



CAN I TOUCH YOUR HAIR?

POEMS OF RACE, MISTAKES, AND
FRIENDSHIP

Description

How can Irene and Charles work together on their poetry project? They don't know each other . . . and they're not sure they want to.

Irene Latham, who is white, and Charles Waters, who is Black, use this fictional setup to delve into different experiences of race in a relatable way. Their poetry explores topics such as hair, hobbies, and family dinners. Accompanied by artwork from acclaimed illustrators Sean Qualls and Selina Alko, this remarkable collaboration shines a light on the joys, sorrows, and misunderstandings of race in twenty-first century America.

Critical Acclaim

- Utah Beehive Award Nominee, **Nominated, 2020**
- Blue Hen Book Award Nominee, **Nominated, 2020**
- William Allen White Children's Book Awards Master List, **Winner, 2020**
- Great Lakes Great Books Award Nominee, **Nominated, 2020**
- Notable Award NCTE Notable Poetry Books, **Winner, 2019**
- Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Awards Nominee, **Nominated, 2019**
- White Ravens, **Winner, 2019**
- Notable Award ALA Notable Children's Books, **Winner, 2019**
- Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction Honor Book, **Runner-up, 2019**
- Cybils Finalist, **Short-listed, 2018**
- Notable Award Kirkus Best Middle-Grade Books of the Year, **Winner, 2018**

"[A]n unusually candid book for pre-YA kids about race and difference, allowing for the possibility of the mistakes (the word is right in the subtitle) but also a hopeful outcome as Irene and Charles find enrichment in their friendship."—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

"It took four people to bring us *Can I Touch Your Hair?* and countless others to bring it to our library and bookstore shelves. It takes only one person to buy it and show it to a kid. And it takes only one to use it as the conversation starter we've needed for so long."—*A Fuse #8 Production*

"Qualls and Alko's layering of print newspaper clippings over paint begs readers to take a closer look. . . . [A]n excellent read-aloud or a launch pad for collaborative classroom writing."—*The Horn Book Magazine*

"[D]elicately demonstrate[s] the complexity of identity and the power of communication to build friendships."—*starred, Publishers Weekly*

Interest Level: Grades 3-6
Reading Level: Grade 4
GRL: U
On Sale Date: Jan 1, 2018

Available Formats:

Hardcover

978-1-5124-0442-5 \$17.99

Multi-user eBook

978-1-5124-7215-8 \$30.65

Audisee®—On Level

978-1-5415-8950-6 \$46.65

Audiobook

978-1-5415-8951-3 \$6.99

“Young readers searching for means to have difficult, emotional, and engaged discussions about race will find an enlightening resource in Irene and Charles’ explorations.”—**Booklist**

“A fresh approach to exploring interracial communication. . . . A brave and touching portrayal worthy of sharing in classrooms across America.”—**starred, Kirkus Reviews**

“A fresh and heartwarming take on bridging the racial divide.”—**Carole Boston Weatherford, author of *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement***

“These poems explore diversity with refreshing honesty and complexity—and truly capture the personalities and voices of these two rising stars of poetry.”—**Janet Wong, author and co-creator of *The Poetry Friday Anthology* series**

“In tantalizing free verse poems, Irene Latham and Charles Waters reimagine themselves as fifth-grade strangers, then classmates, and finally friends. *Can I Touch Your Hair?* is a compelling portrait of two youngsters dancing delicately through a racial minefield.”—**J. Patrick Lewis, former US Children’s Poet Laureate**

Schools have very diverse populations these days, and sometimes the children have trouble understanding how to talk to each other. This lovely book by Irene Latham and Charles Waters is a fantastic way to start the conversation. It is a book of the most amazing poems that shine a light on the different experiences children have in school when race affects them. Irene Latham is white and Charles Waters is black. Each is firmly in touch with her and his inner child and both are incredible poets. The poems of classroom and playground experiences are rich, profound, and exquisite. The subjects that each writes about run the gamut from shoes to hair to forgiveness and apology to punishment, from the N-bomb to piano lessons. All of these and more will speak to children and help them to think about the issues of black and white. Not one page, not one line, not one word disappoints in this amazing book. Illustrations by Sean Qualls and Selena Alko complement these terrific poems of friendship, race, and the uncertainty of being a child. This is a book that deserves wide readership in elementary and middle schools and homes everywhere.—**Seattle Book Review**

Charles and Irene's story, according to the collaborative authors' note, is that of the adult authors' if they "had met in a current-day fifth-grade classroom in a suburban school with a 60 percent white and 40 percent minority population." And as Irene's and Charles's poems speak to and with each other, building experiences and new bonds, the illustrations speak with the text, building relationships with the reader. The illustrations and text are balanced, layered and nuanced, allowing the child protagonists (and readers) the chance to sit with and make sense of race and our society's long history of inequality. *Can I Touch Your Hair?* is a beautifully direct yet somehow outstandingly subtle work that will allow young readers to navigate and understand their places in their communities and the greater world. —**Shelf Awareness**