

Shoo Rayner

## Olympia. Swim for Your Life (Olympia, 5)

United Kingdom (2011)

TAGS: [Alpheus](#) [Ancient Sacrifice](#) [Artemis](#) [Cerberus](#) [Olympia](#) [Olympic Games](#) [Orion](#)



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Olympia. Swim for Your Life (Olympia, 5)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	Shoo Rayner, <i>Olympia: Swim for your Life</i> . London: Orchard Books, 2011, 64 pp.
ISBN	9781408311912
Genre	Illustrated works
Target Audience	Children (aged 8–10 years)
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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## Creators



### **Shoo Rayner , b. 1956 (Author, Illustrator)**

Shoo (Hugh) Rayner is an author, illustrator, and teacher of drawing. He was born in Kingston-upon-Thames, the child of a member of the British Army who moved around the world. He spent his childhood in Germany, Pakistan, Yemen, and the United Kingdom. He is a graduate of Anglia Ruskin University (formerly Cambridge College of Art and Technology). He lives in Gloucestershire, near the Forest of Dean. He has illustrated over 250 books, and has two successful Youtube sites teaching drawing ([Shoo Rayner Drawing](#), and [Draw Stuff Real Easy](#)).

Rayner creates picture books and middle-grade fiction for children. He admits that after failing his English O level he developed a visual approach to writing and telling stories. He refers to himself as a "storyteller illustrator" (see [here](#), accessed: December 4, 2019). His published output is prolific: he has published a large number of series of Early Readers for children, including the *Lydia* series, the *Victor* series, the *Little Horrors* series, the *Ginger Ninja* series, the *Monster Boy* series, and the *Olympia* series.

Rayner's work in these series involves simple, easy-to-read stories, aimed at readers "at the most important stage of reading development where they can be put off, or enthused for life." (*Something about the Author*, 169)

Sources:

Official [website](#) (accessed: December 4, 2019)

Official [channel](#) on You Tube (accessed: December 4, 2019)

[DrawStuffRealEasy](#), channel on You Tube (accessed: December 4, 2019)

[Profile](#) at en.wikipedia.org (accessed: April 6, 2019)

'Hugh (Shoo) Rayner,' *Something About the Author*, Ed. Lisa Kumar.

Vol. 151. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2004, p. 168-171.

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au and Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

### **Questionnaire**

Response to author's questionnaire on Author's [Vimeo channel](#) (accessed: April 4, 2019).

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## Additional information

### Summary

*Swim for Your Life* is the fifth in author-illustrator Shoo Rayner's *Olympia* series of chapter books, which show what life was like for ordinary children in Ancient Greece. It features a boy named Olly, whose father runs the gymnasium where the great athletes train, and who dreams of being an Olympic champion. In *Swim for Your Life*, the athletes are preparing for a swimming race, and making sacrifices to the river god, Alfeios (Alpheus). Olly and Spiro, his rival, have the morning off. Spiro's fierce dog Kerberos chases Olly to the river's edge, before being called off by Olly's sister, Chloe (who has a special bond with the dog), and her friend, Hebe. They invite the boys to join them swimming in a quiet part of the river. It emerges that Spiro cannot swim. The children visit Hebe's father, who is a priest at the temple, and ask Linos, the butcher, to donate some pig's bladders for a float for Spiro.

At lunchtime, the boys go to set the tables for the athletes, and listen to Simonedes the historian talk about Alfeios, and the god's history with Artemis (how he tried to abduct Artemis, but she fooled him by disguising her identity, and how in his anger at being thwarted he threw his river into spate). Olly looks at a wall painting of Alfeios (body of a fish; horns of a bull) and wonders if the river monster is real. Spiro pretends to be the monster, and Olly fears that the river has taken his naughty arch-enemy. The children then watch the athletes as they race in the river. When Kerberos, Spiro's fierce dog, falls in, Olly rescues him by diving in after him and encouraging him to lean on the pigs' bladder-floats, which he has tied to a stick. From then on, when Kerberos chases him, Olly jumps into the water, where the dog becomes his friend.

### Analysis

*Swim for Your Life* is an educational reader for primary-school aged children. It uses large text and simple language to help new readers. Here, the simple, accessible story about Olly's enjoyment of swimming and Spiro's nervousness in the water, is tied to explanation about how the athletes of ancient Greece performed swimming races (though not as part of the main Olympic games). A loose connection is made to the myth of Alpheus, and his attempt to abduct Artemis, and some social history is explored in the discussion of how to make a swimming float from a pig's bladder (obtained from the temple butcher). From these



descriptions, Rayner shows the practicalities of sport in the ancient world. Young readers may enjoy these elements of social history and practical physics, and identify with Olly in his quest to defeat the unpleasant Spiro, though the origin of the boys' rivalry is not given, nor their relationship developed (perhaps Rayner sacrifices this aspect in order to meet the demands of this simple genre of short books).

Some of the characters in *Swim for your Life* have authentic ancient Greek names. The full form of Olly's name is not given, and Spiro is a modern Greek name. Kerberos, the dog, is clearly named for the guardian of the underworld. The illustrations are carefully researched, drawn from ancient Greek art, as Rayner explains on his website.

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Classical, Mythological,  
Traditional Motifs,  
Characters, and  
Concepts

[Alpheus](#) [Ancient Sacrifice](#) [Artemis](#) [Cerberus](#) [Olympia](#) [Olympic Games](#)  
[Orion](#)

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Other Motifs, Figures,  
and Concepts Relevant  
for Children and Youth  
Culture

[Boys](#) [Child, children](#) [Child's view](#) [Girls](#) [History](#) [Masculinity](#) [Parents \(and children\)](#) [Sport](#)

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