Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Aphrodite & the Gold Apple (Little Goddess Girls, 3) by Yuyi Chen, Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1060. Entry version as of November 02, 2026.

Yuyi Chen , Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Aphrodite & the Gold Apple (Little Goddess Girls, 3)

United States of America (2020)

TAGS: Aphrodite Artemis Athena Medusa Olympus Persephone Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Aphrodite & the Gold Apple (Little Goddess Girls, 3)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2020
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Little Goddess Girls: Aphrodite & the Gold Apple*. New York: Aladdin Quix, 2020, 88 pp.
ISBN	9781534431119 pb
Genre	Fiction, Mythological fiction
Target Audience	Children (young children, 5–8 years)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, Lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Yuyi Chen (Illustrator)

Yuyi Chen is an American children's book illustrator from Washington. She also did 3D modelling, design and texturing and animation. Her books include *Doris the Bookasaurus* and *Going to Grandma's House*.

Source:

Official website (accessed: August 11, 2020).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il



Photo courtesy of Joan Holub.

Joan Holub , b. 1956
(Author)

Joan Holub is a prolific children's author from the USA. Graduated from college in Texas with a fine arts degree. Worked as an art director at Scholastic trade books in New York. She has written and/or illustrated over 150 children's books. She has developed a range of series for teenagers on mythological themes: *Goddess Girls*, set in Mount Olympus Academy, *Grimmtastic Tales* series, set in Grimm Academy, *Thunder Girls*, about Norse gods set in Asgard Academy, and *Heroes in Training*, in which the male Greek gods, as very young men, set out on a range of adventures. For pre-school children, Jan Holub has written on a range of topics including several works with religious and historical themes. These include: *This Little President*; *This Little Trailblazer*, *Hooray for St. Patrick's Day!*, and *Light the Candles: A Hanukkah Lift-the-Flap Book*. Joan Holub trained in fine art and worked as an art director at a graphic design company before

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becoming a children's illustrator and then author.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Profile at the penguinrandomhouse.com (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Profile at the simonandschuster.com (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk and Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com and Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

Questionnaire

1. What drew you to writing / working with Classical Antiquity and what challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular myths or stories?

I learned to love Greek and Norse mythology in elementary school. I'm very comfortable adapting the framework of an existing myth or fairy tale by pushing it into a different setting, adding humor, and/or building in a nonfiction component. Staying true to the essential core of each myth along the way is important to me. A young *Goddess Girls* reader once told me she enjoyed the series because she "learned something". In other words, while she liked being entertained, she appreciated that her familiarity and factual understanding of the original myths was broadened at the same time.

2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

Kids have questions about their world. So it's interesting to them to learn how ancient Greeks and other cultures answered questions

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about how their world worked in exciting tales of heroes and beasts. How did the sun cross the sky? In a chariot drawn by the god Helios. What caused night? The goddess Nyx's starry cape covered the sky. Thrilling stories of courage and danger, such as Heracles' twelve labors, the Trojan Horse, and the Argonauts never go out of style.

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?) What sources are you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?

I have an entire shelf of mythology resource books. Some of my favorite go-to sources are the *Scholastic Mythlopedia* series, Edith Hamilton's *Mythology, Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, and www.theoi.com (accessed: May 28, 2018).

4. How concerned were you with "accuracy" or "fidelity" to the original? (another way of saying that might be – that I think writers are often more "faithful" to originals in adapting its spirit rather than being tied down at the level of detail – is this something you thought about?)

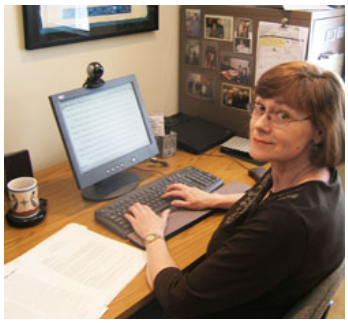
Each book in the *Goddess Girls* series (ages 8–12, Simon and Schuster) and *Heroes in Training* series (ages 7–10, Simon and Schuster) is a retelling of one or two Greek myths, with a twist. We stay as true as possible to the core bones of an original myth in order to give young readers a good understanding, but we include kid situations and humor to entertain. As an example, in *Goddess Girls #1: Athena the Brain*, Athena is summoned to attend Mount Olympus Academy, where Zeus is the principal. MOA teachers include Mr. Cyclops, who teaches Hero-ology, a class where students are graded on their abilities to maneuver small hero figures such as Odysseus, around a gameboard to enact the Trojan War, etc. Meanwhile, Athena, who is the goddess of invention among other things, inadvertently turns mean-girl Medusa's hair to snakes and gives her the power to turn mortals to stone by means of a shampoo-like invention called Snakeypoo at the MOA invention fair.

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5. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?

Suzanne Williams and I have written a new middle grade series called *Thunder Girls* (accessed: May 28, 2018), which is a twist on Norse mythology featuring strong girl characters. The first book Freya and the Magic Jewel releases May 2018 for ages 8–12, published by Simon and Schuster.

Prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com and Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com



Courtesy of the Author from her personal website.

Suzanne Williams , b. 1953
(Author)

Suzanne Williams is an American prolific children's author and former elementary school librarian. She has written over 60 books for children.

She grew up in Oregon and graduated with a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's in library science from the University of Oregon. She currently lives in Reno, Washington.

Source:

Official website (accessed: May 29, 2018).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

Questionnaire

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1. What drew you to writing / working with Classical Antiquity and what challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular myths or stories?

Writing about Greek mythology was my co-author, Joan Holub's idea. She's loved mythology since childhood. Her enthusiasm for the subject got me excited about it too. *Goddess Girls* (ages 8–12) was our very first collaboration. Soon there will be 26 books in that series. One of the challenges we've faced in writing our (soon to be four) myth-based series for young readers is how to handle the sexual and violent content of many of the myths.

To downplay the violence, we often make it cartoonish and lighten it with humor. Since most of our gods and goddesses are pre-teens (as are our readers!), we deal with inappropriate sexual content by making changes that still allow us to keep to the spirit of the myth. For example: in introducing the Adonis myth, in which Aphrodite and Persephone fight over a beautiful youth they both desire, we decided to make Adonis a kitten, rather than a young man.

Another challenge has involved familial relationships among the various gods and goddesses. In *Goddess Girls*, Zeus is an adult, the principal of Mount Olympus Academy, the school attended by our "goddessgirls" and "godboys". In mythology he would likely have fathered a good portion of the student body! So we made a decision that only Athena would call him "Dad". (Until Hebe popped forth from a lettuce in Book 21, that is.) We do acknowledge many other family relationships. For example: Apollo and Artemis as brother and sister. Medusa and her sisters Euryale and Stheno. Persephone and her mother, Demeter.

2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

Myths have got all the elements that draw us to stories: action, conflict, drama, humor, etc. What's not to like?

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?) What sources are

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you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?

Neither Joan nor I have a classical education. I did take an online Greek and Roman mythology class a few years ago, however. (Taught by Peter Struck, University of Pennsylvania.) Terrific class!

For our Greek mythology-based series, Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* is the reference we rely on the most. My co-author and I do consult Wikipedia and other online resources, especially for lists of monsters and maps and general information about ancient Greece. References for *Thunder Girls*, our soon-to-be-published Norse mythology-based series include: *The Norse Myth*s by Kevin Crossley-Holland, D'Aulaires' *Book of Norse Myth*s, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* by John Lindow, *The Poetic Edda* (translated and edited by Jackson Crawford), and *The Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson (Penguin Classics).

4. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?

In addition to *Goddess Girls*, my co-author and I have also collaborated on a second Greek mythology-based series called *Heroes in Training* (ages 6–9). It's a humorous quest/adventure series with Zeus, Poseidon, Hades and other Olympians as ten-year-olds on the run from King Cronus and the Titans. *Freya and the Magic Jewel*, the first book in *Thunder Girls*, our Norse mythology-based series, publishes May 1, 2018. I travel to Norway frequently to visit my daughter, granddaughter, and Norwegian son-in-law, so I am very excited to be doing a Norse-myth series. Aladdin (Simon & Schuster) publishes all three of Joan's and my mythology-based series. We will be doing a fourth myth-based series with them soon – for ages 5–8. Tentative title is *Little Goddess Girls*, and it will be another Greek myth-based series.

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Additional information

Summary

In the third book of the *Little Goddess Girls* series, Athena, Persephone and Aphrodite continue to travel along the Hello Brick Road to Sparkle City, where they hope the mighty Zeus might grant their wishes. Athena wishes to return home, from which she was mysteriously carried away by storm and brought to this magical, Mount Olympus, land. Persephone hopes Zeus helps her overcome her bad luck. Aphrodite wishes for the gift of likability, for sometimes she says things to people without thinking and hurt their feelings.

While on the road, the girls spot a poppy field beyond it. Persephone quickly runs to it, since she loves flowers. Athena follows her, and both suddenly fall asleep. It turns out that the mean Medusa, who desires Athena's magic sandals, cast the spell on the filed in order to kidnap Athena and steal her sandals. Medusa even calls her army of stone animals to carry Athena. Medusa can zap animals into stone and make them her obedient soldiers, which can still move and talk. However, Aphrodite manages to stop Medusa and save her friends. Since Medusa cannot harm the girls on the road, she quickly retreats.

Later, the girls enter a forest, when they hear a voice from one of the trees and an arrow is fired at Athena's dog, Oliver. They discover a girl their age, whose name is Artemis. Artemis is scared of the dog and is also afraid to get down from the tree. Apparently she is scared of everything. While the girls help her, Aphrodite finds a golden apple near the tree and decides to keep it to herself. All the girls continue to travel together to Sparke City, since Artemis wishes Zeus to grant her courage. When they arrive at the city, they discover that it is surrounded by a glass wall; one boy tells them that no one ever saw Zeus and he quickly disappears into the wall. The girls try to find a way to enter, when finally Aphrodite reveals to them her gold apple. Artemis finds a way to use the apple as a key and the four of them enter the city and walk to the Thunderbolt Tower, Zeus' residence.

The book includes characters' list, word list, questions on the story and authors' note, in which they briefly explain on the Greek goddesses Athena, Persephone, Aphrodite, and Artemis.

This series may appear like a spinoff of the popular *Goddess Girls* series by the same authors, yet while the characters are similar (Greek goddesses), the setting and characterization is different. For

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example Medusa is not a bad character in the original *Goddess Girls* series (see here and here). This series is also aimed at early readers and not at adolescents.

The illustrations are cute and display the various scenes, thus helps the readers to better understand them.

Analysis

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz's (by Frank Baum, Chicago 1900) influence continues in this book, combined with Greek mythology reception. Artemis, as the lion in *Oz*, wishes for courage. The twist here is that Artemis was the goddess of hunting and animals, hence making her scared of animals is ironic and a comical twist. Of course the young readers of this series are not necessarily aware of this fact, hence the authors aim their story to various readers, with multiple layers of knowledge. Those who are familiar with the mythological goddess may appreciate the twist, and those who are not will enjoy the story as is.

As in the previous books in this series (see here and here), the focus is on the relations between the girls and how each of them develops and gains more confidence as the result of their mutual friendship. In the previous book, Persephone gained more self-confidence. In this book, it is Aphrodite who receives the main focus. She slowly learns to control herself, and not to talk without thinking first. She is the hero who saves Athena and Persephone from Medusa and she also helps convincing Artemis to get down from the tree. Aphrodite is conflicted between being a good friend but also wanting to keep things for herself. For example, she finds the golden apple and wishes to keep it for herself. She is not sure how she should act. "She thought about showing the others the gold apple. But something made her keep is a secret. She'd found the apple so that meant it was hers….there was nothing wrong with that, was there?" (p. 55) at the endnotes, the authors explain that Aphrodite could be a jealous goddess. This explains why she is envious of Athena's magical sandals and wishes to keep the apple, thinking it might be magical too. In each book of this series, the characters struggle with a moral dilemma or issue of character. For example in the previous book, Persephone had to find her own courage to fend off the daisies in the underworld. This is the educational aspect of the series aimed at the young readers. The illustration exemplifies her dilemma; she watches it uncertain, with question marks painted above. The question marks refer not only to

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the fact that Aphrodite is unsure about the meaning of the apple, but also to her inner conflict.

However if we look at the context of the story from the viewpoint of young, 8 years old readers (also the age of the goddesses in the story), then Aphrodite's actions seem more acceptable. Why can't she keep what she found? It is understandable that she wishes for the apple to be hers alone since she found it. However, by emphasizing her inner thoughts, the authors indicate to the readers that Aphrodite was acting selfishly and was in the wrong. In the end, the apple is revealed to be the key to enter the city and Aphrodite gives it up for the sake of the group, hence she ultimately does the right thing. It is okay to have your own private thing, but one should not fear that her friends might take them from her. What was wrong with Aphrodite's behaviour was her possessiveness and her mistrusting her friends.

Regarding the original myth of the gold apple, while the apple which Eris threw at Peleus and Thetis' wedding caused mayhem, mistrustfulness and eventually war, the apple in our story, although it was also retrieved by Aphrodite, is ultimately a key to better things. With the help of the apple, the girls get closer to having their wishes granted from Zeus. The apple unites them and assists them instead of dividing them. Little Aphrodite, in contrast to the mythological goddess, managed to overcome her own selfishness and jealousy and share this gift, and the other girls accept it. It is only via cooperation and teamwork that the girls succeed in entering Sparkle City. The boy told them that the wall aims to keep troublemakers (such as Medusa) out of the city. Therefore, by working together the girls prove that they are innocent and benevolent.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Aphrodite Artemis Athena Medusa Olympus Persephone Zeus

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

Adventure Emotions Friendship Journeys Magic

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