Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Little Master Homer. The Odyssey by Jennifer Adams, Alison Oliver", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/323. Entry version as of November 19, 2026.

Jennifer Adams , Alison Oliver

Little Master Homer. The Odyssey

United States (2017)

TAGS: Achilles Afterlife Agamemnon Charybdis Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Divination Fate Greek Music Hades Homer Iliad Nymphs Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Polyphemus Scylla Sirens Underworld

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

General information	
Title of the work	Little Master Homer. The Odyssey
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States; United Kingdom; Canada; other English-speaking countries
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Jennifer Adams. *Little Master Homer: The Odyssey*. Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2017, 20 pp.
ISBN	9781423641780
Genre	Instructional and educational works, Myths, Picture books, Toddler book*
Target Audience	Children (c. 0–2)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk 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

Jennifer Adams (Author)

Jennifer Adams is the author of the *Baby Lit* series, which introduces very young children to classic literature via board book adaptations, including *Aladdin*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Don Quixote*, *Frankenstein*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Little Women* (all published by Gibbs Smith). Jennifer Adams is also the author of the *My Little Cities* series of board books about major cities of the world (Gibbs Smith). Further publications include *I am a Warrior Goddess*, a board book about a girl who is "strong, powerful, and kind" (Sounds True, 2018).

After graduating from the University of Washington, Jennifer Adams worked as an editor at Gibbs Smith and Quirk books before moving into children's writing. She continues editorial work as a consultant at Sounds True helping to develop their children's range.

Source:

Official website (accessed: July 5, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

Alison Oliver (Illustrator)

Alison Oliver is a designer and illustrator based at Sugar, her own design studio in New York, USA. She was the illustrator on the whole Baby Lit series. She cites The Odyssey as one of her favourite Baby Lit adaptations (see here, accessed: February 17, 2018).

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.

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@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

The Little Master Homer: The Odyssey takes nine episodes from Homer's *Odyssey* and distils each into a picture/caption/speech-bubble unit. The illustrations cross two pages; they are bold and stylised, designed to capture the attention of very young children.

The first character introduced is 'Calypso, the Nymph'. She is saying, *I keep Odysseus here with me since I saved him from the wine-dark sea*. Next, 'Ino, the Sea Nymph', says, *Take my veil and tie it around your chest. It will keep you safe*. Monstrous Lotus Eaters make munching noises. The 'Cyclops' Polyphemus reclines casually reading a book entitled *The Joy of Cooking Humans*, and he is depicted saying, *I'll eat all your friends first, and then I'll eat you!*.

'Circe the Witch' points her wand towards a rainbow-coloured double pentagram, saying, *Off you go you your pigsty, and stay there!*. Circe is followed by 'Ghosts.' An old man says "Groan", a warrior says "Moan", and a woman surrounded by stylised skulls says, *This is a dark and ghostly place. How did you come here?* Three winged and singing 'Sirens' follow, one playing a flute, the second a lyre, and the third apparently drumming with a bone on a skull. The first calls, *Come, listen to our honeyed songs and sweet-voiced melodies*. A headed tentacle from 'Scylla the Sea Monster' cries, "Yelp! Yelp! Yelp!". 'Charibdis the Sea Monster' makes a "Slurrrrrrrrrrp!" Lastly, 'Telemus the Soothsayer', sits saying, "I told you all these things would come to pass."

Analysis

This beautiful book is part of a series with the creative concept of introducing very young children to classic literature at the point when they first encounter books. *The Odyssey* is the only ancient literature included in the series, which indicates the series editors' perception of it as a particularly important part of the 'canon'. The series does not attempt to tell the stories of classic fiction in any narrative way, rather the books and the stories they are based on are a vehicle for introducing different concepts that are useful in child development. *Wuthering Heights* focuses on the concept of opposites; *Emma* explores emotions; *The Jungle Book* introduces different animals; *Romeo and Juliet* is an introduction to counting. The cover of BabyLit's *The Odyssey* declares it 'A Monster Primer!'. The book does indeed

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.

focus on the *Odyssey*'s monsters, even to the exclusion of images of Odysseus or ships. The *Odyssey*'*s* monstrous figures offer an opportunity for images that are quite distinct from those in the nineteenth-century literature titles and this perhaps influenced the choice of focus. The images of unusual beings encourage very young children to develop their imaginations in relation to biological form. Nonetheless, it is essentially the adults reading these books with children who will recognise and respond to much of the detail. That in itself has educational value for the children with them. Reading to babies can be repetitive and unstimulating to adults at times; if the adults enjoy the book because of its relation to classic literature that they know and like then the children are likely to pick up on the adult's engagement. This in turn will boost the child's own engagement as they learn how books work, how to hold books and turn pages, as they experience the enjoyment of being read to and the interesting sounds of words, and as they are stimulated by the bold images. The captions and the classic literature element also offer prompts for the adults to expand on what is written, thereby potentially increasing the opportunities for adult and child to look, speak, and engage together.

The first character in the book is not really monstrous at all, but she is depicted with an unusual form and she is an immortal with super-human powers. Odysseus becomes the subtext of the book, as Calypso's first words are about him. Cutting to the heart of the Calypso story (for which see *Odyssey* 1.50; 5.1–568; 7.244–266), Calypso is explaining that she 'keep[s]' Odysseus with her. She is depicted like a beautiful princess, with long-flowing hair, smooth dark skin, and gold bangles, diadem, and dress collar. Sea-like waves curl about her flowing dress and hair. Her eyes are closed in a non-confrontational, dream-like manner. This Calypso transports the reader into a fantasy realm, preparing them for the adventures to come.

The second figure, Ino, is depicted with an even more unusual form. Although Homer's *Odyssey* describes Ino as a mortal woman who has become a goddess with neat ankles (*Odyssey* 5.333–350; with Euripides, *Medea*, 1282–1289; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.416–542), she appears here as a sort of jellyfish. Ino has a jellyfish-style lower half, a humanoid body with arms, and a large head with big eyes, a sweet smile, and wild tentacle-like hair. She is depicted in a soft but bright pink that stands out in contrast to the dark sea-blue background. The striking colour contrast and Ino's large, friendly eyes make this a very

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.

compelling image for young children to look at. These first two characters have been helper-'monsters', introducing the idea that strange form does not always indicate danger.

Some licence has also been taken with the Lotuseaters' form. While the Lotus-eaters of Homer's *Odyssey* (9.82–104) are human (often thought of in antiquity as North African people), the BabyLit Lotus-eaters are brightly coloured furry teddy-bear-like monsters. Their big eyes and furriness make them appear unthreatening, despite one of them having horns and all of them having large teeth. Their determined munching on flowers adds to their humorous appearance. Homer's Lotus-eaters present an existential threat to Odysseus and his crew, a concept that would be hard to express in this context; the teddy-bear monsters, on the other hand, are visually striking and touch on the idea of eating – one of the key elements of a very young child's existence.

The Cyclops is also furry, and two wide-eyed sheep are gambolling in his fur as he reclines reading a book. He wears a ludicrous glass for his one eye, which adds to the visual effect of non-threatening domestication, or even faux-intellectualism. The book which the Cyclops holds and his speech bubble indicate his more dangerous aspect, but these would be incomprehensible to a non-reading child. The Cyclops' words are a direct paraphrase from Homer's *Odyssey*, in which the Cyclops, Polyphemus, offers as a cruel joke to eat Odysseus last (at *Odyssey* 9.368–369, with 9.105–542). For the ancient Greeks, part of the Cyclopes' horror was that they ate their food – including Odysseus' crewmembers – raw (see Vidal-Naquet, 1996, below). That feature of his nature is softened here by a joke. The Cyclops reads 'The Joy of Cooking Humans', domesticating his human-eating antics within the common 'Joy of…' book title trope.

Circe (for which see *Odyssey* 10.135–545; 12.8–164; with Hesiod, *Theogony*, 1011–1016) does not have a particularly monstrous appearance. She is depicted as a blonde white woman, with her monstrous aspect being indicated b her words and by the magical symbols on her black dress. Like the other humanoid, Calypso, Circe's eyes are closed, making her a threat that can be viewed, but which does not view (and thereby threaten) the reader. Her words, a command to go to the pigsty, are a paraphrase from Homer's *Odyssey*. An adult who knows the *Odyssey* might enjoy that recognition, but the scene is essentially comprehensible those who do not know it.

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.

It is perhaps a little surprising to see the Underworld episode (*Odyssey*, book 11) included in this adaptation, but as the target audience is so young it was perhaps considered unlikely to provoke questions about death. The figures are done in white outline to stand out on a dark blue and black background. The first two ghosts look a little comedically bored. The third ghost is unnamed but must be Odysseus' mother; her words are a paraphrase of her opening words to Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey* (11.155).

The Sirens pages follow the Underworld, with a striking contrast moving from darkness to a white background, with red text and bright blue rocks. In Homer there are two Sirens, here there are three, in keeping with later depictions (*Odyssey*, 12.39–54; 12.158–200; with Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, 4.891–919; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 5.552–563). The Sirens look like beautiful women. In antiquity they were often depicted as part-bird; that is suggested here through their wings, while the arguably more horrible bird feet that are sometimes included have been avoided. The presence of a single skull and bone suggest the Sirens' threatening aspect, but this is subtle enough to avoid being scary.

The sea-monster, Scylla, is described in Homer's *Odyssey* as having six heads on long necks (12.90) and a yelp like a new pup (12.86). BabyLit's Scylla yelps in the same way. She is depicted as a half-submerged octopus-like creature with six heads and large, irregular teeth. Charybdis arguably presented a greater challenge to the illustrator, as this monster is not described in the Odyssey, and is often regarded as a whirl-pool (*Odyssey* 12.85–125; 12.201–259). Here the idea of the monster sucking down the waters (*Odyssey* 12.104) has been taken literally, and Charybdis appears as a crocodile-fish hybrid sucking down the whirlpool waters through a long straw. With its strange hybrid body, Charybdis is arguably the most monstrous of the monsters in the collection.

The final figure to make an appearance makes only the briefest appearance in Homer's *Odyssey*: Telemus the Soothsayer (for which see *Odyssey*, 9.506–515). Telemus is depicted somewhat in the manner of a gypsy fortune-teller, sitting cross-legged and turbaned before a table of smoking leaves and holding a crystal ball up before him. Telemus, son of Eurymus, was a great soothsayer who lived amongst the Cyclopses. He warned the Cyclops Polyphemus that someone called Odysseus would take his sight, and as Odysseus races away from the cave Polyphemus cries out in remembrance of the

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.

prophecy and realisation that it has come to pass. Here it is Telemus himself who notes that things have come to pass as he predicted. As Homer's *Odyssey* features an encounter with antiquity's most famous seer, Tiresias, it is a little surprising to find Telemus appearing instead, when he is mentioned so briefly in the *Odyssey* and does not appear in person. This was perhaps motivated by modern perceptions of soothsayers and seers, which tend to focus on the idea of predicting the future. Telemus' words conform to that norm, and they make for a pleasing close to the book by reflecting back on what has gone before.

By including *The Odyssey*, an ancient text from the beginnings of literature, the BabyLit series demonstrates its ambitious commitment to adapting 'classic' works for the very young. Their very inclusion of an ancient story within the range suggests that antiquity is something suitable for the young and something that they may enjoy exploring further as they get older. The range of skin tones employed in the illustrations of humanoids communicates the inclusive idea that antiquity is something that involves people of all ethnicities. Monsters are monstrous yet unthreatening and humorous, offering stimulation without real horror.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Afterlife Agamemnon Charybdis Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Divination Fate Greek Music Hades Homer Iliad Nymphs Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Polyphemus Scylla Sirens Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Death Knowledge Learning Storytelling

Further Reading

Miles, Geoffrey, "Chasing Odysseus in Twenty-First Century Children's Fiction", in Lisa Maurice, ed., T*he Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature. Heroes and Eagles*, Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Miles, Sarah, "The *Odyssey* in the 'Broom Cupboard': *Ulysses 31 and*

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.

Odysseus: The Greatest Hero of them All on 'Children's BBC', 1985–86", in Fiona Hobden and Amanda Wrigley eds., *Ancient Greece on British Television*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

Murnaghan, Sheila, "Men into Pigs: Circe's Transformations in Versions of The Odyssey for Children", Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature. Heroes and Eagles*, Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Roisman, Hanna M., "The Odyssey from Homer to NBC: The Cyclops and the Gods", in Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray, eds., *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, 315–326.

Vidal-Naquet, Pierre, "Land and Sacrifice in the Odyssey: A Study of Religious and Mythical Meanings", in Seth L. Schein, ed., *Reading the Odyssey: Selected Interpretive Essays*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 33–53.

The University of Chicago Library, "The Children's Homer", part of *Homer in Print: The Transmission and Reception of Homer's Works*, available at lib.uchicago.edu (accessed: July 26, 2018).

Addenda

From the *Baby Lit* series.

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.