

**FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL**

A2 Reading Challenge

# The Boy Who Built a Windmill

*How a 14-year-old boy from Malawi used old bicycle parts to bring electricity to his village*

<b>Level</b>	A2 (Elementary)
<b>Age Group</b>	Teens (11-16)
<b>Topic</b>	True Stories
<b>Duration</b>	~15 minutes
<b>Vocabulary</b>	12 words
<b>Quiz</b>	5 questions

## Article

William Kamkwamba was born in 1987 in a small village called Wimbe, in the country of Malawi in south-east Africa. His family were farmers. They grew maize, which is the most important food in Malawi. Life was simple but hard. There was no **electricity** in William's home. There was no running water. When the sun went down, the family sat in the dark or used a small candle. William went to a local school, and he loved learning. He was especially **curious** about how things worked — radios, bicycles, machines. He liked to take things apart and try to put them back together. His friends sometimes laughed at him for this, but William did not care. He wanted to understand the world.

### The Famine

In 2001, something terrible happened. The rains did not come. Month after month, the sky stayed dry. A long **drought** hit Malawi, and the maize crops failed. Without rain, nothing could grow. By early 2002, the country was in the middle of a serious **famine**. Millions of people did not have enough to eat. William's family went from eating three meals a day to just one. Sometimes they ate only a few mouthfuls of nsima, a thick porridge made from maize flour. William was always hungry. His stomach hurt. He felt tired all the time. He watched his father's face become thinner and more worried every day. Many people in the village became very sick, and some died. It was the worst time William had ever known.

### Leaving School

The **famine** caused another problem for William. In Malawi, families must pay school fees. William's school cost about eighty dollars a year. That was a lot of money for a farming family, even in a good year. Now, with no harvest and no income, his parents could not **afford** to pay. In 2002, when William was fourteen, he had to leave school. He was very sad. He loved learning, and he did not want to stop. He watched his friends walk to school every morning while he stayed at home, helping his father in the empty fields. But William made a decision: even without school, he would not stop learning. He started walking to a small **library** near his old school. The **library** had only a few shelves of books, donated by the American government. Most of the books were in English, and William's English was not very strong. But he looked at the pictures and tried to understand the words.

### The Book That Changed Everything

One day, William found a book called "Using Energy." It had a blue cover and was full of photographs and diagrams. One picture caught his eye: a **windmill**. The book explained that a **windmill** could turn wind into **electricity**. William stared at the picture for a long time. Wind was something Malawi had plenty of. It blew across the fields every day, strong and free. If he could build one of these machines, he could make **electricity** for his family. They could have light at night. They could charge a phone. They could listen to a radio. The idea filled William with excitement. He read the book again and again, looking at every diagram, every drawing, every description. He did not understand every word, but he understood

enough. He knew what he needed to do.

## Building from Scrap

William had no money, no tools, and no teacher. But he had something else: determination. He started collecting **scrap** materials from around the village. He found old bicycle parts in a junkyard. He took a fan from a broken tractor. He cut down blue gum trees to make the tower. He found a broken shock absorber from a car and used it as part of the frame. He collected pieces of PVC pipe to make the blades. Everything he used was something other people had thrown away. His neighbours watched him carry these strange objects to his family's yard. They thought he was crazy. "What is that boy doing?" they asked. Some people called him "misala" — a word in Chichewa that means "crazy." Even his mother was not sure what he was building. But William kept working.

## The First Light

After weeks of hard work, William was ready to test his machine. He had built a tower about five metres tall from blue gum tree poles. At the top, he attached the tractor fan and the bicycle frame. He connected wires from the bicycle dynamo to a small **battery**, and from the **battery** to a light bulb inside his house. The moment of truth came on a windy afternoon. William climbed up the tower and pushed the blades. They started to turn. The wind caught them, and they spun faster and faster. Inside the house, the light bulb flickered — and then it turned on. William's mother screamed. His father ran outside. The neighbours came to look. The crazy boy had made light from the wind. William connected three more bulbs, and soon his family had four lights in their home. For the first time in their lives, they could see clearly after dark. It was a small **invention**, but it changed everything.

## The News Spreads

Word about William's **windmill** spread quickly. First the village talked about it. Then people from other villages came to see it. A local journalist heard the story and wrote about it. Then, in 2006, a blogger named Mike McKay visited Malawi and met William. He wrote about the teenager on the internet, and suddenly the whole world knew about the boy who built a **windmill** from **scrap**. In 2007, William was invited to speak at TED, a famous conference where people share big ideas. He was only twenty years old. He stood on the stage, nervous but proud, and told his story in simple English. When he said, "I tried, and I made it," the audience stood up and clapped. The video of his talk was watched by millions of people around the world. William's story began to **inspire** others.

## Back to School — and Beyond

After the TED talk, everything changed for William. He received a scholarship to study at the African Leadership Academy in South Africa. Later, he went to Dartmouth College in the United States, one of the best universities in the world. He studied environmental science and engineering. But William never forgot his village. After finishing his studies, he returned to Malawi. He built more windmills. He helped bring clean water to his community using a

solar-powered pump. He started a project to teach young people in rural Africa about science and technology. In 2009, he published a book called "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind," which tells his full story. The book became a bestseller and was later made into a film by the actor Chiwetel Ejiofor in 2019. William's story reached even more people around the world.

## Why William's Story Matters

William Kamkwamba did not have money, a good school, or modern tools. He had a **library** book, some **scrap** metal, and a dream. He showed that you do not need to be rich or live in a big city to change the world. You just need to be **curious**, brave, and ready to try. Today, William is an engineer, an author, and a speaker. He travels the world telling his story and encouraging young people to believe in themselves. He often says that the most important thing is not to give up, even when everyone thinks you are crazy. His **windmill** still stands in Wimbe village. It is small and simple, made from things nobody wanted. But it brought light to a dark house, hope to a hungry family, and inspired millions of people to believe that one person — even a teenager with no money — can make a real difference.

## Vocabulary

Word	Definition
<b>famine</b>	a time when there is very little food in a country and many people are hungry
<b>scrap</b>	old or broken pieces of metal, wood, or other materials that are not wanted
<b>windmill</b>	a machine with long blades that turn in the wind to make power
<b>electricity</b>	the power that gives light, heat, and energy to machines
<b>afford</b>	to have enough money to pay for something
<b>library</b>	a building or room where you can read or borrow books
<b>invention</b>	a new thing that someone makes or designs for the first time
<b>connect</b>	to join two or more things together
<b>battery</b>	a small object that stores electricity and gives power to things
<b>curious</b>	wanting to know or learn about something
<b>drought</b>	a long time with no rain, when the land becomes very dry
<b>inspire</b>	to give someone the idea or wish to do something good

## Comprehension Quiz

### 1. Why did William have to leave school?

- A) He did not like studying
- B) His school closed because of a flood
- C) His family could not afford to pay the school fees
- D) He wanted to work on a farm

### 2. Where did William learn how to build a windmill?

- A) From a teacher at his school
- B) From a television programme
- C) From a book he found in a small library
- D) From his father

### 3. What materials did William use to build his first windmill?

- A) New parts he bought from a shop
- B) Old bicycle parts, a tractor fan, and blue gum trees
- C) Metal sheets from a factory
- D) Plastic bottles and wire

### 4. What was the first thing William's windmill powered in his home?

- A) A television
- B) A refrigerator
- C) A radio
- D) Four light bulbs

### 5. What did William do after he became famous?

- A) He moved to Europe and became a businessman
- B) He went back to school, studied in America, and returned to help Malawi
- C) He stopped building windmills
- D) He became a farmer like his father

## Answer Key

#	Answer	Question
1	<b>C</b>	1. Why did William have to leave school?
2	<b>C</b>	2. Where did William learn how to build a windmill?
3	<b>B</b>	3. What materials did William use to build his first windmill?
4	<b>D</b>	4. What was the first thing William's windmill powered in his home?
5	<b>B</b>	5. What did William do after he became famous?