First Opinion: A Transdisciplinary Springboard:  
The Collision of Poetry, Science, and Art


Elizabeth Turner

*Now You See Them, Now You Don’t* by David L. Harrison is rich in appeal to all ages of young readers. Younger children will connect with the multiple creatures as well as the different forms of poetry collected in this book, while older children and adults will enjoy considering how poetry is used as an entry into the science of animals and their camouflage. The first page of the book explains the author’s intent—to “meet some animals that know how to hide” (Harrison unpaged). Providing this simple introduction guides the readers as they interact with the poems and the illustrations.

The first poem, “Ghost Crab,” demonstrates how a list poem can evoke powerful images—“eat, fast, scurry, hide” (Harrison unpaged). Harrison carefully chooses the order of his words to create a narrative story in a list poem. “Ghost Crab” is the first poem in the sea life section. In the next two poems, “Common Octopus” and “Flounder,” the author offers the reader free-verse rhymes loaded with metaphors like, “its octo-lethal charms, / hug its prey in suckery arms.”

*Now You See Them, Now You Don’t* also explores reptiles and amphibians, mammals, insects and Spiders, and birds. “Copperhead” is a poetic letter from Mr. Copperhead to Mr. Vole where the author chooses to use consonance to bring the sss-sounds into the written word. Moving into the mammals section of the book, “Fawn” creates a rhythmic
read while also teaching the readers a lesson—“without a scent, the slightest trace, to give away . . . its hiding place” (Harrison unpaged). Readers will be left wondering if deer really are odorless!

Illustrator Giles Laroche cleverly hides the creatures within his collage art, which he calls “paper relief” artwork. The importance of the illustrations are especially noted in the poem “Crab Spider.” On one page, the spider is white blending with a white flower, while on the following page, the crab spider camouflages to yellow to match the yellow flower. Not once does the author mention the crab spider’s ability to change color in his poem. Instead, the author’s words, “Spider used . . . a bloom to hide it . . . until a fly . . . flew down beside it,” guide the readers to notice the spider’s prey and the spider’s color-changing gift at the same time. The poem ends with a metaphor that made me laugh out loud: “Then with spider’s . . . aptitude . . . the buzzy fly . . . became fast food” (Harrison unpaged). My eight-year-old son was able to make such a powerful connection to that line and deemed it the best metaphor he’d ever heard.

One of the short, simply written poems in the bird section, “Great Blue Heron,” demonstrates the power of carefully chosen words in their ability to provide strong imagery. Readers are clearly able to visualize the bird’s ability to camouflage while hunting its prey—“Standing statue still. Slender sharp bill. Slowly aimed spear” (Harrison unpaged).

A thoughtful reader is left with questions, and the author does not disappoint. At the end of the book is where Harrison is able to use his science degrees to provide an elementary explanation of each creature’s camouflage abilities in a concise, reader-friendly paragraph. Like a good teacher, the author subliminally encourages readers to learn even more by offering other books, the library, and Internet resources.

From the cover of the book to the very last page, Now You See Them, Now You Don’t is a delight to the mind and the eye. With so many fun twists and turns for the tongue to try, this book promises to be a classroom and family favorite for years to come.

**About the Author**

*Elizabeth Turner* is an elementary education instructor and Elementary STEM Recruitment and Retention Project Manager at the University of Indianapolis. She enjoys reading, learning, and exploring the outdoors, especially with her husband Mark and their three children.