Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Aphrodite the Diva (Goddess Girls, 6) by Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/292. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Aphrodite the Diva (Goddess Girls, 6)

United States (2011)

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Artemis Athena Dionysus / Dionysos Egyptian Mythology Galatea Hades Hera Isis Pandora Persephone Pheme Pygmalion Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Aphrodite the Diva (Goddess Girls, 6)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Aphrodite the Diva* (Goddess Girls). New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2011, 220 pp.
ISBN	9781442421004
Genre	Alternative histories (Fiction), Bildungsromans (Coming-of-age fiction), Fiction, Humor, Mythological fiction, Novels, School story*
Target Audience	Children (Older children, 8–12 years old)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, mauril68@gmail.com 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



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?

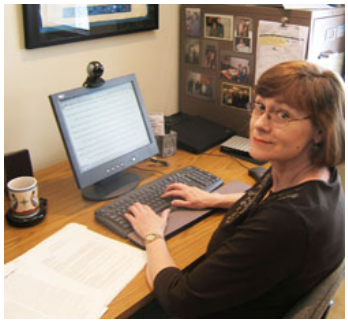
Suzanne Williams and I have written a new middle grade series called *Thunder Girls* (accessed: May 28, 2018), which is a twist on Norse mythology featuring strong girl characters. The first book Freya and the Magic Jewel releases May 2018 for ages 8–12, published by Simon and Schuster.

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

General summary for the series see under *Athena the Brain*.

In this installment we follow Aphrodite's plan to up her grade in Hero-ology class. She goes to Egypt where she encounters Isis. Aphrodite and the Greek go encounter the Egyptian goddesses and compete with them. Aphrodite needs to find her own voice and what makes her special. The book also reiterates themes from the Trojan war.

Analysis

Aphrodite is shocked to discover she got a D in Hero-ology; "Their class assignment had been to send their heroes on quests. Instead, she'd accidentally helped Paris start a war. One teensy-weensy little mistake. Was that why she'd gotten a—gulp—D?" (p. 7). Medusa accuses Aphrodite of starting the Trojan War on purpose; "'It's true!' Medusa insisted. 'You'd do just about anything to get attention. Even start a war!'" (p. 11). This is a refreshingly comic view of this great war as a child's play going array. On the one hand, it makes the gods human in their mistakes, yet on the other, it further distances them from humans, because wars are a game to them.

Although it is a pitiful excuse, the Greek heroes were valued by their participation in wondrous heroic acts, and the Trojan War did supply a wonderful setting for them to prove their worth and valor. So the goddess lame excuse becomes very close to the mythological truth of the Greek heroes. Continuing the strange mix of Greece and Rome, the girls plan a trip to the Roman Colosseum (p. 33).

In order to correct her grade, Aphrodite starts a lonely heart club – a matchmaking club. Then she gets a mysterious letter and the girls figure out it is from Egypt. Here we have a slight factual problem. The girls think Cairo is the capital. But of course it was not in ancient times. We are in the timeline of the Trojan War therefore the reference to the Roman colosseum is also misplaced; the authors showed such expertise in all the mythological elements so it would have been better not to mix different elements which do not match. The description of Egypt is also not quite fitting with the alleged timeline: "Mortals dressed in long white robes and wearing fat turbans atop their heads rode camels across the sand." (p. 81). It feels too anachronistic. It could have been a mix of old and new yet the

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Trojan War is too strong indication mark. Isis is described as Aphrodite's equivalent, the goddess of love. In Egyptian mythology she was more associated with death, healing and royalty. (The other goddesses Hathor, Ma'at and Bastet are better presented). The Goddess girls universe is expanding to a different country, yet the Egyptian myths are not entirely explored. Yet it does give the readers indication about other myths and gods from different parts of the world, which share resemblance to the more known Greek myths.

Aphrodite and Isis are fighting over who is the better goddess of love and the judge is Pygmalion. The Egyptians are presented as a bit annoying and unfair to the Greeks, yet in the end they become friends. In the meantime, the girls are trying to help Zeus find a companion, since Athena's mom (the fly Metis) left him. Zeus apparently is very modern in the woman he seeks: "A woman who is smart, strong-willed, and has skills and interests of her own. Someone I can talk to and who doesn't giggle too much or mind scorch marks." (p. 213). This is of course an empowering message; the king of the gods is interested in a smart woman. When the girls go to the market place and enter a wedding shop, one lady strikes their eyes, Hera. It is ironic that Hera is presented as Zeus' perfect companion when every mythological tale shows the opposite. Pygmalion at the end reveals his affection for Galatea, his statue.

The Greek myths were not told with a happy-end in mind; seldom they end in what in the Westernize view could be even considered a happy end. Yet in this series the emphasis is on happy ending for the benefit of the young readers. Problems can be solved with the help of good friends and love truly conquers everything. It is a reassuring and empowering message that can help the young children to overcome various obstacles, since there is a light at the end.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Apollo Artemis Athena Dionysus / Dionysos Egyptian Mythology Galatea Hades Hera Isis Pandora Persephone Pheme Pygmalion Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Animals Appearances Coming of age Conflict Emotions Friendship Knowledge Love Teachers

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Addenda The review refers to the Kindle edition.

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