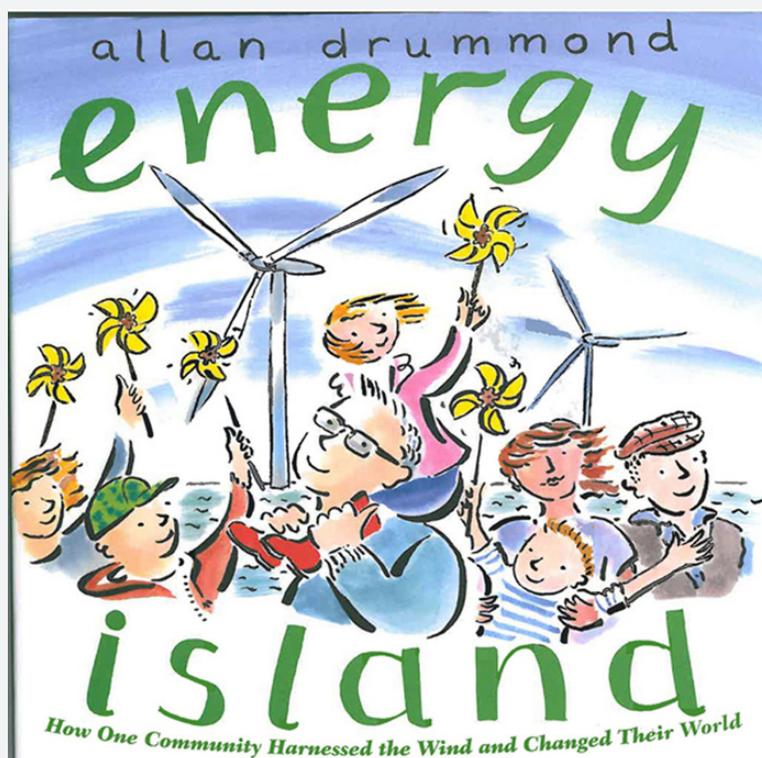


## First Opinion: Exploring Energy on *Energy Island*

Drummond, Allen. *Energy Island: How One Community Harnessed the Wind and Changed Their World*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

Sara M. Flanagan



In a tale that is both factual and whimsical, Allan Drummond tells the true story of the island of Samsø and a teacher, Søren, who has a passion for bringing renewable energy to the island. *Energy Island* presents scientific facts within the context of an intriguing narrative and informative illustrations, making it an effective interdisciplinary tool for both science and literacy instruction. The images in the book spark the student's interest by enhancing the story and supplement the factual information by depicting each scientific concept with an image. For instance, when Drummond describes ways in which different forms of energy are used, an image is provided (e.g., solar panels [unpaged], biomass furnace [unpaged], heating systems [unpaged], oil by tanker trucks [unpaged]). This aids in reader

comprehension of new concepts and vocabulary presented in the book.

In addition to using images to help clarify the concepts presented in the text, Drummond helps readers relate to the story by describing the similarities between Samsø and other towns and cities around the world. As many readers may not be familiar with the island of Samsø, or even recognize that it is Denmark, the author provides a frame of reference for the story by describing where Samsø is and what makes it unique (i.e., the amount of wind on Samsø [unpaged]).

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The narrative has a high readability for the targeted age group and is easily differentiated from the scientific information related to energy. Factual information is presented in a green sideboard with a white font. This contrasts the narrative story, which has a black font and is surrounded by colorful illustrations on a white background, allowing readers to be able to focus on the story without being interrupted by other information. The readers can turn to the sidebars when needed. While the more scientific information is presented in the sidebars, Drummond also explains concepts within the context of the larger story. For example, when first introducing the idea of renewable energy, the main character explains the concept to his students.

As the story continues, the readers are presented with a problem: the residents of Samsø do not want to try to use wind turbines, one type of renewable energy; they prefer to continue using their present energy source. However, after a strong winter storm, only one farmer—the one with a wind turbine—has electricity. This convinces the residents to begin using forms of renewable energy, including wind turbines. Situations such as the one in this book would provide opportunities for discussion where students can examine the advantages and disadvantages of types of renewable energy, along with the associated challenges. Students will further be able to tie in the factual information to the narrative text to develop and explain their ideas.

One drawback to the book is both the length of the actual text and the amount of text on each page. Though both the narrative and factual texts are thorough, students may become bored or lose interest due to the extensive amount of reading on some pages, especially if the factual information (which often consists of several paragraphs) is read at the same time as the narrative. While the book may be text-heavy, it provides authentic stopping points to discuss concepts being addressed in the story or to pick up reading again at a later time. For example, at one point in the book, the teacher Søren asks the students for ideas on how to conserve energy by using renewable energy. On

the sidebar for those pages, Drummond provides information and ideas about renewable energy. This would be an excellent opportunity for additional science instruction or activities related to energy.

Given the ever-increasing emphasis on energy-saving vehicles, appliances, homes, and other items in students' daily lives, I would recommend this book for upper elementary grades, and perhaps early middle school grades, due to the visual nature of the text and the way in which scientific information is combined with a literary narrative. Children will be attracted to the visual appeal of the story and will take away both a lesson about science and a lesson in energy conservation.

### **About the Author**

**Sara M. Flanagan** is a doctoral candidate in special education at Purdue University. Her research focuses on supporting students with high incidence disabilities across academic areas.