

Name: _____

Class: _____

How I harnessed the wind

By William Kamkwamba

2009

William Kamkwamba is an inventor from a farm village in Malawi, a country in East Africa. In this TED Talk, he explains how he used knowledge and skill to help his village during a famine, or a widespread lack of food. As you read, take notes on how William Kamkwamba helps his community.

[1] Thank you. Two years ago, I stood on the TED stage in Arusha, Tanzania.¹ I spoke very briefly² about one of my proudest creations.³ It was a simple machine that changed my life.

Before that time, I had never been away from my home in Malawi. I had never used a computer. I had never seen an Internet. On the stage that day, I was so nervous. My English lost, I wanted to vomit.⁴ (Laughter) I had never been surrounded by so many azungu, white people. (Laughter)

There was a story I wouldn't tell you then. But well, I'm feeling good right now. I would like to share that story today. We have seven children in my family. All sisters, except me. This is me with my dad when I was a little boy. Before I discovered the wonders of science, I was just a simple farmer in a country of poor farmers. Like everyone else, we grew maize.⁵

One year our fortune turned very bad. In 2001 we experienced an awful famine. Within five months all Malawians began to starve to death. My family ate one meal per day, at night. Only three swallows of nsima⁶ for each one of us. The food passes through our bodies. We drop down to nothing.



[*"Untitled"*](#) by *Fernando_Villadangos* is licensed under CC0.

1. a city and country in east Africa
2. **Brief** (*adjective*) for a short time
3. a piece of work that someone makes
4. **Vomit** (*noun*) to throw up food
5. corn
6. a thick patty made from corn flour and water

[5] In Malawi, the secondary school, you have to pay school fees. Because of the hunger, I was forced to drop out of school. I looked at my father and looked at those dry fields. It was the future I couldn't accept.

I felt very happy to be at the secondary school,⁷ so I was determined to do anything possible to receive education. So I went to a library. I read books, science books, especially physics.⁸ I couldn't read English that well. I used diagrams⁹ and pictures to learn the words around them.

Another book put that knowledge in my hands. It said a windmill¹⁰ could pump water and generate¹¹ electricity. Pump water meant irrigation, a defense against hunger, which we were experiencing by that time. So I decided I would build one windmill for myself. But I didn't have materials to use, so I went to a scrap yard where I found my materials. Many people, including my mother, said I was crazy. (Laughter)

I found a tractor fan, shock absorber, PVC pipes. Using a bicycle frame and an old bicycle dynamo,¹² I built my machine. It was one light at first. And then four lights, with switches, and even a circuit breaker, modeled after an electric bell. Another machine pumps water for irrigation.

Queues of people start lining up at my house (Laughter) to charge their mobile phone. (Applause) I could not get rid of them. (Laughter) And the reporters came too, which lead to bloggers¹³ and which lead to a call from something called TED. I had never seen an airplane before. I had never slept in a hotel. So, on stage that day in Arusha, my English lost, I said something like, "I tried. And I made it."

[10] So I would like to say something to all the people out there like me to the Africans, and the poor who are struggling with your dreams. God bless. Maybe one day you will watch this on the Internet. I say to you, trust yourself and believe. Whatever happens, don't give up. Thank you. (Applause)

7. the school a student goes to after completing elementary school
8. a science that deals with matter and power and the way they act on each other in heat, light, electricity, and sound
9. **Diagram (noun)** a drawing that shows how something is put together or how the parts work together
10. a machine that uses wind to turn a wheel
11. to produce
12. a machine used to make electrical power
13. people who write online stories

"How I harnessed the wind" from TED by "William Kamkwamba". Copyright © 2009 by TED. This text is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Unless otherwise noted, this content is licensed under the [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license](#)

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. What does William learn from his hard work?
 - A. He learns that people think he is funny.
 - B. He learns that reading helps to cure famine.
 - C. He learns to believe in himself and follow his dreams.
 - D. He learns that everyone should go to school to be smart.

2. Why does the text include "(Laughter)" and "(Applause)"?
 - A. to show that there was no one in the audience
 - B. to show that the audience enjoyed the speech
 - C. to show that William was telling jokes
 - D. to show that William was nervous

3. Which statement best captures the author's point of view about facing challenges in the text?
 - A. "On the stage that day, I was so nervous." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "Because of the hunger, I was forced to drop out of school." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "Another machine pumps water for irrigation." (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "I say to you, trust yourself and believe." (Paragraph 10)

4. What does the word "defense" mean as it is used in paragraph 7?
 - A. the way that something can be achieved
 - B. a group of people who help others
 - C. something that gives protection
 - D. how someone supports an idea

5. How did William use what he learned to help his community?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. William really enjoyed going to school. What do you like most about school? Why do you think receiving an education was important to William? Why is school important to you?
2. In the text, William read a lot of books and used what he learned to create his windmill. What have you learned from reading books? How has your school or local library been helpful to you and your community?
3. William said, "Whatever happens, don't give up" (Paragraph 10). Why should we follow our dreams? What can you do if people do not believe in you? How can following your dreams help others?