Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Athena the Wise (Goddess Girls, 5) 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/294. Entry version as of November 04, 2026.

Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Athena the Wise (Goddess Girls, 5)

United States (2011)

TAGS: Aphrodite Arachne Artemis Athena Atlas Augean Stables Cerberus Ceryneian Hind Charon Cretan Bull Erymanthian Boar Eurystheus Hades Heracles Hercules Hydra Nemean Lion Pandora Persephone Pheme Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Athena the Wise (Goddess Girls, 5)
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, *Athena the Wise* (Goddess Girls). New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2011, 240 pp.
ISBN	9781416982746 (paperback) / 9781442420977 (ebook)
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?

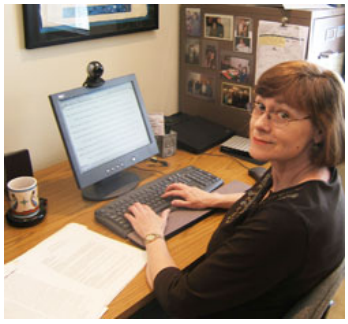
Suzanne Williams and I have written a new middle grade series called *Thunder Girls* (accessed: May 28, 2018), which is a twist on Norse mythology featuring strong girl characters. The first book Freya and the Magic Jewel releases May 2018 for ages 8–12, published by Simon and Schuster.

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, Athena meets the new boy in school, especially admitted by the headmaster Zeus – the boy Heracles (the Greek pronunciation is kept). The wise Athena is confronted with the brawny Heracles and the two form a strong friendship in which Athena helps Heracles in his dangerous tasks while he encourages her with her own problems. Furthermore it appears that bullying is not a problem only on earth. In the book we have two parallel main story lines; Heracles' tasks and Athena-Arachne confrontation. The combination of Athena's and Heracles' characters would decide the results of both.

Analysis

This installment pairs Athena – the wisest girl in school, with the new mortal boy, Heracles. The theme of "don't judge a book by its cover" is again repeated, when Heracles' appearance, clad in lion's skin deters some of the kids. As Athena thought: "A lion cape was perhaps overkill as a fashion statement." (p. 2). As the former new kid at school, Athena is sympathetic to Heracles' condition and his desire to fit it. "'Maybe we should try to put ourselves in his sandals and wonder what he's thinking of us, instead of the other way around,' she suggested." (p. 5). When Zeus, her father, asks Athena to help and guide the new boy, because she is "goddessgirl of wisdom" (p. 19), she agrees.

Heracles story line deviates from the more known myths about him. The tasks are dealt with more humour and there is no hint at any violence on his part. On the contrary; in an interesting twist, Heracles, the ultimate hero of myth, is in fact being bullied at school and principal Zeus helps him through it. Heracles' past is narrated comically, when Zeus tells Athena that in his former school Heracles got into a fight with his music teacher: "The long and short of it is that Heracles wound up smashing a lyre over the teacher's head." (p. 18). Of course in the original myth Heracles kills Linus, his music teacher in a fit of anger. Heracles' character traits of being hot-tempered and not so clever are repeated here, but since he is a kid, he could also change into the right course.

Athena assists Heracles with his missions – his "to-do" list given to

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him by his cousin Eurystheus. Zeus was responsible for giving the labors to Heracles so he can prove his worth, before he is admitted to the gods' academy; yet Zeus did not know that Eurystheus would choose such difficult tasks this is why he asked Athena to help the boy. The labors are quite similar yet at the same time different than the original myth which is a refreshing approach. Athena and her friends help Heracles to complete them, Hades even lets him borrow Cerberus, and Artemis helps with a deer. For example, the Hydra is a foul and annoying creature. It is being caught when all the heads argue with each other and more popped out and soon they were trapped in the lair. No killing needed. Athena "was pleased with herself for showing him that violence wasn't the only way to solve a problem." (p. 66). This teaches children that you have many ways to solve a problem. The boar is also different than expected. He chats with the children boring them with stories "This was one boring boar!" (p. 108). It gladly goes with them to Eurystheus' house. Eurystheus is apparently hiding inside a bronze vase and Heracles' brings the boar closer to him. Of course Eurystheus in the vase is a well-known story in the myth of Heracles.

Ironically however, Athena restrains Heracles' temper, yet when she faces Arachne who upsets her and makes fun of her family, she is the one who cannot control her temper and turns the mortal girl into a spider. Athena thinks: "She'd lashed out in a way that was more like Heracles than like her, using violence to solve her problem. [...] Still, she couldn't help wondering if, instead of delivering justice, she'd simply been vengeful. How did one tell the difference?" (p. 193).

This shows that anyone can lose their temper form time to time and the results are severe and there is a fine line between justice and revenge. Although Athena does not regret her action and this is an interesting development. The authors do not make her turn the girl human again and Athena does not seem to bother about it too much and in the end accepts her behaviour and that gods can lose their temper as mortals.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Aphrodite Arachne Artemis Athena Atlas Augean Stables Cerberus Ceryneian Hind Charon Cretan Bull Erymanthian Boar Eurystheus Hades Heracles Hercules Hydra Nemean Lion Pandora Persephone Pheme Zeus

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Friendship Intellect School Violence
Addenda	The review refers to the Kindle edition.

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