Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Athena & the Magic Land (Little Goddess Girls, 1) 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/1061. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Yuyi Chen , Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Athena & the Magic Land (Little Goddess Girls, 1)

United States of America (2019)

TAGS: Athena Hestia Medusa Olympus Persephone Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Athena & the Magic Land (Little Goddess Girls, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2019
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Little Goddess Girls: Athena & the Magic Land*. New York: Aladdin Quix, 2019, 88 pp.
ISBN	9781534431058 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?)

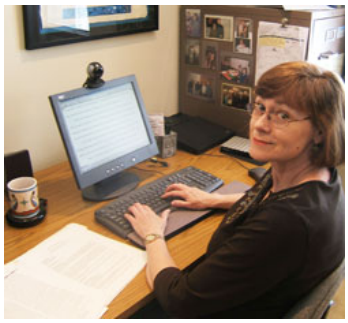
Each book in the *Goddess Girls* series (ages 8–12, Simon and Schuster) and *Heroes in Training* series (ages 7–10, Simon and Schuster) is a retelling of one or two Greek myths, with a twist. We stay as true as possible to the core bones of an original myth in order to give young readers a good understanding, 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.

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

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Additional information

Summary

Little Athena returns home from school, playing a game about pets on her tablet. Suddenly she is caught up in a strange storm and is whisked off to a strange new land. When she lands safely, she discovers a cute white dog named Oliver near her; this is the same dog she had chosen on her tablet game. A sign nearby reads: Hello Brick Road. Then a little Greek goddess named Hestia flies to her, and explain to Athena that she has arrived at magical Mount Olympus.

Next magical sandals appear from nowhere and wrap themselves around Athena's feet. These magical sandals have the ability to fly. However, a mean girl with green snakes for hair unexpectedly appears as well and yells at Athena and wants to take her sandals from her. Athena recognizes the girl as the mean bully, Medusa, a girl from her class back home. Yet the Medusa in this magical land is not the same girl from home and she does not recognize Athena. All she wants is Athena's magical sandals. Hestia warns Athena that Medusa wants to use the sandals in order to make trouble in Olympus, but Athena cannot take them off and Medusa vanishes for now.

Three owls that Athena meets on the road explain to her that as long as she remains on the Hello Brick Road Medusa cannot hurt her. Later Athena comes across a girl her age called Persephone, who is stuck in the mud. Athena frees her and the two decide to travel together. Persephone tells Athena that she has "bad-luckitis" and she wishes for her luck to change. While the two travel together they encounter talking trees and then stone animals. They discover that Medusa can zap people and animals to stone by using her eyes. After successfully overcoming Medusa, Athena and Persephone decide to go to Sparkle City and meet the mighty Zeus; they hope he can help Athena return home and grant Persephone better luck. Hestia reappears in the end to caution them against adventures and dangers that await them along the way.

The book also includes a list of characters, a word list, questions on the story and an authors' note, in which they give brief explanations of the Greek goddess Athena and the mythological Medusa.

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

This series is aimed at young readers, and therefore the stories are light-hearted and focus on the adventures and friendships of 8 years old, including the main villain. The authors note that they were influenced by Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Chicago,1900), for example, Medusa and her Green hair recalls the wicked witch of the West. Yet there are also echoes of the authors' other titles, such as the *Goddess Girls* series and *Heroes in Training*, especially in the character of Hestia which recalls the Pythia from the latter series.

At this point it is unclear why Athena was magically transferred to Olympus and if she is really a goddess. The plot focuses on her bond with Persephone and on their quest to find Zeus so that Athena can return home. There is no sense of dread or fear in the series and Athena's adventures appear fun and magical. Even though it seems like she is facing a long, even dangerous journey, she is not scared or disheartened. She eagerly and courageously faces the obstacles on her way. This story might be conveying a message for the young readers, about facing difficulties and challenges on the way to achieve their goals and dreams. It also carries a message of kindness and caring for others, as Athena is attentive to those whom she meets on her way (she even tries to be kind to Medusa). There is an eventual reward for kind behavior, as Athena triumphs and Medusa fails.

The mythological references are scattered across the story, for example the owls or Persephone's love of flowers, yet it is not an adaptation of myths but rather the use of mythological elements in a fictional narrative. We may argue that this story combines a reception of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* with Greek mythology.

The authors took as their inspirations Oz's yellow brick Road and the flawed characters who wishes for the Great Wizard to provide them with what they think they are lacking (like wisdom, courage, heart), but in the end, through their travel, they find out that these qualities existed in them all along. This is the same in our story. As it

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	progresses, the girls grow up and find their inner strength and their own ways to deal with difficulties, even with bad luck without the need of any external help. The illustrations accompany the narrative and illustrate some of the scenes so they are clearer for the young readers. There is no text in the illustrations.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Hestia Medusa Olympus Persephone Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Friendship Journeys Magic

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