

## Water Love – An Authentic African Nova Scotian Story

*by Natalie Hodgson, Author, School Counsellor and Educator*

I co-authored *Water Love* with my good friend and colleague Rajean Willis. We are both Indigenous Black Nova Scotians with an active investment in our communities, focusing on youth development and mental health. I proudly introduce my co-author, as a social work clinician, scholar and PHD candidate.

The inspiration behind *Water Love* came from our participation with the North Preston Surf Program and our passion to create stories that emphasize Black excellence and representation. Our children enjoyed catching a wave and excelling in this program (in contrast you may or may not have seen me struggle on my surf board). North Preston resident and community leader, LaMeia Reddick, in collaboration with the Surfing Association of Nova Scotia (an organization that demonstrated allyship) led this program to counter the barriers and challenges that have historically kept our Black communities disconnected from water activities.

This story is told through spoken word, a written and oral style that resonates with the poetic and linguistic expressions and phrases that are familiar to children in our communities. Spoken

word captivates readers with sentence structures similar to cultural dialogue in the Black community. The intonation and creativity of spoken word provides opportunities to engage everyone.

Let's take a moment to talk about the artwork that is encapsulated in our book. The very talented, Sahle Robinson from Ontario, created vibrant images that helped bring our story to life. In addition, having the opportunity to work with an illustrator of African descent allowed the authenticity of *Water Love* to be visually captured.

That's when I fell in love with water—like the main character in our story, I also fell in love with water at a very young age. However, this is not the common narrative for African Nova Scotians. In fact, the relationship between water and our communities has been distant and often inaccessible. This is rooted in a dark history of generational trauma including a deep-seeded fear of water dating back to enslavement.

To accompany *Water Love*, we created a teacher's guide, published by the EECD. The teacher's guide articulates themes and direct connections to curriculum in the book.

Trust me, as a former classroom teacher, I understand how valuable ready-to-use resources are for educators (my school counsellor friends will also appreciate the inclusion of mental health issues).

The process of co-authorship is enlightening. As an educator and author, I am well grounded in Afrocentric principles. A significant Afrocentric worldview that guides my practice is the importance of the collective. One of the seven Nguzo Saba (also known as Kwanzaa) principles are Ujima, which means collective work and responsibility. Within this framework, an African proverb speaks to my engagement with collaborative projects, **"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."** Do I create independent work? Yes, of course I do. However, it's important to note that collective work and understanding is a part of my organic and holistic essence. Collaboration is a crucial element of my cultural and social identity. Ubuntu **"I am because we are"** is another African proverb that strengthens my core values.

*"With ancestral footprints in the sand, salty air*

*Collaborative minds, and braided hair ... that's when we fell in love with water."*

Check out a review of *Water Love* from Quill & Quire here: <https://quillandquire.com/review/water-love/>



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*for literacy and its value in children's growth and well-being. Natalie believes that children need to see themselves reflected in the books they read. She is a school counsellor working for the Halifax Regional Centre for Education. Currently on*

*leave for the school year, Natalie is working with the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute on a national project to roll out Impact of Race and Culture Assessments (IRCA) across Canada.*