Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Persephone & the Giant Flowers (Little Goddess Girls, 2) 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/1062. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Yuyi Chen , Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Persephone & the Giant Flowers (Little Goddess Girls, 2)

United States of America (2019)

TAGS: Aphrodite Athena Cerberus Elysian Fields / Elysium Hades Hestia Medusa Olympus Persephone Tartarus Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Persephone & the Giant Flowers (Little Goddess Girls, 2)
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: Persephone & the Giant Flowers*. New York: Aladdin Quix, 2019, 88 pp.
ISBN	9781534431089 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?)

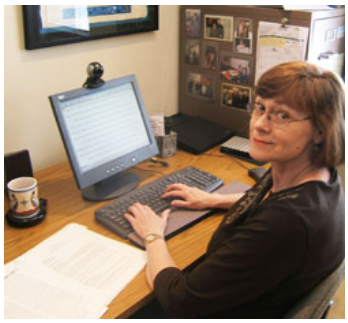
Each book in the *Goddess Girls* series (ages 8–12, Simon and Schuster) and *Heroes in Training* series (ages 7–10, Simon and Schuster) is a retelling of one or two Greek myths, with a twist. We stay as true as possible to the core bones of an original myth in order to give young readers a good understanding,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

In the second book of the *Little Goddess Girls* series, Athena and Persephone 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 the home, from which she was mysteriously carried away by a storm and brought to this magical mount Olympus land. Persephone hopes that Zeus will help her overcome her bad luck.

While traveling, after the girls eat a few pomegranates a mysterious chariot appears and the ground splits open. The girls hope this might be a shortcut to Sparkle City so they follow the chariot using Athena's magical flying sandals. When the chariot stops, a young boy who apparently drove it invisibly appears and calls his dog, the three-headed beast Cerberus. The boy and dog enter through a gate which carries a sign, Wunderworld. Yet the boy does not see Athena and Persephone at this point.

The girls continue to travel this strange place. They see a sign, "Tartarus: only rotten people are welcome here…" [p.33] and next "Elysium: only perfect people are welcome here" (p. 35). When they continue, they encounter a blue pool before a golden palace, which the boy and the dog entered. Suddenly big flowers spring out from the ground around them and begin to sing. Meanwhile the girls hear a call for help from a beautiful shell in the pool. When they manage to open it, a beautiful girl emerges, named Aphrodite. She tells them that she was trapped in the shell by Medusa.

Later the boy, whose name is Hades, and Cerberus find the girls. Hades agrees to bring them back to the road. In the meantime Persephone is being held by the flowers and almost misses the chariot, yet her friends manage to free her. The girls continue their journey and invite Aphrodite to join them. Aphrodite tells them that people find her harsh, so Athena suggests that Aphrodite can ask Zeus for the gift of likability. While the three of them travel on the road, the goddess Hestia appears to warn them about dangers that might await them, but then disappears before explaining herself.

The book 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 goddesses Athena, Persephone, Aphrodite, as well as Hades

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and 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 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 illustrated chapter book for young readers adapts the myth of Persephone's journey to the underworld into a story that narrates ideas about friendship and character.

As in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Frank Baum, Chicago, 1900), each of the characters has a wish for Zeus. Athena (our Dorothy) wishes to return home, Persephone wishes for better luck and Aphrodite for likeability. While Aphrodite is described as physically perfect and beautiful (golden hair and blue eyes), her character is flawed. She herself admits that she can hurt people unintentionally, yet she is not a bad person and is a good friend.

Although the characters descend to the underworld, it is not a scary but rather a wondrous place (Wunderworld). For the young readers, they simply go down the earth, without any specific location indicated and not mention of death. The girls even comment on Tartarus and Elysium. Persephone says that no one is perfect and it seems that those in Elysium ignore their calls for help. Hence the underworld appears as neatly divided between good and bad, rotten and perfect, yet as the girls fully realize, many people are in between. Tartarus and Elysium are not presented as final resting place or as prisons, just as places, similar to closed clubs, in keeping with the light tone of the series.

The mythological references provide the background for the story, but the main focus is on the girls' blooming friendship. Persephone is the most insecure of the three. She used to have only flowers as friends, and now she is afraid that Athena might go home and leave her. She is grateful to have Athena and Aphrodite as friends, and she sees the

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good qualities Aphrodite has, like being funny. The threats made by Medusa only make the girls bond closer with each other.

The daisies which catch her almost seem to express Persephone's inner fears and when she talks to them, she confronts these fears and makes up her mind. The daisies wish for her to remain with them and become their friend, yet she explains to them that "you can't make someone be your friend…as the words left her mouth she began to wonder. She hoped Athena and Aphrodite would decide to be best friends with her. But if they didn't, she'd have to accept that, hard as it would be." (p. 68).

Persephone's loneliness might be linked to her mythological character, who had to forsake the earth for the gloomy Hades. While the myth is not repeated here, it may be argued that little Persephone's character and loneliness was shaped by it, just as Athena is the wise and resourceful one in the group.

Although they are all 8 years old and alone without any family or grownups, the girls feel happy and secure, since it is a magical land and a magical story which is meant to empower the young readers (especially female readers at this point) to find their inner strength on their own and with the help of good friends. We may assume that Hestia is older, since her age is not mentioned or referred to, yet she provides only little help and no reassurance. She may be considered as an adult who warns the girls on their way, yet she offers no real advice or protection aside from these obscure warning (which are mostly employed as cliff-hangers at the end of the story)

To conclude, this story alters the myth of Persephone's kidnapping to the underworld (which is first told by Hesiod in his *Theogony*), yet instead of a traumatic event in which the heroine is kidnapped alone, in this adaptation, our young heroic girls actively decide on their own to follow the strange chariot underground. The boy who drives the chariot is unaware of their existence and in a complete opposite of the original myth he helps them get back to the main road. The authors emphasize the activity and initiative of the girls, who are not afraid to travel to an underground unknown place, nor are they afraid from traveling in it. Instead of saving Persephone, they end up saving Aphrodite. Persephone also rescues herself from the flowers which catch her by her strong will (and with the help of her friends), hence she is not doomed to remain in the underworld. The flowers may resemble the mythical Hades who resented his lonely existence, and

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	the lesson little Persephone teaches the daisies could be referred to Hades as well. The birth of Aphrodite is also echoed here. While she is only trapped in the seas shell and not born form the seas (as in Hesiod's *Theogony*), her rescue offers her a chance of a new life of freedom.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Athena Cerberus Elysian Fields / Elysium Hades Hestia Medusa Olympus Persephone Tartarus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Friendship Journeys Magic

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