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Dear Friends, Readers, Fellow Anti-Racists-in-Training, Good Humans, and All Who Walk the Path:

When I sat in my comfy red chair on our screened porch to write this newsletter, at first the cursor blinked and blinked as I watched the cardinals and woodpeckers taking turns at the feeder.

What can I say during this time? How can my voice help?

While I'm grateful for those who lift their voices loud and proud, I know that for me, the healthiest action is to retreat: I need the acceptance of wild spaces, the peace of the porch to grieve, the reassurance the seasons give us that change is natural, normal, essential -- and the reliability of sun and birds to trust that there is always hope. Things *will* get better.

And that got me thinking about how we writers reveal ourselves in our books -- specifically about how I hope my life and my books show readers who I am, what's important to me, and how I love the world, even when I choose to be quiet in the midst of turmoil.

With that in mind - and because this day was originally the release date for [NINE: A BOOK OF NONET POEMS](#) (before covid came along) -- I offer you 9 relevant and revealing lines from some of my published works for children.

1. "Let's
embrace
this
season/
of
strife"

-

from
"Dear
Wandering
Wildebeest"

in

DEAR
WANDERING
WILDEBEEST:
AND
OTHER
POEMS

FROM
THE
WATER
HOLE

(Lerner,
2014,
illus.
by
Anna
Wadham)

2. **"Love
in
the
time
of
racism/
requires/
cardinal's/
red/
courage"**

-

from
"Love"

in
DICTIONARY
FOR
A
BETTER
WORLD:
POEMS,
QUOTES
AND
ANECDOTES
FROM

A
to
Z

(Lerner,
2020,
with
Charles
Waters,
illus.
by
Mehrdokht
Amini)

3. **"Can
you/
see/
I'm
just/
pretending/
to
be
brave?:"**

-
from
"Flight
of
the
Midge"
in
WHEN
THE
SUN
SHINES
ON
ANTARCTICA:
AND
OTHER
POEMS
ABOUT
THE
FROZEN
CONTINENT
(Lerner,
2016,
illus.
by
Anna
Wadham

4. **"Clouds
are
made/
to
shift,
drift,
shuffle."**

-
from
"Cloud
Nine"
in
NINE:
A
BOOK
OF
NONET
POEMS
(Charlesbridge,
2020,
illus.
by
Amy
Huntington)

5. **"Barren
places
invite
our**

**imaginations
to
soar"**

-

from
"Walking

on
Mars"

in

THE
PROPER
WAY
TO
MEET

A
HEDGEHOG

and

OTHER
HOW

TO
POEMS

(Candlewick,

2019,

selected

by

Paul

B.

Janeczko,

illus.

by

Richard

Jones.)

6. **"We
are
so
much
more
than
black
and
white."**

-

from
"Dear

Mrs.

Vandenberg"

in

CAN

I

TOUCH
YOUR

HAIR?

POEMS

OF

RACE,

MISTAKES,
AND
FRIENDSHIP

(Lerner,
2018,
with
Charles
Waters,
illus.
by
Sean
Qualls
and
Selina
Alko)

7. **"May
unity
swallow
the
grave."**

-

from
"

(Epitaph
for)
Hate"

in

DICTIONARY
FOR
A
BETTER
WORLD:
POEMS,
QUOTES
AND
ANECDOTES
FROM

A

to

Z

(Lerner,
2020,
with
Charles
Waters,
illus.
by
Mehrdokht
Amini)

8. **"Thank
you,
sunshine/
for
this
fresh/**

**delicious/
day."**

-

from
"Closing
Time"

in

FRESH
DELICIOUS:
POEMS
FROM
THE
FARMERS'
MARKET

(WordSong,
2016,
illus.

by
Mique
Moriuchi)

9. **"Remember:
You
are
the/
reason
for
everything."**

-

from
LOVE,
AGNES:
POSTCARDS
FROM
AN
OCTOPUS

(Lerner,
2018,
illus.

by
Thea
Baker)

So many thanks to readers for your enthusiasm and love for [THE CAT MAN OF ALEPPO](#) (Penguin, 2020, with Karim Shamsi-Basha, illus. by Yuko Shimizu). We invite you to listen to all three of us book creators on Matthew Winner's [Children's Book Podcast](#). Also, if you'd like a copy of the book signed by both Karim and me, please visit [Alabama Booksmith](#), and they will ship it right out to you! One of the unexpected highlights of this adventure so far has been Karim teaching me how to sign my name in Arabic: إيرين لاثام



Thanks also to [Alabama Library Association](#) for awarding [MEET MISS FANCY](#) (Penguin, 2019, illus. by John Holyfield) with the 2020 Children's Fiction Award. The book features the real Miss Fancy, an elephant who lived in Birmingham's Avondale Park 1913-1934, and fictional Frank who has a big dream. What an honor! And while the awards ceremony was canceled due to covid, it was quite a thrill to pull this beautiful award out of its box. As my writing partner and poetic forever friend [Charles Waters](#) says, librarians are magical people. Thank you for sending a little pixie dust my way! Congratulations to the winners in other categories: [Patti Callahan Henry](#) for BECOMING MRS. LEWIS, [John Green](#) for TURTLES ALL THE WAY DOWN, [Ashley M. Jones](#) for MAGIC CITY GOSPEL and [Emily Blejwas](#) for THE STORY OF ALABAMA IN FOURTEEN FOODS. Please give these books a read!

... and I shall leave you with a poem I wrote a few years back. May it fill you with hope and purpose, and may peace find you on this day and all days.

Mending

And this is how
we shall remake
the world:
like a seamstress
with pins in her mouth,
steady fingers
coaxing thread,
a hum forever
in her throat
as stitch by stitch
the fabric is fitted,
gathered –
until what was once tattered
now dances across the floor.

irenelatham.com

Love,
Irene



P.S. Coming in September: [THIS POEM IS A NEST](#) (WordSong, 2020, illus. by Johanna Wright). This collection for ages 7 and up includes one big "Nest" poem and 160 "nestlings" (small poems found within "Nest") on wildly diverse topics (animals, emotions, space, weather, relationships, etc.) in a celebration of nature, art and language. Please email me irene@irenelatham.com if you are interested in receiving a digital review copy!

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