

## Irene Latham Q&A about *D-39: A Robodog's Journey*

**You've written poetry collections, and you've written novels. But this is your first verse novel. Why did you choose to write this story in verse?**

The verse novel marketplace is generally populated by historical or contemporary stories. I wanted to figure out if it was possible to create a futuristic, dystopian verse novel. What I discovered is that not only is it possible, but also it was the best fit for this particular story. Klynt uses a ham radio, so her missives are often short and punchy – like a poem. Also, when faced with Klynt's unfamiliar lexicon, as well as the realities of her Worselands/Wilds world, readers benefit from the safe, snug, all-on-a-page experience these poems offer.

**You call the poems “prose poems.” What does that mean?**

In short, prose poems are poems without line breaks. You utilize all the tools in the poetic toolbox – alliteration, figurative language, rhythm, etc – *except* line breaks.

**Klynt uses words that we don't. How did you invent these words, and why?**

One of the joys of writing this book was discovering Klynt's vocabulary! It wasn't something I intentionally started out doing – it just kind of evolved as I discovered more about Klynt and her world. It was SO MUCH FUN to invent words! It helps that I'm married to a man who invents words all the time – so much so that our children at one point made a “Dad Dictionary.” Just like Klynt, his made-up words are generally easy to decipher in context.

**Klynt likes to tinker. Are you a tinker-er, too?**

I am definitely a tinker-er! Though what I tinker with most, of course, is words. Really, another word for “poet” IS “tinker-er.” I marvel at mechanical tinker-ers like Klynt, and like my brother MicaJon and my son Daniel (who, when he was a teen, took apart and put back together quite a few computers, among other things!).

**The plot includes a war/ an out-of-control president, and citizens rising up when the government decides to take away weapons. Do you think this will happen in the United States?**

The events of the war in the book are modeled after the events of the war in Syria. War is possible in the United States and anywhere in the world, if freedoms are taken away from citizens.

**On the front cover, Kirby Larson calls this book “a powerful fable for current times.” What does that mean to you?**

First of all, I want to shout a big THANK YOU to Kirby for reading this story early on, and for offering those words! Fables generally include animals, and they include a message. This book has D-39 at its center, and it has messages about freedom, family, love and heroism. In some ways it might be a cautionary tale — I'm not sure! I think more important than hearing from me about this is that readers decide for themselves what the message(s) might be.

**Have you ever owned a robodog?**

No, but we do have a sweet, energetic Australian Shepherd named Rosie. While D-39 loves gloves, Rosie's all about *socks*! She is quite the sock thief. We adore her!

**Why “D-39”?**

When this book sold to Charlesbridge, the robodog was a D-23. But then I discovered a company called 23 and Me (DNA ancestry) and also D23, the official Disney fan club. So, I wanted to change

the name. It was my editor Karen Boss who came up with D-39, after she read that dogs have 39 pairs of chromosomes. I thought it was perfect!

**What kind of research did you do for this book?**

Every book requires research! For this one I studied the war in Syria. I researched emerging robot technologies. I visited North Dakota and the International Peace Garden.

**One of the themes in the book is what makes a hero. What did you learn from writing this book?**

What I'm (still) learning every day is that we don't need to look outside ourselves for heroes. We can be our own heroes. And instead of spending so much time looking outside ourselves (on social media or wherever), we should turn the lens inside, to our own actions and thinking, and cultivate those traits that allow us to rescue ourselves.