

Six Trait Gurus

Featuring standards, traits, lesson ideas, and the BEST in current literature for young people.

Can you find the red-spotted newt? How about the ladybug?

Where in the Wild? Poems by David M. Schwartz and Yael Schy,
Photos by Dwight Kuhn

2007. Berkeley: Tricycle Press

Genres: Nonfiction, poetry,
photography

Ages: K through grade 4 as the
primary audience—but adults
love this book, too!

Summary

Seriously, now: *Can* you find that red-spotted newt hiding on the front page? How about the ladybug lurking right by the Introduction? If so, good for you. If not—well, that’s the whole point of this visually enchanting, multi-award-winning book. Nature has given countless creatures a

clever and highly effective way of hiding from predators who’d like to eat them: camouflage. Thanks to the stunning photography of Dwight Kuhn, we see 10 creatures hiding in their native habitats, and the challenge is to find them. We get a hint: the introductory poems provided by David M. Schwartz and Yael Schy. These poems are untitled for a reason—titles would make the search far too easy! We have to guess what we’re looking for, then try to find it. Once you have (or think you have) the answer, you can open the beautiful gatefold spread to see a coyote, tree frog, weasel, butterfly, spider, or whatever vividly displayed against a muted background. Inside the gatefolds, you’ll also find concise, well-written informational essays that treat us to a range of fascinating facts. We learn that pound for pound, weasels consume more food than almost any other mammal, that moths’ coloring has evolved to



WHERE in the WILD?

Camouflaged Creatures Concealed...and Revealed



allow them to adapt to a changing environment, that a flounder's eye migrates as it grows, so that as an adult, it has both eyes on one side of its body—and much more. Facts are intriguing and carefully selected, making this book ideal for teaching effective use of informational detail. The authors have also taken care to appeal to a range of age levels by making some creatures (e.g., the fawns) easier to spot than others (e.g., the moth). Truly, this delightful book does a masterful job of blending genres. This is about as close as still life can come to imitating video. You'll buy it to share with your children or young students, but your adult friends won't be able to put it down. (You may find it camouflaged on a friend's bookshelf if you don't keep an eye on it.)

In the Classroom

1. Introduce the word *camouflage*. Who knows what it means? Who can spell it? You may want to look up the etymology of this word. It has an interesting history!
2. Once everyone gets the idea of what camouflage is all about, ask students if they can name any animals that use camouflage to hide from predators. They may have observed this in the forest, in a meadow, or even in a garden or window box. If they can think of any (whether they've seen them or not), make a list, and ask them (later, when you share the book) to notice if the authors mention any of the same animals they have listed.
3. Introduce the book by sharing the photo on the cover and asking students to look for the red-spotted newt pictured there. Caution them not to point to it or say anything aloud (It is *very* hard not to do this!), but just to raise a hand when they spot it. This will give everyone a chance to look carefully. Some of us find camouflaged critters faster than others! Once everyone has found the newt, talk about what helps this small animal to hide in this particular background. You want students to notice the color, but also the shape and texture that help this amphibian blend into fallen leaves so well. This is a question you'll want to repeat as you share other photos throughout the book.
4. Also take time to look for the ladybug (*Can you find me?*) opposite the Introduction. Very young primary students may not have patience for you to share the Introduction itself aloud, but do share it with older readers. It does a beautiful job of setting the stage for the book—and is a good example of what an informational introduction can be. Among other things, the Introduction makes clear that the book has three main parts: poetry that provides us with hints about what to look for, a photo to explore (a kind of visual hide and seek), and "inside" information, tucked behind the flap, to tell us about the creature we've just found. You might mention that the three composers of this book worked together to come up with this organizational structure: hint, game, answer, more information. Is it effective?
5. Share one, two, or more of the entries from the book. Older students may be ready to do all 10—and may object if you want to stop! For younger students, you may want to divide the book into two, three, or more lessons, sharing as many entries at a time as you feel they're ready for. For each entry, read the poem first (perhaps even without sharing the picture right away), and have students guess what creature they might be looking for. (Keep in mind that it may be very hard for students to focus on the poem if you show them the photo at the same time.) After they have identified the animal they're looking for (or at least made a good guess or two), share the photo and have them look carefully. Remind them not to give the location away too quickly, as this spoils the game for viewers who need just a bit more time. When they think they have identified the animal, open the gatefold to reveal the answer. Cheer if you got it right!
6. Take time to share all or part of the informational text (behind the gatefold), depending on what you feel students may be ready for. Invite older students to comment on which details they find most

interesting. Also talk about the different ways these three authors/composers found to share information: poetry, essays, photos. Do students find this effective? Does it make reading more fun to have this mix of approaches?

7. If you work with older students, invite them to be readers too, so you can hear multiple voices. You may have students who especially want to share poetry, and others who like reading the informational pieces aloud.

8. Notice various features of the presentation in this book. For example, the poems take different shapes on different pages. Do your students like this kind of playfulness with the look of the text? How many would like to try this in their own writing? Also talk about the gatefolds. They allow us to see some information right away, while some remains hidden. Have any of your writers used this gatefold technique? Would they like to?

9. You can explore the idea of camouflage in a variety of ways, especially if you have small creatures to observe within your classroom: e.g., frogs, ants, spiders, and so on. Create your own backgrounds using natural materials such as grass, twigs, sand, small rocks, leaves—or things like wrapping paper, fabric, or wallpaper. Talk about which backgrounds would provide the most effective hiding for particular creatures—and which might make those creatures stand out. Also discuss the fact that some creatures do not hide at all; they are immediately visible. Examples would be a goldfish, a Monarch butterfly, or a cardinal. Could standing out in this way be an advantage for a creature? If so, how? (You may wish to do additional research on this topic.)

10. If possible, take a short field trip to explore the hidden creatures that may live on your school campus or within any environment to which you have access. It may be helpful to have students focus their attention by creating “windows” out of cardboard strips. Make each window a foot to two feet square, and have students work in teams of two or three, setting the window right down on the ground and studying what they find there. In an environment with varied flora, you are likely to spot a wide range of small creatures—some of which may not be visible without a close look. By all means, use magnifying glasses if you have them. Discuss what you find, and the kinds of camouflage you discover.

11. Have students write about any creature (of their own choosing) that uses either camouflage or high visibility as part of its survival strategy. Students may choose to write poems, informational essays, or both. Encourage them to include illustrations (drawings, paintings, or photos if you have camera access), and to think about a gatefold design if it fits their text. Share results, and talk about how good information and presentation work together to draw readers in. You may also choose to have students work in teams, with one doing a poem, one doing informational writing, and a third doing the illustrating.

12. Keep track of other creatures you notice (in your own environment or in films) that use camouflage or stand-out coloring. Keep a running list and discuss your findings to expand your understanding of how camouflage works—and also of how nature finds other ways to protect creatures. Reflective question: Can camouflage also help predators? How? What animals would offer good examples of this?

Note: Don't miss *Where Else in the Wild?*, a sequel to this remarkably successful book.