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Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Persephone the Grateful (Goddess Girls, 26)

United States of America (2020)

TAGS: Antheia / Anthea Aphrodite Athena Hades Kydoimos Machai / Makhai Persephone Pirithous / Perithous Urania Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Persephone the Grateful (Goddess Girls, 26)
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, Suzanne Williams, *Goddess Girls: Persephone the Grateful*. New York: Aladdin Press, 2020, 256 pp.
ISBN	9781534457409
Genre	Romance fiction, Teen fiction*
Target Audience	Children (8–12 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 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.

Creators



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 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

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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?

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 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

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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.

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

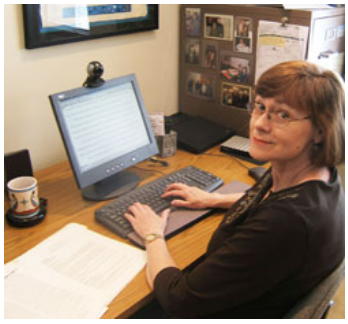
Suzanne Williams and I have written a new middle grade series called *Thunder Girls* (accessed: May 28, 2018), which is a twist on Norse mythology featuring strong girl characters. The first book Freya and the Magic Jewel releases May 2018 for ages 8–12, published by Simon and Schuster.

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

Suzanne Williams , b. 1953
(Author)

Suzanne Williams is an American prolific children's author and former

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Courtesy of the Author from her personal website.

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

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

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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 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 Myths* by Kevin Crossley-Holland, D'Aulaires' *Book of Norse Myths*, *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?

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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

This story focuses on Persephone, the goddess girl of plants and nature. While traveling with her friend (and love interest) Hades to the underworld, Persephone meets the naiad Minthe, the caretaker of the river Cocytus. Minthe is a beautiful, green-haired nymph and Persephone thinks she shows too much interest in Hades. Minthe overhears Persephone complaining about the smells coming out of the river and is offended. She then exhibits open resentment to Persephone and complains to Hades that she is lonely guarding the river. She tells Persephone, "Unlike you, nymphs like me are only considered minor goddesses. We aren't free to wander where we choose. I have to make do with hand-me-downs from shades" (p. 13). This makes Persephone pity her a little and she tries to understand the nymph's frustration. Seeing how the nymph's life is so different from her own, Persephone vows to appreciate everything that she has and be grateful for her life.

Later Persephone and her Science-ology class are told by their teacher, the Muse Urania, that the next day there will be a team competition, Geo-dash. The students are excited. The goal is to collect four items from different places across the world by solving riddles and using sophisticated scroll gadgets. Persephone is thrilled to be on the same team as Hades and Poseidon, but to her disappointment, they are asked by the teacher to participate in preparing the competition, so they must withdraw. Instead, the mortals Theseus (Heracles' cousin) and Theseus' friend, Pirithous, join the team. Pirithous is said to be very good with technical things. Persephone's team is therefore composed of herself, Antheia (the goddess girl of flowering wreaths), Makhai (one of Ares' companions, he is considered a bully), Theseus and Pirithous. Persephone is disappointed that Hades is not participating and she dislikes Makhai since he and his friend, Kydoimos, usually act like bullies and insult everyone. Persephone fears he might ruin their competition.

While working on the first clue, Persephone begins to feel that Pirithous is taking an interest in her; while she is flattered at first, his behaviour soon begins to irritate her. Makhai appears to be trying to cheat and steal the tokens of the other teams, but, to Persephone's relief, it appears that they cannot be stolen. Slowly it turns out that Makhai is not so bad as everyone initially thought, and he tries to help the team, even though he does not like mortals.

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Persephone's team seems to be advancing, with only Athena's team close to catching up with them. The last location is in the underworld, the river Cocytus. The mortals are asked to remain outside, since they are forbidden entry to the underworld. Persephone, Antheia and Makhai enter. Upon arriving, Antheia and Minthe get into a fight, when Antheia stands up for Persephone, whom Minthe insults. As a result. Minthe grabs Antheia and tries to drown her in the river. Persephone rushes to save her friend and puts a curse on Minthe, turning her to green fragrant plant. When the girls team up with Makhai, he tells them that the mortals have disappeared. Apparently Theseus and Pirithous tried to sneak into the underworld but were caught on the chair of forgetfulness. Hades tries to free them but in vein. Then the group must call upon Heracles, who was in Athena's team, and he is granted a special permission to enter the underworld and by using his power, frees the two, who slowly regain their memories.

After freeing them, it turns out that Pirithous somehow managed to hack the other teams' scroll gadgets in order to throw the other teams off course. In the end, there is no winner in the competition. Zeus warns him to make sure he does not do this again. Persephone also confides in Hades about turning Minthe into a plant. He reverses the spell and Persephone asks her where she would have preferred to live. With Hades' approval, Minthe is transferred to be the guardian of the big fountain at MOA where she can socialize with the other students and not feel alone anymore.

Analysis

This book is titled Persephone the Grateful, since Persephone decides she must be grateful for all the good things in her life. Meeting Minthe makes her realize how fortunate she is. This is an important message to the readers, to appreciate the good things which they already have and treasure them (like friends and family).

The adapted myths in this story are the abduction of Persephone by Theseus and Pirithous and also the myth of Minthe and Hades. The two myths are of course heavily adapted to comply with the light tone of the series.

The myth of Minthe is repeated here with Persephone turning the conceit nymph to a plant; however, in the myth (for example in Strabo, *Geography* 8.3.1)

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Persephone turns her to a plant out of jealousy due to Minthe's relationship with Hades. In our story, Persephone, while feeling slightly jealous, does try to sympathize with the nymph's loneliness. She only turns her to a plant (it is obvious that it is the mint plant and its delicate smell is described) when Minthe threatens Antheia's life and Persephone must do something quickly to save her friend. Furthermore, Persephone does not feel comfortable with what she had done and in the end, helps Minthe to find a better dwelling. Persephone in this series is kindhearted and gentle, she is not vengeful or evil and therefore her actions are undone to allow a happy ending for both. Furthermore, changing her reasoning for the curse also illustrates this character's caring for her friends. She is not acting out of jealousy for a loved one, as Aphrodite did in the past (*Goddess Girls Book 24: Eos the Lighthearted*).

Lisa Maurice notes that it is a little known myth, and yet figures here and also in *Lore Olympus*, specifically *Minthe*.

The myth of Pirithous is also changed. He was the mortal King of the Lapiths who decided to kidnap Persephone with the help of Theseus. While Pirithous is (annoyingly) infatuated with Persephone, he does not harm her. He and Theseus enter the forbidden underworld perhaps out of curiosity. Yet, as in the ancient myth, Pirithous appears impious due to his cheating in the contest.

Another part in the story refers to Makhai. Upon giving the groups the rules for the competition, Urania tells them, "When you've found what you're looking for in each location, consider this: Sometimes we see what we want or expect to see instead of what is there" (p. 32). Persephone does not fully understand the teacher's words at the beginning. But later she begins to wonder whether they could be implied to her classmates, especially Makhai.

As with Minthe, Persephone tries to be kind to Makhai and understand him; "Maybe bullies (and would-be cheaters) didn't expect kindnesses, since they never offered them. Her heart softened toward him a little..." (p. 148). "Had Persephone been expecting to see Makhai as totally awful all along?" (p. 161). Persephone expected the worst from Makahi yet he (as well as his good friend Kydoimos) also do not trust others, and prefer to maintain their reputation as "bullies", even if they are not as bad as they seem.

Regarding the competition, Persephone is excited, and admits that

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	competitiveness is natural to an immortal (hence referring to herself and her divine friends); yet, unlike Pirithous, she is fair and will not do anything to win. The story also highlights playing fair, cheating and winning, emphasising that competition is healthy but that one should honour the rules as well.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Antheia / Anthea Aphrodite Athena Hades Kydoimos Machai / Makhai Persephone Pirithous / Perithous Urania Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Friendship Isolation/loneliness Magic Punishment
Addenda	The review refers to the Kindle edition 9781534457416.

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