

Name: _____ ()

Class: _____

Date: _____



Photo of two witch doctors

Adapted excerpt from *The Boy Who Harnessed The Wind*

William and the Witch Doctor's Curse

Before I discovered the miracles of science, magic ruled the world.

Magic and its many mysteries hovered around constantly, shaping my earliest memory as a boy: the time my father saved me from certain death and became the hero he is today.

I was six years old, playing in the road, when a group of boys approached, singing and dancing. They worked for a nearby farmer who kept many cows. They explained how they'd been tending their herd that morning when they discovered a giant sack in the road. When they opened it, they found it filled with bubble gum.

Can you imagine such a treasure? I cannot tell you how much I loved bubble gum.

"Should we give some to this boy?" one asked.

I did not move or breathe. There were dead leaves in my hair and mud splattered all over my clothes.

"Eh, why not?" said another. "Just look at him."

One of the boys reached into the bag, pulled out a handful of gumballs—one of every color—and dropped them into my hands. I stuffed them all in my mouth. As the boys left, I felt the sweet juice roll down my chin and soak my shirt.

The following day, I was playing under the mango tree when a trader on a bicycle stopped to chat with my father. He said that while on his way to the market the previous morning, he had dropped one of his bags. By the time he realized what had happened and circled back, someone had taken it. The bag was filled with bubble gum, he said. Some fellow traders had told him about a group of boys passing out gum in the villages, and this made him very angry. For two days, he had been riding his bicycle throughout the district looking for the boys. Then, he issued a chilling threat.

"I've gone to see the witch doctor. Whoever ate that gum will soon be sorry because I paid him a lot of money to curse them with horrible diseases."

I had swallowed the gum long before. Now the sweet, lingering memory of it soured into poison on my tongue. I began to sweat; my heart pounded. Without anyone seeing, I ran into the forest behind my house, leaned against a tree, and tried to make myself clean. I spat and gagged, anything to rid my body of the curse. I came up dry. A bit of saliva colored the leaves at my feet, so I covered them with dirt.

But then, as if a dark cloud had passed over the sun, I felt the great eye of the witch doctor watching me through the trees. That night, his demons would come for me in my bed. They would kidnap me and bring me to their secret lair.

A fear of death swept over me like a fever.

I began crying so hard I could not move my legs. The tears ran hot down my face, and as they did, the smell of poison filled my nose. It was everywhere inside me. I fled the forest as fast as possible, trying to escape the giant magic eye of the witch doctor. I ran all the way home to where my father was resting. I wanted to throw my body under his, so he could protect me from the great evil.

“It was me!” I sobbed, my tears drowning my words. “I ate the stolen gum. I don’t want to be tortured by demons, Papa! Don’t let them take me!”

My father looked at me for a second, then shook his head.

“It was you, eh?” he said, then kind of smiled.

“Well,” he said and rose from the chair. His knees popped whenever he stood. My father was a big man. “Don’t worry. I’ll find this trader and explain. I’m sure we can work out something.”

Reading Summary

- William Kamkwamba lived in a village where people were not well off and did not have money to regularly enjoy sweet treats like gumballs.
- One day, William ate some gumballs given by a group of boys. They had stolen them from a trader.
- William now lived in fear as the trader claimed to have asked a witch doctor to place a curse on anyone who ate the stolen sweet treats.



Photo of gumballs in a candy dispenser

Short Answer Questions

Question #1	Why does the narrator describe bubble gum as a “treasure”? <i>Hint: Think about how the narrator reacts when he hears about the gum. Why does he love it so much?</i>
Question #2	Why do you think the group of boys gave the narrator some gum? <i>Hint: Look at how they describe him before giving him the gum. Do they pity him, mock him, or just feel generous?</i>
Question #3	What does the narrator’s reaction to the trader’s words tell you about his beliefs? <i>Hint: How does he react physically and emotionally? What does this show about what he thinks of magic, curses and the power of the witch doctor?</i>

Question #4

Why did the narrator try to make himself “clean” after hearing the trader’s threat?

Hint: What did he do in the forest? Why did he think it would help remove the curse?

Question #5

How do you think the father felt when the narrator confessed to eating the gum? Explain your answer.

Hint: Look at his reaction—was he angry, amused, or concerned? What do his words and actions tell you?

Question #6

What does the narrator’s description of the “great eye of the witch doctor” suggest about his emotions at that moment?

Hint: Does he feel safe or threatened? What does an eye watching him symbolize?

Question #7

How does the father’s response to his son’s fear show a difference between their beliefs?

Hint: Compare how the narrator reacts to the witch doctor’s curse with how his father reacts. Are they both superstitious?

Question #8

What does the word “chilling” suggest about the trader’s threat?

Hint: Does “chilling” mean the threat was funny, serious, or frightening? How did the narrator react to it?

Question #9

Why does the narrator feel that the sweet gum had “soured into poison”?

Hint: The narrator enjoyed the gum at first. What changed his feelings towards the gum?

Question #10

Find a word in the passage that means the same as “crying a lot”.

Hint: Look at the part where the narrator is scared and cannot stop his tears. What word describes this?

Answers:

1. Why does the narrator describe bubble gum as a “treasure”?

Answer: The narrator describes the bubble gum as a “treasure” because he loves it so much. He sees it as something rare and valuable, and the idea of being given a large amount of it makes him very excited.

2. Why do you think the group of boys gave the narrator some gum?

Answer: The boys may have felt a sense of kindness or pity for the narrator. They could see that he was not able to take care of himself well as he had dead leaves in his hair and mud splattered all over his clothes.

3. What does the narrator’s reaction to the trader’s words tell you about his beliefs?

Answer: The narrator is extremely frightened and believes in the power of magic and curses. His physical reactions of sweating and feeling panic show that he believes the witch doctor’s curse is real and powerful, and he fears the horrible consequences of eating the stolen gum.

4. Why did the narrator try to make himself “clean” after hearing the trader’s threat?

Answer: The narrator believed that by making himself “clean” through spitting out and getting rid of the gum he had eaten, he could remove the curse and avoid the terrible curse.

5. How do you think the father felt when the narrator confessed to eating the gum?

Explain your answer.

Answer: The father felt that the narrator was worrying over nothing and that eating the gum was not a serious crime. He reassured the narrator by saying, “Don’t worry,” which suggests he did not take the curse seriously and that the matter could be solved easily.

6. What does the narrator’s description of the “great eye of the witch doctor” suggest about his emotions at that moment?

Answer: The narrator feels threatened and terrified. The “great eye” watching him suggests that he believes the witch doctor is constantly observing him, adding to his fear.

7. How does the father's response to his son's fear show a difference between their beliefs?

Answer: The father is calm and logical, showing no fear of the curse. He does not believe in the supernatural or magic, as he plans to talk to the trader and sort things out. However, the narrator is deeply superstitious, believing the curse will lead to great suffering.

8. What does the word "chilling" suggest about the trader's threat?

Answer: The word "chilling" suggests that the trader's threat is very frightening to the narrator as he will suffer greatly.

9. Why does the narrator feel that the sweet gum had "soured into poison"?

Answer: At first, the gum was something sweet and enjoyable to the narrator. However, after hearing the trader's threat, the gum became something harmful as he was now cursed by the witch doctor.

10. Find a word in the passage that means the same as "crying a lot."

Answer: The word is "sobbed".