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POEMS, QUOTES,
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from **A to Z**

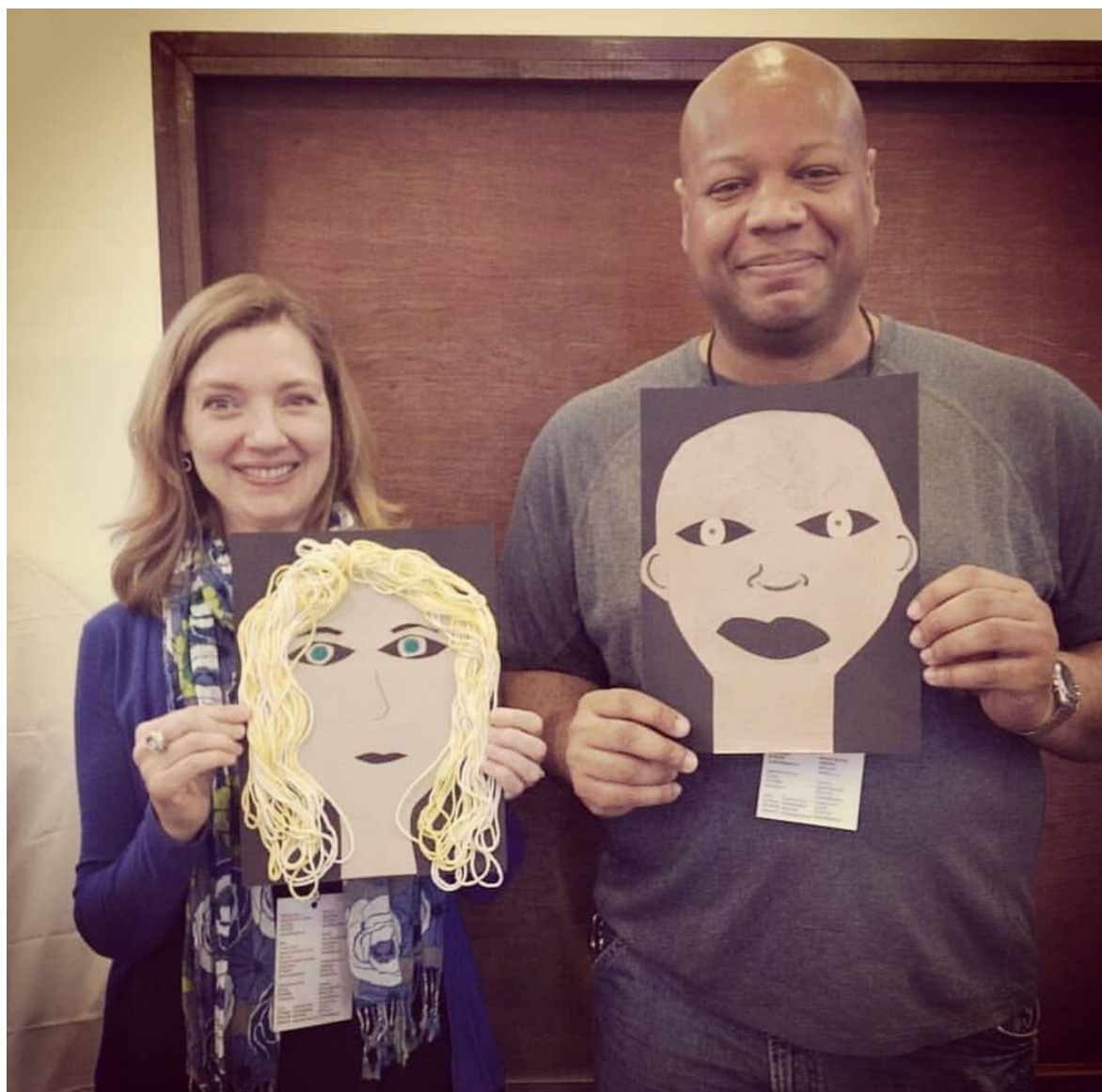


**Irene Latham
&
Charles Waters**

illustrated by
Mehrdokht Amini

***DICTIONARY FOR A BETTER WORLD:
Poems, Quotes and Anecdotes from A - Z***

Author Q & A
with Irene Latham and Charles Waters



What was your inspiration for this book?

Beginnings can be difficult to track down, and we're not entirely sure how the idea for the book came to be. But we can tell you *when* it came to be: on a snow-filled Friday morning after a school visit cancellation in Grand Rapids, Michigan (due to the district calling a "snow day") we received a note from Carol Hinz, the editorial director at Lerner Publishing Group, with a rejection of a poetry proposal we submitted, along with a message to submit more manuscripts or proposals we might have. We had hours to kill before our respective planes were scheduled to depart, so we sat across from one another and started brainstorming. One of the ideas that made its way onto paper was this one. We were inspired by the strong, vulnerable students with whom we'd shared the week, and knew we wanted to do something to extend the work of ***Can I Touch Your Hair?*** We wanted to explore poetry forms that intimidated us and also share personal details about our lives. We also knew we wanted to include quotes (because we both collect quotes). It was tough, and so many times we wanted to quit — but we tunneled through, and we're so glad we did!

After doing joint and separate school visits throughout the winter, we refined our idea of what our next potential book would be about and by the spring we submitted a synopsis of the book and four poems, two apiece, to Carol who then took it to the acquisitions committee.

Here is the original email from Carol to our literary agent, Rosemary Stimola.

From: "Hinz, Carol"

Subject: DICTIONARY FOR A BETTER WORLD/good news

Date: May 7, 2018 at 2:16:49 PM EDT

To: Rosemary Stimola

Hello Rosemary,

This new project from Irene and Charles was approved at our acquisitions meeting, and I expect to send an offer memo your way in the next couple days! Do you have a sense of when the authors could have a complete draft manuscript ready? It'll be helpful to know as we start putting together a tentative schedule for the book.

All best,
Carol

When did you have the complete draft ready for Carol?

Irene and Charles: We had a first draft for her ready by July 1, 2018. Even though Carol was seeing a “first” draft, we had worked on it together for many, MANY drafts before sending it to her.

How did this collaboration differ from your work on CAN I TOUCH YOUR HAIR?

Irene and Charles: It was a more ambitious book than *Can I Touch Your Hair?* (or as we now refer to in emails or texting with each other, CITYH). There were more moving parts, different poetry forms, and the challenge of finding quotes and remembering anecdotes to fit the poems. A mammoth undertaking. Our trust in each other as children’s poets and humans was deepened as a result. We started writing a proposal in April of 2018 and it didn’t get locked down and sent to the printer until August 2019. In that time we wrote and rewrote poems, looked up quotes, and created anecdotes. Through the multiple rounds of revisions, a fair amount of material was cut, which meant starting again from scratch on some parts -- but that helped make the book so much better. Children’s book editors, like our editor for this book, Carol Hinz, are magical people.

What was the most difficult part about writing this book?

Irene and Charles: All of it. :-)

We both prefer to write free verse poetry, so the constraints of writing in form was a challenge! Also, simply finding forms was a challenge. And who knew how hard it can be to find diverse and accurate quotes with proper attribution? So many times we found a quote we loved only to find out it wasn’t real, so we had to keep digging and also double and triple check lots of quotes to verify their accuracy.

Did you discover any poetry forms that you like/didn't like?

Irene: Two forms I kind of fell in love with are Charles' tricube and my decima. We really labored over the short Japanese forms, because we wanted to do more than just fulfill a syllable count. The most challenging poem for us was probably the renga. No other poem in the collection went through more revisions than that one. (And we'd still like to revise it at least one more time!)

Charles: What Irene said. :-) Also, one of the most challenging poems for me to learn by heart — since I'm a professional actor and act out my poems for author visits — was the poem "Wonder" which was written in a super cool poetry form called "The Bop." It's basically a poetic monologue. While learning it, I kept saying, "this is super difficult, who wrote this?"

How did you come up with the list of words, and how did you decide who would write about what?

Irene and Charles: Compiling the list of words was not difficult; the problem was cutting the list off! One of our favorite additions to the list didn't come from us, but from Jordyn Taylor, one of our editors at Lerner Publishing Group. She suggested the word "xenial," a word neither of us had heard before. As for who was to write what, we just selected the words as they called to us. We don't remember a single time when either of us jockeyed for this word or that -- we both just trusted the collection would balance itself out ... and it did! We each wrote 23 individual poems and 4 poems together.

How did writing the book change you/your world?

Irene and Charles: It really established us as a writing team and friends-for-life: ***I & C Construction Co: Building Books One Word At A Time since 2015.***
#i&cconstructioncompany #ireneandcharlespower

Which is your favorite poem/spread/art?

Irene and Charles: We are both utterly enamored of Mehrdokht's work on this book! What a phenomenal effort she put into combining different elements and bringing something magical to our words. Some elements that stand out to us are the "Hope" camel, the "Gratitude" woman bearing flowers, and the "Laughter" Hippopotamus.

The final spread "The Etymology of Progress" is a particular favorite, for the poem and poetry form (a "byte") and for the art, which incorporates a multitude of diverse faces as well as actual photographs of us and Mehrdokht. Beautiful and inspiring!

#mehrdokhtpower

Your book suggests many action "try it" ideas. Have you tried any of these, and with what results?

Charles: Every day when I wake up, I say a word of inspiration out loud to myself such as: "Thank you" or "Let's go" to get my day started off with gratitude and encouragement.

Irene: Just today I was very frustrated when an online support person couldn't help me, and instead of voicing my anger, I decided to take a minute and remember the person on the other end of my interaction. We were able to get the situation resolved without it turning hurtful, and I felt good about that.

The back matter includes a gratitude list, and one of the action steps is to make a gratitude list. Can you share 1-3 things on your gratitude list is today?

Charles:

Irene's encouragement and friendship.

My parent's sacrifices and hard labor in order to provide for their children -- and who now do the same for their grandchildren.

The calming, joy-filled sounds of drizzle outside my window.

Irene:

Text messages from Charles that make me smile so big! (They often include hashtags.)

Morning walks on our country road with my husband Paul and our dog Rosie.

Fresh, ripe Straight Mountain tomatoes.

What final thoughts would you like to leave with the reader?

Irene and Charles: That we're not perfect people. We're flawed, hard working, good humans -- just like you! We're doing the best we can with what we know as of this moment. As a result, we're continuing to learn, listen, stand up for ourselves and become more transparent every day.

