Susan Deacy, "Entry on: How to Write a Myth by The British Museum ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1084. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

The British Museum

## How to Write a Myth

*United Kingdom*

TAGS: Heracles Minotaur Theseus






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

| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | How to Write a Myth |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United Kingdom |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | United Kingdom, Worldwide |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *Available Onllne* | emails.britishmuseum.org (accessed: August 3, 2020). |
| *Target Audience* | Children (aged c. 4–11) |
| *Author of the Entry* | Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk |
| *Peer-reviewer of the Entry* | Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il<br>Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com |



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

**The British Museum (Author)**



The logo of the British Museum. Retrieved from Wikipedia, public domain (accessed: January 25, 2022).

The British Museum, established 1753, is among the oldest and largest of the world's major museums. The Museum, located in Bloomsbury in central London, houses artefacts from numerous places and periods many of which originate from territories once ruled or administered by Britain as a colonial power. Its classical collections, overseen chiefly by the Department of Greece and Rome, encompass over 100,000 objects, most famously and controversially, the "Parthenon [or "Elgin"] Marbles." The Museum organises wide-ranging learning programmes for children, young adults and adults and provides on-site activities for visitors of all ages such as activity trails, gallery talks and handling sessions.

Sources:

Caygill, Marjorie, *The British Museum A-Z Companion to the Collections*, London: British Museum Press, 1999;

Kennedy, Maev, "Mutual attacks mar Elgin Marbles debate," *Guardian, 1 December* 1999 theguardian.com (accessed: August 3, 2020);

en.wikipedia.org (accessed: August 3, 2020);

britishmuseum.org (accessed: August 2, 2020).

Prepared by Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk



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.

## Additional information

Summary

This webpage, which forms part of a series of activities for "Young Explorers" created by the British Museum, provides various facts and ideas to enable children to write, and then potentially perform, their own myth. Information is provided on particular features of myths along with suggestions of figures to research for ideas: from ancient Greece (Herakles) West Africa (Anansi) and Central America (Huracán). The webpage is illustrated with a depiction of Theseus killing the Minotaur from an object – a vase painting – in the Museum's collection.

Analysis

The guide is concerned above all with myths as stories that involve a hero and their adventures. Care is taken not to assume that any hero is gendered as male, although the examples given of possible topics to research are all male, as is the character (Theseus) shown performing an exploit in the accompanying illustration. In common with other guides for children to write their own stories (e.g. Dickens and Lewis 2018), the current one offers tips in how to structure the story and suggests possible topics, although without either providing much information about particular characters or pointing to possible sources of information. This lack of information or advice on sources for information about specific characters might prove a barrier; for example, unless children have access to a retelling of Mayan stories which include Huracán, researching this figure might provide difficult as the initial hits that come up are likely to be for the car of the same name.

By encouraging children to create their own stories, the guide draws on the potential of story-writing for stimulating in gaining experience, and confidence through thinking more deeply about particular issues such as "good" and "evil." Indeed, in relation to this very broad issue, the guide includes sections on "the hero" and "the monster/villain," stating that "every good myth has a hero" and "not every myth has a monster but it can be fun to make one up!" By suggesting that children might perform their completed story, the guide informs children about the performative contexts of mythology while bearing out certain of the values of writing stories discussed by Tompkins et al., namely to articulate their ideas through sharing them and to gain reassurance and validation from others (1982: 719).



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.

While providing a framework within which a story can be told, the guide also points to the imaginative potential of myth, for instance to go beyond ordinary time and space into the fantasy world of heroes, gods, magical objects etc. The guide also enables children to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of classical and other myths. Furthermore, given that, as Tomkins et al. consider, creating their own stories enables children to remember what they have discovered (Tomkins et al. 1982: 710), the activity might instill a deeper memory of particular stories than, say, solely reading existing retellings. As myth-makers themselves, children might also take from the activity a notion that, far from having a right or authentic version, myths are endlessly retold and flexible. There is, for instance, no 'right' version of Theseus, one of the characters depicted in the accompanying illustration, nor of his combatant the Minotaur, the half-bull, half-human hybrid character who might, himself become the central figure – thus hero in the terms of the guide – of a child's story.

| | |
|---|---|
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Heracles Minotaur Theseus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Character traits Knowledge Learning |

Further Reading

Dickens, Frances, and Kirstin Lewis, *The Story Maker: Helping 4–11 Year Olds to Write Creatively*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.

Tompkins, Gail E. et al., "Seven reasons why children should write stories", *Language Arts* 59.7 (1982): 718–721, jstor.org (accessed: August 4, 2020).



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.

| | |
|---|---|
| Addenda | Genre: Creative and educational webpage promoting classical mythology |



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.