time after he gave his presentation?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

9. What two goals did William tell Tom he had?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

10. Who were William’s first investors?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
11. When Tom saw William’s windmill for the first time, what did he say about it?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
12. What did Gerry Douglas do to streamline the systems of the Malawi Ministry of Health?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
13. What was done by Solair, a local solar power dealer in Lilongwe, to improve the flow of electricity in William’s village?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
14. Where was William finally accepted to school, and what was Mrs. MacLean’s one condition?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
15. What funny irony did William experience in all his “success” in the city?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
16. How did Gerry teach William English?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
17. Who was William’s English tutor at the school? What story about his life did he tell William?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
18. What did the money William received permit him to do for his family?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
19. What did William construct when he went home for the holidays?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
20. Why did William go to the United States for the first time in December 2007?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
21. What impression did he have of New York City when he took a taxi from the airport?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
22. What new things did he see in Tom’s apartment and the city itself?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
23. What was the favorite item William saw in the library of Jay and Eileen Walker’s home?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

24. What funny thought came to William’s mind when he visited the San Diego Wild Animal Park?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

25. What did Chris Copeland, the head engineer of the Windtec wind farm show William?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

B. Open to Discussion: Working with Quotations
Read the quotations and discuss the questions in small groups.

1. “Don’t be discouraged and give up just because it’s hard,” Blessings told me. “Look at me. I didn’t go to college until I was thirty. Whatever you want to do, if you do it with all your heart, it will happen” (275).

Why is it so important to have a mentor and to learn from this person’s experiences?

2. My family couldn’t have imagined that the little windmill I built during the famine would change their lives in every way, and they saw this change as a gift from heaven. Whenever I came home from school on weekends, my parents had a new nickname. They called me Noah – like the man in the Bible who built the ark, saving his family from God’s flood.

   “Everyone laughed at Noah, but look what happened,” my mother said. “He saved his family from destruction.”

   “You’ve put us on the map,” my father said. “Now the world knows we’re here” (276).

Why is what William’s father says so true? Why does it first take “being put on the map” so “the world knows [a country] is here” in order for progress to be made? What would be happening now if William had NOT put Malawi on the map?

3. “Standing at a construction site, I watched giant cranes lift enormous pieces of steel into the sky, and it made me wonder how Americans could build these skyscrapers in a year, but in four decades of independence, Malawi can’t even pipe clean water into a village. We can send witch planes into the skies and ghost trucks along the roads, but we can’t even keep electricity in our homes. 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” (277-278).

Why is William’s education in America so important for what he hopes to accomplish in his country years from now?
C. Open to Discussion: From Quotations to Point-of-View Writing

Discuss the quotations in small groups. Then prepare one of the role plays suggested here.

1. I expected the audience to laugh at my silly English, but to my surprise, all I heard was applause. Not only were people clapping, but they stood up in their seats and cheered. And when I finally returned to my chair, I noticed that several of them were even crying. After all those years of trouble – the famine and constant fear for my family, dropping out of school and my father’s grief, Khamba’s death, and the teasing I received trying to develop an idea – after all that, 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.

(pp. 268-269)

You are an audience member. Explain what moves you when William gives his presentation. Write a monologue and then present it to the class.

2. “One line from my presentation even became a kind of motto for the conference. Everywhere I went, people were shouting, ‘I try, and I made it!’ I was so flattered. I wished my parents, Gilbert, and Geoffrey had been there to see it: they’d have been so proud” (269).

You are William’s parents and his friends Geoffrey and Gilbert. What thoughts run through your minds when William tells you about the conference? Write monologues for each “role” and present them to the class.

3. “You’re like a Silicon Valley startup, and I’m going to be on your board of directors,” [Tom] said. “Let’s take this presentation and show it around. We’re going to get you some money” (269).

You are William. How do you react to Tom’s words now that you are starting to feel that you are “among colleagues”? Write a monologue and present it to the class.

4. “One of the things I noticed in New York is that people don’t have time for anything, not even to sit down for coffee – instead, they drink it from paper cups while they walk and send e-mails” (277).

You are a New Yorker. How do you react to William’s observations about New York? Write a monologue and present it to the class.

5. “To think my journey had begun in my tiny library at Wimbe – its three shelves of books like my entire universe. But now standing here [in Jay and Eileen Walker’s house in Connecticut], I was seeing the true size of the world, and how little access I had to it. There was so much to see and do. I felt a bit light-headed” (278).

You are William. Why is humility an important discovery on the road to knowledge? Write a monologue and present it to the class.
D. **Analogies: Writing Incentive**

*Discuss the analogy in the quotation below. Then use the sentence as the first sentence of your own original paragraph, in which you will describe a momentous event in your life, one that celebrated a wonderful achievement.*

“My heart beat fast **like a mganda drum** as I climbed the steps to face the audience, which totaled about four hundred fifty people – among them all the inventors and scientists and doctors who’d stood on the stage in the previous days” (268).

E. **Journal Entry**

*Free-write in your journal on one of these topics.*

1. During his first trip to the United States, “as [he] lay in bed, [he] let that daydream [of Malawi and his windmill] spin [him] off to sleep, the white noise of the machinery like a song [his] mother would sing. [He] went to sleep dreaming of Malawi, and all the things made possible when your dreams are powered by your heart.” This “vision of home” was a source of comfort for William when he was traveling in America. For him, “[i]t was always the same, and each time [he] went there, it brought a warm, pleasant feeling” (279-280).

What is your “vision of home”? How does it figure in your mind when you are far away? Does your “vision” give you the same comfort that William’s gave him? Why or why not?

2. Here are William’s thoughts when he first sees the windmills at the Windtec wind farm in Southern California:

> It was an incredible feeling to see the machines that I’d been imagining for so long. Now here they were, twisting in the wind before me. I’d come full circle.

...  
As I watched them [i.e. “the twirling blades” of the windmills], they seemed to be telling me something – that I didn’t have to decide just then. I could return to Africa and go back to school, reclaim the life that had been taken from me for so long. And after that, who knows? Perhaps I would study these machines and learn how to build them, then plant my own forest of them along the green fields of Malawi. Perhaps I would teach others to build more simple windmills like the one I had at home, to provide their own light and water without having to depend on the government. Perhaps I’d do both. But whatever it was I decided to do, I would apply this lone lesson I’d learned:

> If you want to make it, all you have to do is try.

(p. 281)

What do you think of William’s statement? Have you ever come “full circle”? How does what William says here relate to you and what you hope to accomplish in your life?
Epilogue

Essay

Here, at the African Leadership Academy, the pan-African high school in Johannesburg, South Africa that William had the privilege of attending, William meets other young “colleagues” who had endured hardships similar to his. If a key concept can be identified in the Epilogue, it is surely one echoing the future potential of “entrepreneurship” because this idea embodies William’s vision of “creating a new kind of Africa, a place of leaders instead of victims, a home of innovation rather than charity” (286).

What do you think of William’s dream of the future for Africa? What examples have you found in the book that show that William has the entrepreneurial spirit that is needed for the realization of this dream? How does this dream make sense to you in your own struggle towards freedom and self-empowerment?

Write an essay in response to these questions.