

Dear Friends,

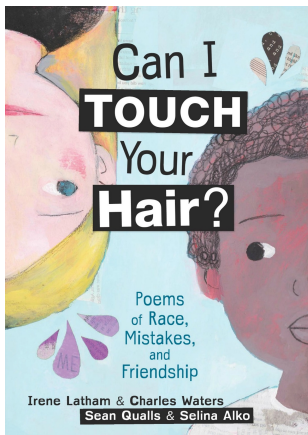
Hello and Happy 2018! I am writing to you from the lake, where the rainkissed water is dimpled and one of our resident blue herons stands still as an ice sculpture.

That's right -- we've moved! After twenty years in the suburbs, we're back in the country where there are fewer fences and more time to watch the deer feed.

I meant to send this newsletter January 1 to celebrate:

1. the brand new year, all clean and hopeful as fresh snowfall. Welcome 2018!

2. the announcement of my [2018 One Little Word](#).* What's YOUR word??



3. the release of [CAN I TOUCH YOUR HAIR? Poems of Race, Mistakes and Friendship](#) (co-written with [Charles Waters](#)), illus. by [Sean Qualls](#) and [Selina Alko](#), brought to us by the fine folks at [Lerner Publishing](#).

KIRKUS calls the book in their **starred review**, "A brave and touching portrayal worthy of sharing in classrooms across America."

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY states in their **starred review**, "The poems delicately demonstrate the complexity of identity and the power of communication to build friendships."

BOOKLIST adds, "Young readers searching for means to have difficult, emotional, and engaged discussions about race will find an enlightening resource in Irene and Charles' explorations."

THE HORN BOOK MAGAZINE proclaims, "This volume would make an excellent read-aloud or a launch pad for collaborative classroom writing."

We couldn't be more pleased and grateful for the warm reception the book has received. **Thank you!!!** We hope the book gives readers a starting place to have their own conversations about race, mistakes and friendship. [Get your copy TODAY!](#)

Listen to find out more:

[Fully Booked by Kirkus Reviews podcast with me and Charles](#)

You're also invited to join us for these free upcoming online events:

webcast with *The Hornbook Magazine's* Roger Sutton featuring me, Charles, and illustrators Sean Qualls and Selina Alko on "[Exploring Race, Mistakes and Friendship through Poetry](#)" Wednesday, January 17 at 1:00 PM Central

Booklist/AASL webinar "[Mirror, Mirror, Who Do You See in Your Books?](#)" on Tuesday, January 23 at 1:00 PM Central

We'll be visiting readers in Grand Rapids, Michigan in February, Birmingham and Tuscaloosa, Alabama in March, and New York City in April! Hope to see you!!

AND THEN, after all that celebrating...I was going to talk about the difficulties (and joys!) of downsizing and the loveliness of the recent snow and maybe share something I learned recently about pacing in verse novels, but now that I'm late, I've decided to scrap all that.

Instead I want to talk about HAIR, as in my life in hair.. . **and invite you, my most amazing e-newsletter subscribers, to join in the fun for a chance to win a signed (by both me AND Charles!) copy of the book!**

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So, hair.

Once upon a time, I wanted -- and got -- and Afro. (There's a poem about this in the book, that sits alongside Charles' poem "Strands," which contains the line that became the title of our book!)

After growing out my hair and wearing it long (and often in French braids!) for a few years, I got a "[Tenille](#)," which is kind of like a glorified bowl cut.

As I teen I was part of the Big Hair '80's...

And as an adult I have mostly kept my hair long. I'm delighted by these women who change their hairstyles often, but I know I am not one of them. My (long) hair is an important part of my identity. What I am hearing over and over again in my travels related to CAN I TOUCH YOUR HAIR? is that I am not alone in that!

Which is why I am inviting you to tell me a hair story. Or send me a picture of a favorite hairstyle you've sported... or a bad hair day! OR you can complete this sentence using description or metaphor or simile or whatever:

MY HAIR IS.....

MY HAIR IS... naturally wavy.

MY HAIR IS... a curtain to hide behind.

A short hair story: Once as a teen I was desperate for a cut and stopped in near closing time for a trim. The stylist was rushing and whacked my hair so badly that I cried for three days and refused to go to school! That was the start of my long-hair-for-life habit.

We'll use the hashtag #myhair, or you can simply respond to this email and on January 31 Maggie (our cat) will select a winner!

**Wishing you love, peace, adventure and happy hair (!) today and all days,
Irene**

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