

Interview: David Harrison, Poet

Copy Editors of Pennsylvania Reads, Tammy Brown and Hollie D'Agata recently had the opportunity to interview David Harrison, noted children's author and poet, for the journal of the Keystone State Literacy Association. Hollie met David at the Highlights Foundation when she attended David's poetry workshop.

When David accepted Hollie's invitation to be interviewed for Pennsylvania Reads, she and Tammy had no idea what a fun-filled hour they were in for! David is known for writing poetry, but he is also a master storyteller. As you read the interview, be sure to picture David with a twinkle in his eye and a ready smile (and Hollie and Tammy chuckling throughout)!

Hollie: David, I remember you saying at a poetry workshop at Highlights in Honesdale, PA, that you started out as a biologist. How did you ever get into poetry and writing? It seems like opposite sides of the brain.

David: Well...I'm not sure, though, because scientists have to be creative also. I'll give you an example. It's kind of gross, but for my master's thesis, my research for my master's degree was in parasitology, the study of parasites. When I was at Emory University, I had received what was then the largest fellowship that was available in the science building. The hook was that I had to study parasitology instead of some other branch of biology that I might have preferred. The head of the department had just received a huge federal grant to pursue his interest in parasitology, and he had to spend part of it on fellowships and the rest on equipment. So I had to do parasitology. His interest at that moment was a little, well, it wasn't little, but it was a tapeworm. This tapeworm, *Hymenolepis diminuta*, was found almost exclusively in rats, so I had to raise my own rats in the laboratory. They were Wistar rats. They were beautiful things, actually. I told my wife they would make a pretty fur coat if she didn't mind, and it turns out she did, so we didn't do that. Anyway, I had to infect these rats with this tapeworm. Rats tend to eat grain and such, and sometimes little beetles are found in grain. I remember when I was a kid, once in a while you'd find little beetles in a flour bag. Well, those little beetles sometimes become infected with these tapeworms. So, I had to raise these beetles. I had to infect them with the little eggs of the tapeworm, and then I had to dissect the rats after so many hours because that was my assignment. I had to study the rat after it became infected with this particular tapeworm. So I had to dissect them, lay their intestine out in a pan, pin them down, and try to find where those little cysts were. (*pause.*) Isn't this fun? (*laughs*)

Hollie: A long way from poetry!

David: I had to find them, and no one before me had actually done this, so I had to figure out how to get

these things to move. I knew they were in there. I had put them there with a pipette. I finally decided that if I put a gooseneck lamp over the pan that had saline water in it, it would heat the water just a little bit, and that would agitate the cysts and make them move. And it worked! And I became Boy Genius! They gave me accolades for that simple solution to a complex problem, and I went on to win the Sigma Chi award for the best science thesis for a master's degree that year. That's an example of how, in research, you do have to use creativity. You do have to use your mind, confront a problem, and then evaluate it, and solve it. That's very much what I do as a writer today — confront an issue, a problem, an idea, and then I have to figure out how to solve that problem, or how to present that poem or story. Scientists and writers share a lot of the same characteristics. I also had to work alone as a scientist, and of course, you work alone as a writer, too. So, on the surface, it's a long way from *Hymenolepis diminuta* to writing a poem! (*laughs*)

Now, to answer your question without all these smart-alecky tapeworm answers, when I was a little boy, I collected things — butterflies, turtle shells, snake skins — anything I found in the woods and along the creeks. I had always been a nature lover, and then I became educated in that field of science. But at the same time, I made up my first poems when I was six years old. I didn't aspire to become a writer and didn't think about it until I was 20 years old. I was about to graduate from Drury University and my degree was in science. Turned out I had taken too much science and not enough other subjects, so the dean of Drury called me into his office as I was signing up for courses the last half of my senior year. I was student body president. I thought I was doing okay, but he threatened me by saying I was going to be in deep trouble if I didn't take something else that last semester. I said, "What do you suggest?" He said, "I don't care, just as long as it isn't any more science."

My advisor finagled to get me into a writing class. I didn't have any prerequisites for this class in writing, but a friend of hers taught the course, so I wound up senior year taking this course in creative writing. I was terrified. I had never done that sort of thing, and here I sit in a class surrounded by writing majors. These people are all comfortable with one another, they know one another, and they're in the same clubs and social circles, and I'm probably smelling of formaldehyde and just came from the physiology lab. The professor told us we could write anything we wanted to that term. Well, I finally wrote a short story. It was based on observation. I had witnessed a certain kind of wasp hunt. The wasp would fight with a spider and paralyze it. And, of course, it was going to drag the spider off and lay eggs on it so when they hatched the larvae would have something to eat. (Another very appetizing part of my repertoire.) But the professor really liked it! And he was the one who took me aside when I graduated and urged me to become a

writer. “I know you’re going to be a scientist,” he said, “and that’s fine. But you don’t have to be just one; you can be both.” And that’s just where it started.

Hollie: Thank goodness for that professor!

David: I was 21. I went off to Emory to get my Master’s work done, and as soon as I finished, I took a job in Evansville, Indiana, as a pharmacologist. I was in a laboratory working with experimental organic compounds, looking for the next breakthrough in some kind of medicine. I studied the brain and spinal cord. That was my area. But at night, I began to write stories.

Hollie: So you started out with stories.

David: I wrote for adults. I had no thought about writing for children. I wrote for six years and was turned down every single time, 67 times in a row! I was very discouraged. I had been promoted by day. I was doing okay as a scientist, but I didn’t like my work. I finally told my wife maybe I needed a change in my profession. Maybe it was holding me back. I hadn’t sold a darn thing, mind you, but I quit science anyway and started looking for a job. I needed something else. Eventually, Hallmark cards took me on in Kansas City, as an editor of children’s greeting cards.

Hollie: Children’s greeting cards?

David: Yes’m. One week I had been operating on cats in the laboratory, and the next week I was in Kansas City pulling out drawers with sentiments for children’s greeting cards. I was almost hysterical. I didn’t know what I had done to myself. It was like I was in a foreign country! But it worked out, and, eventually, I became head of the department. As the editorial manager I said yes or no to almost every sentiment Hallmark published. During my Kansas City years, and while I was editing children’s cards, I was still writing stories for adults at night. One story won a prize and a brief article about it appeared in the Kansas City Star. A woman who read the piece called to talk about my writing and asked if I wrote for kids, too, considering that I edited cards for them. I said no. I mean, why would I do that? But, afterward, I sort of took that as a suggestion and tried my hand at writing something for kids. It turned out to be a picture book called *The Boy with the Drum*. I wrote that in 1967; it was published in 1969 and went on to sell more than 2 million copies. I took that as a clue that I ought to be writing for kids. Last year I celebrated my 50th anniversary as a published children’s author.

Hollie: How do you get ideas? What are your sources of inspiration? I mean, you write all over the place!

David: You know, that’s true. A lot of what I write is informed by nature, by animals. I’m more comfortable writing about animals than I am using boys and girls as my protagonists. For one thing, when you get a boy for

the hero or a girl for the heroine, you have a lot of other baggage to be worried about, a lot of other concerns that you don’t have if you’re writing about a squirrel. Who cares if it’s a boy or girl squirrel? Plus, I’m at home with the world of animals, and I feel comfortable there. I tend to use animals more often than not, though by no means always. I look around a lot. I’m an observer. I’m a very happy person if you just leave me alone and let me look around. When my wife and I go places during the brief times when she’s looking for a skirt on sale or something, I’m almost always looking around. It’s just a habit. It is surprising what you see when you look around. Not infrequently, I will find something I need to tuck away. It may or may not turn into something. I have a book called *Now You See Them, Now You Don’t* that came out in 2016. *Now You See Them, Now You Don’t* is about the kind of natural camouflage animals use when they’re hunting. My wife and I were in our swimming pool in late fall a few years before that, and I was complaining about being bitten by these little midges. Midges are those little biting flies. You don’t notice them until the next morning when you’re scratching. So Sandy said, “Well, you ought to write a book about that.” I said, “About what? Midges?” She said, “About little itty bitty things that hide.” That eventually turned into this book that includes animals of all sizes, but the thesis was how they hide, how they keep you from spotting them. That was just from scratching and complaining about little biting flies. Very often, that’s the genesis of a book: something happens, and you think about it, and consider the possibility of writing about it. Most of the time it doesn’t go anywhere, but now and then it does.

Hollie: What is your process? Do you jot down ideas? Do you do research?

David: I have files. If it’s a copy of something, an article from a newspaper, a magazine, or something I have just written, I stick it in those files. One time, years ago, I was preparing for a family night at school. All the moms and dads were there, and we were talking about the importance of reading and writing at home. I was leaving the school and a little boy caught up with me, and sort of tagged me on the hip and said, “Hey, will you write a story about me sometime?” I said, “I don’t know you.” He said, “My name is Dylan,” and he had already written it out. He had “D-Y-L-A-N” on a piece of paper, and he handed it to me. I said, “Well, Dylan, it’s nice to meet you, and I’ll certainly give that some thought.” When I got home, I took that little scrap of paper out of my pocket and put it in one of my idea files. Years later, I wrote a book called *Dylan, the Eagle-Hearted Chicken*. It’s a story about an egg, a hen egg, that is kidnapped by a crow, dropped into an eagle’s nest, and raised by an eagle. I needed a name. I was going through my idea folders, and there was “Dylan.” That’s how we got *Dylan, the Eagle-Hearted Chicken*.

Hollie: Do you start off writing a poem, or do you write a story first and then extract a poem?

David: I like to write rhyming stories, but to me that's not the same thing as a collection of poems. A rhyming story is *The Night Before Christmas* (which, unfortunately, I didn't write.) But that's a rhyming story. Although, in itself that's probably a poem, but a nice, big juicy poem. Usually, a story to me is prose. A lot of it depends on how your first thoughts come together. If they happen to come together in rhyme, then I might pursue it that way. Now, when I'm writing poems, that's a different matter. Just before we started talking, I was working on an idea about endangered species. I've been making lists about the ones I may want to write about, and when I get settled on that, I will probably write a poem about each one. So that's not a rhyming story; it's a collection of poems. I may also try the same idea in prose, just to see which I like better. It's not too uncommon for me to do both. That way, I have a choice, the editor has a choice, and eventually, we pick the one that seems to be the best way to get that information to a young reader.

Hollie: You make school visits. How do you share your love of writing and the writing process with children?

David: I've done a lot of schools over the years. Once in a while, someone will stumble across my name somewhere, and I'll wind up in the school, and I love it! When I'm there, depending on the age, I'll tell them a little bit about how I write, by way of introduction. I tell them each morning I get up at 6 o'clock, and while they're still catching that last little nap or they're brushing their teeth or they're having breakfast before they go off to school, I'm already sitting at my desk working. And, at night before I go to sleep, the last thing I do is decide what I'm going to work on the next morning, so I don't waste time. I get up, go turn the coffee pot on, and by 10 minutes after 6 I'm sitting right where I am now, working. And then I read a poem or two. About then the first hands start going up, and I acquiesce to their questions. They set the tone. I make sure that before I leave, I tell them everything I came to tell them, but I let them ask questions, and then I use those questions to shape the answers I want to make sure they hear. I always consult with the teachers before I arrive to see what I should be talking about that will be most supportive of what they're doing in class. Then I ask them if there are things they would like to hear me talk about. So, we get it done, and it never comes out the same way twice!

Tammy: What's one of the best questions you've ever had from a child?

David: Well, most of them, of course, are the same ones you get over and over and over, but now and then someone will ask why I became a writer. And that's a good question. I can tell them the same thing I just told you, that the guy who was teaching a class back in college told me he thought I could be [a writer], but, you know, it goes deeper than that. It's sort of programmed by life, maybe by genetics too. I'd be attracted to one

kind of activity or another, and, for some reason, I was primed somewhere along the line to be a writer when someone told me I could be. In my case, I believe it had a great deal, maybe everything, to do with how I was raised. When I was quite small, my mother was a stay-at-home mom, and she was a very creative woman. Very friendly and outgoing, read to me a lot. Both of my parents did, so I had a pretty good vocabulary as a child. When I was 4 years old, my Uncle Wayne bet my mother a dollar that I couldn't memorize the *Gettysburg Address*. I still have the book where she wrote in it, "At age 4, David recited the *Gettysburg Address* at Grace Methodist Church." And she got the dollar. I didn't see a penny of that dollar, by the way. She probably spent it on material. She was a good seamstress, too, so she made me an Uncle Sam costume with a stovepipe hat and the long tails jacket. When I finished reciting, I remember being very impressed by how the adults in the room took on about what I had just done. I was too little to understand the meaning of most of the words, but there was something about those words that impressed grownups. I learned one important lesson when I was 4 — I liked words. As an adult, I can theorize about why I liked them, but I believe if I hadn't had the experience, I might not have enjoyed the job — the work of becoming a writer. Or maybe I would not have had the patience to stick with it.

David: So, Tammy, I'm trying to think of some of the questions because now and then somebody will just blow you away with a question and you think like, where did that child come from? But right now, I'm blanking out. If I think of something, I'll tell you. But they want to know how old I am, and how much I get paid—all the things the teachers tell them ahead of time, "Do not ask!" But that's always the thing they ask.

Tammy: Have you seen your work used in schools in good ways or ways that you disagree with?

David: Oh yes, I've seen puppet shows and little plays. I've seen kids dress up as characters. They have read. They have sung. Some of my poems have been set to music and kids have sung them or recited them. Not too long ago, when I had a book called, *And the Bullfrogs Sing*, I had a big program at our main library. I served Pond Scum Punch and Oogie Woogie Cookies, and I had invited a friend of mine who is a musician to come with me and sing "Froggie Went a Courtin'." We had coloring contests for the little ones, and I also read from the book. Also, I wrote a poem of just sounds, several years ago, called "The Frog Chorus." It first came out in a Georgia Heard collection, an anthology of poems. It's just the four sounds: knee-deep, knee-deep, ribbit, ribbit, ...oh shoot, I can't remember the other sounds, but, anyway, there are four sounds, and you divide the room up into quarters and everybody has a sound that you practice. And they had a jumping contest to see who could jump the farthest, and I was amazed at how many kids got in line for that. We just had a big time. So, you take an idea,

a story in this case, and you play with it, and you find all kinds of things to do that sort of bring it to life and encourage the kids to think that way about other stories they read.

Hollie: That's the way to make it fun. We have to make it fun for our kids.

David: Yeah, well, I was reading some of my poems in a Barnes & Noble 15 years ago, and Chris Craig, an old friend of mine — a gifted musician with a lovely baritone voice who plays great guitar, and spent time in Nashville as a younger man — happened to be there. Afterward, Chris asked, "Would you mind if I put some of your poems to music? They just have a lyric to them. I'd love to do that." I said, "Of course!" So he did, and he invited a percussionist friend of his, and the three of us formed a group we called Byron Bigger's Band, and we still perform every now and then! So that's been fun. It's a matter of being open to possibilities, taking one form of art, and turning it into other forms.

Tammy: Are there any things you see happening in schools, especially with regard to your work, that you're concerned about?

David: Oh! Don't get me started! (*David growled, made a face, and then laughed.*) Well, yes, I think it's hard to convince teachers in the classroom that it's important enough to make time for poetry. Most of them wait until the poetry unit comes around, and then, for that brief period of time, they use the same poems, the same process, the same everything they've used for years. Teachers who have discovered what poetry can do for their kids look at it entirely differently — poetry is part of everyday life. They read poems, they find a minute in the morning, or they close out part of the afternoon, or if there's a time of the day when there's a little brief lag, they surprise their kids — like ring a cowbell or something. "It's poetry time!" Then they read a poem. They may tuck poems into kids' lunchboxes or pockets or jackets. You can create a lively, word-oriented classroom with poems.

Dick Allington gave a talk that I attended not many years ago and he said to the teachers, "If you don't have a hundred books in your classroom that are guaranteed crowd-pleasers, that you know kids love, then you're in the wrong profession. So quit. Get out of the way. Let somebody that can teach get in there." He's very, very subtle. But the point he was making, is that kids need to read. We all know that. They need to read, and they need to read in every subject all the time. They need to go home to read. Kids who come to kindergarten from a reading family may have heard a million words more than kids who haven't, and the ramifications of that are just obvious. And yet we still find ourselves talking about that year after year after year, begging teachers to do what is good for their kids. Not because teachers don't care. They just have other priorities. I happen not to be a fan of Common Core State Standards. I don't know

where you stand on that, but to me, for all the good it represents, it also has a downside. Everybody has to be on the same page every hour of every day of every week of every month. It has pinched off valuable bits of time that were the teacher's, for the teacher to use and apply in creative ways. I have a blog that I post almost every day. One of the things I started doing 10 years ago was that each month I'd post a single word. That's the "Word of the Month Poetry Challenge." Poets from all over the world take that one word and create. They use it as their inspiration to write a poem. Some are good, some are not. It doesn't matter. It's an exercise. That's all it is. When I started that, I had a children's division too, two of them: one for the younger ones, and one for the older ones. Teachers all over the country looked forward to that, and each month many of them posted poems written by their students. Adults who follow my blog and often contribute their own work to it would read them, and they'd say nice things to the kids: "I especially loved the way you did this," and "Thank you for being here today," and "We're so proud of you." There was a very warm, supportive system. Well, it's been two or three years since I saw even one poem posted by a teacher, and all that disappeared over time. In a moment when I think we need to be using more poetry because of the value it brings to the classroom: vocabulary development, and understanding, and fluency. Instead, the kids are busy doing something else, and the teacher no longer has the time it takes to post something that's going to be greatly rewarded. It's a wonderful experience for the kids. The teachers know that. They haven't turned into bad people. They're just busy! And so, I support teachers every way I know how to. But I'm always preaching to the choir. I know that, but I'm still preaching.

Hollie: I read that you are collaborating with teachers about writing.

David: Yes, in 1993, my first book of poetry was published by Boyds Mills Press. It was called, *Somebody Catch My Homework*. The editor-in-chief at that time, for Boyds Mills, was Bernice Cullinan. She was still teaching at NYU, and at that time she was president of IRA. But Kent Brown, who was the main guy at Boyds Mills, knew her and sweet-talked her into helping him start this line of books called Wordsong, that would be dedicated to poetry. I was in England visiting an editor of mine there, and by happenstance, an editor from Boyds Mills was also in England at the same publishing house at the same time in the next-door office. It was kind of unusual, two Americans there at the same time, visiting editors. So, we were introduced, and that became my link to Boyds Mills. She asked me to send poetry in, so I did. Bea became my editor for the first 3 or 4 books I did, and there came a time when I said to her, "I wonder if maybe I should try to write something for teachers." This is long-term marketing (*taps his temple and smiles*), trying to get my name in some books that teachers, you know pre-teaching students, and then when they got into their own classrooms, maybe they would take some of my poems with them. Bea thought that was a good idea,

and offered to write one with me. The first one of these books I did was called *Easy Poetry Lessons that Dazzle and Delight*; Bea and I wrote it together. After that, I did another one with a third-grade teacher in Denver Colorado, Kathy Holdreth. So, the editor said, "What do you want to do next?" I didn't think I'd get much traction if I wrote a book by myself; I'd have to partner with a teacher. And she said, "Do you know Tim Rasinski?" I said no. She said, "He's a good guy, and we do some work with him. Maybe you two could write something together." I said, "Well, I like partner poems." She said, "I do too. See what he thinks." By the time I got back home, she had already emailed Tim. He got in touch with me, and we wrote a book called *Partner Poems*. I was at a Scholastic party one time and Mary Jo Fresh from The Ohio State University was there, and she said, "I've been using some of your work in my classroom for a long time." We struck up a friendship that has led us so far to writing seven books together. Laura Robb, another old friend, and I were at lunch at a conference and she said, "I have finally thought of something that you and I can do." So, we're just finishing one together. I have had a wonderful time. These will be my 14th and 15th books for teachers. I've had a wonderful time learning just what you people do! There's a lot to know! And naturally, I will never be what you are. I will never be in a classroom, close the door, and be there with those kids. But I love knowing what I do know, and working with someone who has been there, and who does know that. I've volunteered for 35 years for public education here in Springfield, Missouri, where I live. I have a great affinity for what goes on, for what happens when those kids sit down and face the front of the room.

Hollie: You have won quite a few awards. Which one is most important?

David: Gosh, I don't know, the one that probably has the most weight is the Christopher Award, and that came with something called, *The Book of Giant Stories*, about a little boy who keeps finding giants. American Heritage Press published that just as they were being acquired by McGraw Hill, and I was in Kansas City at that time, and my phone rang and it was my editor in New York. She said, "You have just won the Christopher Award!" I said, "Yess!!!" (because she sounded so excited). I asked, "What is it?" because I didn't know. She said, "Well, it's a big deal." The Christopher Award was given the year before to the *Little House on the Prairie* series and some other pretty swell things, and I just really, I should've been prouder than I was, and I am now. She said, "It's a black-tie thing. You need to come to New York for the party." I had just given Hallmark my resignation notice, because my mom and dad lived here in Springfield where I am now, and my dad wanted to retire. He was wondering if I would come home and take over the family business that he had started in 1945. It manufactured concrete blocks, and I was the editorial manager at Hallmark, with a background of chasing tapeworms, so I said, "Of course." (Which meant I couldn't attend the

party.) But, one of the things I'm proud of, being from the Midwest--a lot of people don't know how to take us, you know. The folks in the south have wonderful stories to tell, the ones up and down the east coast do, and the western folks do. California, and all up and down the coast, those people have history to talk about. We do here, too, but it isn't as well known to a lot of people who aren't from here. It's not very exciting. We have our own sound, our voices are fairly flat, probably our own sense of humor. So, a couple of years ago, when *Now You See Them, Now You Don't*, was selected by the Midland Society of Authors as the Best Book for Children's nonfiction published that year, to me that was a big deal. This is a society that's over a hundred years old, and it represents the whole middle of the United States. They're like "my people." They are people like me. They hear my voice. They read my work and understand it. So, to have that honor was one that I'll tuck away and when they send me to the home, I'll rock, and I'll think about that.

Hollie: How about the school named after you?

David: Yes, that was truly, other than getting married and having children, that would be the next one. I go to David Harrison Elementary School at least once a year. I would go every day, but I don't want to wear out my welcome. When you walk down the hall, and kids come up and hug you or they wave at you or they point at you and whisper, "That's..." You know they know who you are. Well, it just melts my heart every time. The school's mascot is the Husky dog, and their chant is Da-vid Harrison Huskies, ruff, ruff!" Boy, I can't get enough of that! And to hear these little kids saying, "Da-vid Harri-son Huskies, ruff, ruff!" And whoever's leading — the teacher, the principal — will make it fast one time, slow one time, high one time, low one time. One of the teachers one time said, "You lead them!" I said, "Really?" So, I got to lead them! Well, that was truly a wonderful experience for me. I've also had a library conference room named for me at The Library Center in Springfield, Missouri. In Phoenix, Arizona, there's a library called the Burton Barr Central Library. A few years ago, the Phoenix Suns professional basketball team decided to underwrite the construction of a children's garden just outside the children's library. It's a nice area, walled in so kids and parents and teachers and librarians can go out in the sun and read. They wanted to put a sidewalk in to lead children and patrons outside from the library into the garden. Somebody found my poem — "My Book!" — from *Somebody Catch My Homework* and asked if I'd give permission to have the poem sandblasted into the sidewalk. You can imagine how thrilled I was. I was flown out to speak at the grand opening of the garden and was introduced by Arizona's Attorney General. My family attended, as well as my teacher from second grade, and my old best friend from when we lived in Ajo, Arizona when I started school. Every now and then somebody I know will send me a picture of that sidewalk. In Pueblo, Colorado, there's a bookmobile with "My Book!" painted all around the outside of it. This bookmobile goes into

rural and underserved areas. So, I've had some really nice things happen over the years! I've had two books (and I'll quit), I've had two books selected to represent Missouri at the National Book Fair in Washington, D.C. Something like 200,000 people go to that book fair every year. Each state is invited to choose one book, and books of mine have been chosen twice.

Hollie: Oh, that's wonderful! You've come a long way from those tapeworms!

David: Yes, I don't think I'm interested in tapeworms anymore.

Tammy: You belong to ILA and you go to NCTE conferences. Why do you belong to these education-related professional organizations?

David: It keeps me involved and learning. I try to get to one or two a year, and when I'm there, there's an electricity in the air. There's an excitement that goes on. I want to rub a little of that off on me. I like being there. I am almost always a presenter of some kind. This last one, at NCTE, they put me on a panel of people who presented the Notable Book Award list for this coming year. I happen to have a book that's on that notable book list, a poetry book for next year. *Crawley's School for Bugs* is on the NCTE notable book list for 2019-2020. And so, they thought it was pretty fun to put me on that panel. I was told they'd not had a winning author participate in the presentation before, and I was happy for a chance to stand up and use that as a bully pulpit to talk about getting poetry into the classes. That's generally what I do when I'm there. And I write sometimes for their journals.

Years ago, Ann Porter Gifford, a professor friend of mine who had been president of the Missouri Reading Association, started interviewing me and writing up the interviews and sending them out to IRA publications around the country. So, I've been in a bunch of journals, thanks to her. But I don't do journal interviews very often, so I'm very appreciative of your letting me do this with you today.

Hollie: We are appreciative! I love listening to your stories and reading your blog. It's always interesting!

David: Thank you. I decided in 2009 that it was time to have a website because all the big kids had websites. I was still doodling around, and I didn't have one, so I looked around and found this woman who designs websites. She and I talked, and I've been delighted with her work. And then when we finished, she said, "Now you need a blog." I said nu-uh. I don't even like the way the word sounds: "Blog." She said, "Well you really have to." I said, "I don't even know how to start." So she got me a blog and posted once or twice and said, "Ok, now it's up to you." I didn't really know what I was supposed to do, and I'm not sure my posts are quite blog-like. I don't know how you're supposed to use a blog. Each

morning I sit down and I rarely know ahead of time what I'm going to say. I get out of bed and come in here and say, "Hi everyone," and then I just wait for something to happen. And once in a while, I'm lucky and something will happen, like today. I knew yesterday I had this really nice review of a book coming out, so I said, "Yes, I can put this on the blog."

Tammy: Thank you for talking with us.

Hollie: Yes, thank you. This has been fun! Not only informative but fun!

David: Thank you. I appreciate this. My pleasure!

About the Authors

Tammy Brown is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at Marywood University in Scranton, PA. She directs the Graduate Reading and ESL Programs.

Hollie D'Agata is a retired Kindergarten teacher, and she served for many years as an adjunct professor in the Graduate Reading Program at Marywood University in Scranton, PA.

WHO IS DAVID HARRISON?

David L. Harrison's 99 books for children and teachers have received dozens of honors, including Society of Midland Authors award for best children's nonfiction book, 2016; Missouri Pioneer in Education Award; and Missouri Library Association's Literacy Award. His work has been widely translated and anthologized more than 185 times. His poems have been set to music and sandblasted into a library sidewalk. He has been featured at hundreds of conferences, workshops, literature festivals, schools, and colleges. David holds two science degrees and two honorary doctorates of letters. He's Drury University's poet laureate. David Harrison Elementary School in Springfield, Missouri, is named for him.

For further information: DavidLHarrison1@att.net, <http://davidlharrison.com>, and <http://davidlharrison.wordpress.com>.

Selected Resources

Selected Books

For children:

After Dark: Poems about Nocturnal Animals
The Alligator in the Closet
And the Bullfrogs Sing
The Book of Giant Stories
Crawly School for Bugs: Poems to Drive You Buggy
Farmer's Garden: Rhymes for Two Voices
Johnny Appleseed: My Story
The Mouse was Out at Recess
Now You See Them, Now You Don't
Oceans: The Vast, Mysterious Deep
Piggy Wiglet's Great Adventure
Pirates
A Place to Start a Family
RUM PUM PUM (with Jane Yolen, August 2020)
Somebody Catch My Homework
A Thousand Cousins: Poems of Family Life
Wake Up, Sun!
When Cows Come Home

Selected Books For teachers:

Easy Poems to Dazzle and Delight
Partner Poems for Building Fluency: Grades 4-6
7 Keys to Research for Writing Success: Grades 3 & Up
Rhymes for the Times: Literacy Strategies through Social Studies: Grades 4-6
Learning through Poetry, Volumes A-E: Grades PreK-2
Guided Practice for Reading Growth: Texts and Lessons to Improve Fluency, Comprehension, and Vocabulary: Grades 4-8 (September 2020)

Empowering Students' Knowledge of Vocabulary: Learning How Language Works: Grades 3-5 (November 2020)

Selected Article

Harrison, D.L. (2019). Poetry: The game-changer. *The Missouri Reader*, 42(2), 6-11. <https://view.joomag.com/the-missouri-reader-vol-42-issue-2/0872773001549634845?short>

Selected Chapters

Harrison, D.L. (2018). Creating a community of poetry enthusiasts. In Wooten, W.A., Liang, L.A., Cullinan, B.E. (Eds.), *Children's Literature in the Reading Program* (5th ed., pp. 182-202). Guilford.

Harrison, D.L. (2015). Poetry, the write thing to do. In Wooten, W.A.(Ed.), *Children's Literature in the Reading Program* (4th ed.) International Reading Association.

Websites

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