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Adam J. B. Lane , David Slavin , Daniel Weitzman

Odd Gods

United States (2020)

TAGS: Adonis Athena Hermes Ouranos / Uranus Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Odd Gods
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	USA and worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2020
First Edition Details	David Slavin and Daniel Weitzman, *Odd Gods*. New York, HarperCollins, 2019, 218 pp.
ISBN	9780062839534
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Children (8–12 years old)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il
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Creators



Adam J. B. Lane (Illustrator)

Adam J. B. Lane is an author, illustrator and cartoonist. He was born in London and grew up in Pennsylvania. He studied at Harvard and the California Institute of the Arts.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: August 4, 2020);

harpercollins.com (accessed: August 4, 2020).

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



David Slavin (Author)

David Slavin is an American author, writer and performer. He writes children's books, satire books, cultural and political commentary for leading newspapers, such as Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, Huffington Post. He has been a voice-over artist for over 20 years.

Source:

harpercollins.com (accessed: August 4, 2020).

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

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Daniel Weitzman (Author)

Daniel Weitzman is a children's books author. He has worked with various entertainment companies and created digital initiatives, film scripts, music video narratives and more.

Source:

Daniel Weitzman on Harper Collins Publishers website (accessed: October 29, 2021).

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Additional information

Summary

The publisher describes this series as "*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* meets *Percy Jackson*". This is the first book of the *Odd Gods* series, which follows the adventures of Oddonis. Oddonis and his brother, Adonis, are the twin sons of Zeus and his Norse goddess wife, Freya (there is no explanation for the unusual pairing of these gods). Yet while Adonis is the handsome and successful god of love, Oddonis is strange-looking and socially awkward. In this book, Oddonis is entering Mount Olympus Middle School. Oddonis is scared for he used to be bullied and teased in grade school, since he is not a god. Apparently only his twin brother Adonis is considered a god while Oddonis is referred to as different or simply odd. In the world of this story there are the gods, beautiful, powerful and successful, and there are others, the odd ones, a group that includes monsters such as the Minotaur, mortals and demi-gods. All of them live together on Olympus but the gods are more privileged.

Oddonis and his best friend, Gaseous (son of Uranus and the fictional Chalupa) go to school together and they are both looked down at by the gods, especially Adonis and his friends, Heracles, Poseidon and Artemis. At school, they meet and befriend new odd friends, like them, including Puneous, the smallest person, the son of Amazonia and the fictional Ginormous; Mathena, the daughter of Athena and Euclid, the goddess of math and poultry; and Germes, the son of Hermes and Typhoid Mary who can make everyone sick. Quickly they form a group of misfits who try to survive school against the harassment of the gods' group.

At the centre of the story are elections to the class president, the school's ambassador to the council of Gods. Adonis believes he is the most suitable for this role and no one dares to compete with him. Then later Oddonis feels that the Odd-groups around the school deserve equal rights and representation, so he decides to contend for the position against his brother. While Oddonis and his friends create a campaign for his election, it turns out that he cannot be elected since he is failing Math class. Yet with the help of Mathena, Oddonis manages to pass his test on election day.

When the votes are counted, there is a tie between the brothers; apparently Oddonis has not yet cast his vote. He decides to share the presidency with his brother. In the end, Zeus decides that all the

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members of the Odd groups are Gods in his eyes therefore Oddonis can now be a god as well. He is not sure what god he is, so his mother tells him that he is the god who helps others find their inner strength.

The text is accompanied by black and white humorous and cartoonish illustrations that form an integral part of the plot. Through them, we see what Oddonis is thinking or the strange sights the group sees. The illustrations are vital to the flow and understanding of the story.

Analysis

This book aims to show that not everyone is perfect, even among the gods; each has his/her own special ability and we just need to believe in ourselves. This message is a common trope of coming of age tales, even ones involving Greek mythological characters. The use of Greek gods and goddesses to represent insecure adolescents who are facing self-esteem problems is quite common in juvenile literature. For example, in Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams' Goddess Girls and Heroes' in training series (see: here and here). Also in Ross Collins' *Medusa Jones* which shares a similar light tone with the current book, as well as the Perfect vs. Freaks groups.

Oddonis is the awkward character with whom readers can identify; he is not as strong and popular as his perfect brother, yet he also manages to find good friends and form his own group. His friends are there for him as is evident during his math-problems. Furthermore, his oddness gives him the ability to reach out to others and help them. His brother may appear perfect on the outside, yet he acts like a bully and is very conceited, an aspect that is reminiscent of a common trope of the athletics vs. the nerds groups in the genre of fiction set in American high schools.

The book raises important themes regarding family. While Freya is a loving and caring mother, Zeus can be harsh and unpleasant. He openly prefers Adonis over Oddonis, and does not encourage Oddonis at all. As Oddonis tells us in the introduction, "on Mount Olympus, it's all about the Gods. Gods., Gods, Gods." (p. 11). Ironically, we, the readers, know that Olympus is the official dwellings of the gods, hence Oddonis' rant appears funny. The author wishes to direct our attention to other inhabitants of Olympus, the odd ones. Hence the author aims to show that all kinds of gods and other beings reside on Olympus, they have different appearance and they should all be respected.

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Before the first day of school, Zeus tells Adonis, "go get 'em, tiger!" yet when Oddonis asks him for encouragement as well, he says, "just…try, Oddonis – that's all anyone can ask." (p. 19).

Trying and doing your best are of course important messages, but Zeus shows a lack of confidence in his son. He clearly does not believe in his abilities and does not think he can achieve much (it is made clear in the introduction that Zeus sees only Adonis as his son while he blames Freya for the birth of the strange-looking Oddonis.

Later, when Zeus hears that Oddonis decides to run for class president, he is angry with him. "Oddy, we talked about this. Leadership is your brother's thing….all I'm saying is, certain positions should be left to those with the right skill set. I wouldn't want you to embarrass yourself – or this family." (pp. 104–105). Zeus is using fake sympathy to try and persuade Oddonis to quit. Yet Zeus does not truly grasp the true meaning of leadership (there may perhaps be a hint here towards Zeus' scandalous behaviour in the myths). The book's moral is that leadership is not about being the strongest, but about empowering others. Freya is the one who tells Oddonis that he can do anything he chooses. Hence the Norse goddess appears more compassionate and caring (in her role as a mother) than the king of the Greek gods. This is the encouragement which Oddonis needs. His doubts are similar to another character who is inspired bythe ancient world, Brianna Justice from Sherri Winston's *President of the Whole Sixth Grade*.

While Oddonis suffers from Zeus' attitude, in the end he confronts him for his lack of support. "…unlike Adonis, I'm trying because I want to, not because you're telling me to!" (p. 182). This leaves Zeus dumbfounded and Oddonis angry and frustrated, but at least he spoke his mind and was not afraid of his father. The illustration shows an angry Oddonis pointing a finger at Zeus, who stands quietly, looking confused and biting his finger. Oddonis finally shows his own strength by standing against his father.

The story also shows us a glimpse at Adonis' childhood. Although he is conceited and rude, this is perhaps because Zeus was harsh with him as well, trying forcibly to make him the god he wished for. For example, he would not allow Adonis to play with a baby doll since he thought he should only play with swords. Being odd gives Oddonis more freedom in a way to pursue his own happiness since his father does not pin his entire hopes on him. This can teach the readers that

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they should believe in their selves even if it looks like no one else is encouraging them; they can fight for what they believe in and should not be degraded by anyone for being different.

In the end, being odd gives Oddonis a broader perspective on his fellow students and this is why he chooses to co-rule with his brother, to end all divisions within the student body. The other students, even the gods, confess that they have their own problems, not everyone feels perfect all the time, so Oddonis' words to them make the groups a bit closer to each other. Even Adonis admits in the end that his brother deserves to be president.

We can also find an interesting (and perhaps unintentional) historical nod in this story to the origin of democracy. The principal Deadipus (a walking and talking skeleton) asks for democratic elections, but at first no one dares to face Adonis. In the end, he congratulates Oddonis for his decision to co-rule. Hence we can see in this satirical example in the story that the only way to preserve democracy is by giving equality to all and by people not being afraid to contend against other people. No position should be reserved for one person, not even a god.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Adonis Athena Hermes Ouranos / Uranus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Childhood Coming of age Communication Conflict Family Friendship Humour Intellect

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