Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Be Careful, Icarus! by Joan Holub, Leslie Patricelli", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Dorota Mackenzie. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/339. Entry version as of November 04, 2026.

Joan Holub , Leslie Patricelli

# Be Careful, Icarus!

*United States*

TAGS: Architecture Crete Daedalus Icarus Labyrinth Maze Minos Minotaur






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

| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | Be Careful, Icarus! |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United States of America |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | United States; United Kingdom; other English-speaking countries |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Details* | Joan Holub, *Be Careful, Icarus!* "Mini Myths", New York: Abrams Appleseed, 2015, 22 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9781419716775 |
| *Official Website* | abramsbooks.com (accessed: July 26, 2018) |
| *Genre* | Didactic fiction, Mythological fiction, Picture books, Toddler book* |
| *Target Audience* | Children (aged c. 0–4) |
| *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<br>Dorota Mackenzie, University of Warsaw, dorota.mackenzie@gmail.com |



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## 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

**Leslie Patricelli (Illustrator)**

Leslie Patricelli is an illustrator based in Hailey, Idaho, USA. Patricelli majored in communications from the University of Washington, and



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Photo courtesy of Leslie Patricelli.

took classes at the School of Visual Concepts in Seattle. She first worked as an advertising copywriter. Her work is primarily aimed at books for a preschool audience and carried out for Candlewick Press. She has recently begun branching out into writing children's literature. She created Rover the dog for Windows XP help.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: January 13, 2018).

Profile at the goodreads.com (accessed: June 26, 2018).

Bio prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com and Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



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## Additional information

Summary

In *Be Careful, Icarus!*, Icarus is a young child living in the modern world. He is introduced on the first page, while the facing page uses a single image, single word combination to show what is important to Icarus – a kite. When the story begins, Icarus is making a bird-shaped kite with his father. He is warned not to spill the paint, but still does so. They celebrate when the kite is completed. Out in the park, Icarus is eager to hold the kite himself. His father hands it over and Icarus runs with it calling *Higher*. Icarus' father calls out *Be careful, Icarus!*, but Icarus runs into a copse of trees. The kite is damaged; Icarus looks forlorn; his father tells him that they can fix it. We see them working on it together. In the final image, Icarus is successfully flying the patched-up kite. He (and his father) are behaving more responsibly. Icarus now stands and flies the kite properly with his father supporting him. A one-page summary of the myth follows, written at a somewhat different register, as if for an older child of c. 4–8.

Analysis

This is a beautifully-illustrated series that creatively transposes ancient myths into real-life scenarios faced by pre-school-aged children. Subtle ancient-style features are included in the design of each volume in the series: a brightly-coloured Greek key runs vertically along the cover beside the spine; the series name is written on a scroll, with the 'S' of 'myths' written in a jagged, inscription-like style; on the spine, the main character is shown standing upon a Doric column, with the name of the book written on the column, and the image of the character atop a column is repeated in the interior title-page.

A theme, or moral lesson, is included in each volume in the fore-notes in the style of a dedication. In *Be Careful, Icarus!*, the dedication is *To trying out your wings*. In the traditional myth of Icarus, Icarus wears a pair of manufactured wings and dies when he disregards his father's advice, venturing too close to the sun and causing the wings' glue to melt. In this re-telling, *trying out your wings* refers to trying new actions and skills; this is neatly tied-in with the second meaning, trying out the wings of the kite.

This retelling follows the familial dynamic of the ancient myth by



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focusing on a father-son relationship. In ancient versions of the myth, Icarus' father, Daedalus, creates the wings; here father and son make them together. Daedalus tries to warn Icarus, but Icarus is reckless and disregards the warning. In both stories there are consequences; in both the wings are damaged, in myth the boy dies, in the retelling the kite is broken. The retelling then offers a constructive addition to the narrative – the wings can be fixed, Icarus acts more carefully, and Daedalus demonstrates more diligent parenting. At a very fundamental level, the books in this series act on and communicate the idea that ancient mythology contains concepts that can help in children's development – social and emotional. The retelling of this myth communicates a key moral of the ancient myth, namely the need for children to follow good advice about being careful and to regulate their behaviour. Ancient versions of the myth carry further stern lessons about the irrevocability of action – *what's done is done*, not all mistakes can be rectified (Icarus' recklessness) and the things one does can lead unintentionally to the loss of all one holds dear (Daedalus did not mean for harm to come to his son when he invented the wings). This retelling favours an alternative additional lesson, which is the importance of perseverance and learning from your mistakes. This latter message is more in-keeping with modern priorities in child development.

There are few visual indicators of antiquity in the story beyond those which are common to the series. One striking double-page does, however, strongly invoke the original myth. When Icarus runs with the kite shouting *Higher*, the usual turquoise background is rejected in favour of a glowing sun filling the page; it begins with a central yellow which bleeds into orange then red, with Icarus running excitedly into the reddest corner. Adult readers and some child readers will recognise the significance of the sun as a connection with the myth. However, even those who do not, are likely to feel instinctively the increased frenetic energy of the colours and, potentially, to understand the implication that Icarus is losing control and heading towards danger.

The summary of the myth at the end of the book goes to greater length than in other titles in the series to avoid reference to the more sinister elements of the ancient myth. There is an explanation that Icarus' father created a maze – but no reference to it housing the Minotaur. There is no sense that Daedalus and Icarus wish to get away from where they are; the wings are said to have been created so that they can escape the maze. It then explicitly says that while



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Daedalus warned Icarus not to go too high, Icarus was too excited and did not listen – the crux of the myth. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the young age of the intended audience, the summary refers to how Icarus *splashed into the sea below*, avoiding mention of his death. For more on the ancient traditions, which begin with Daedalus as inventor and only gradually come to include Icarus, see Homer, *Iliad*, 18.590ff; Herodotus 7.170; Diodorus 4.76–79; Apollodorus 3.15; 3.65; Ovid, *Metamorphose*s, 8.183ff, *Tristia* 2. 105; and numerous examples from Greek and Roman art.

This series introduces very young children to some of the names and images associated with antiquity, preparing them for encountering these images and characters again in different contexts. The families in the books come from a range of ethnicities, with the implication that classical myths are universal, regardless of ethnic background. Children at the outer edge of the age bracket for these books (i.e. around four years old) can also enjoy the summary that comes at the end of the book, which creates the opportunity for an early encounter with the sophisticated concept of characters reappearing in different contexts and stories, and stories working on different levels – things which are likely to stimulate thought and a nuanced approach to stories and story-telling.

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|---|---|
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Architecture Crete Daedalus Icarus Labyrinth Maze Minos Minotaur |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Authority Child, children Disobedience Family Gaining understanding Morality Multiculturalism Parents (and children) |



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