Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Don't Get Lost, Odysseus! 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/340. Entry version as of November 08, 2026.

Joan Holub , Leslie Patricelli

Don't Get Lost, Odysseus!

United States

TAGS: Aphrodite Architecture Athena Cyclops / Cyclopes Gods Heracles Hercules Homer Medusa Midas Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Pandora Penelope Polyphemus Sirens Trojan War





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

General information	
Title of the work	Don't Get Lost, Odysseus!
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, *Don't Get Lost, Odysseus!* "Mini Myths", New York: Abrams Appleseed, 2016, 22 pp.
ISBN	9781419718977
Official Website	abramsbooks.com (accessed: July 26, 2018)
Genre	Didactic fiction, Mythological fiction, Picture books
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 Dorota Mackenzie, University of Warsaw, dorota.mackenzie@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



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 *Don't Get Lost, Odysseus*, Odysseus is a pre-school-aged child living in the modern world. The first page introduces the character with a single word – his name, while the facing page introduces his main fascination, 'Adventure', which is illustrated by the entrance to a children's play area.

Odysseus and his mother are approaching a mall; she wants to go to a shop, he wants to go home. Once they are in a shop, Odysseus' attention switches to wishing to go to an enticing adventure playground. When Odysseus' mother turns away from him to pay, Odysseus runs off on his own towards the playground. He enjoys pretending to steer a play ship, and going on the slide, but a realisation hits him that he is alone. *I'm lost!* He bursts into tears. Odysseus' mother finds him and gives him a reassuring hug. They head home together. A one-page summary of some of the main features of the ancient versions of the Odysseus myth follows, written for adults or slightly older children (i.e. aged c.4–8).

Analysis

This is a beautifully illustrated series that creatively transposes ancient myths into real-life scenarios facing 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 *Don't Get Lost, Odysseus*, the dedication is 'To home sweet home.' This appreciation of home reflects a key theme in Homer's *Odyssey*, and other myths about Odysseus – the importance and desirability of *nostos*, or return home. In ancient versions of the myth, Odysseus did not wish to leave home to fight at Troy, just as pre-school Odysseus does not wish to go shopping – both are compelled to leave home through forces external to themselves (see e.g. *The Cypria*). Learning to deal with the

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frustration of this scenario is a developmental challenge facing all children. The next turning point, in which Odysseus begins his adventure, diverges from ancient myth; in ancient versions of the myth, Odysseus' odyssey begins when he departs from Troy with his fleet, in accordance with the rest of the army and its authorities. In *Don't Get Lost*, Odysseus does not return home, but rather leaves his mother's side without her permission or knowledge. Rather than, for example, getting lost while trying to walk home from school alone for the first time, the young Odysseus is taking an unnecessary risk. This alteration adds an element of social learning, as the character and reader are encouraged to recognise the danger of going off alone – a more active, preventable problem than simply getting lost. In terms of resonance with ancient myth, young Odysseus' situation is perhaps more akin to Odysseus' experience amongst the Cyclopes (*Odyssey*, 9.224–230), when his desire for adventure and gain places him in opposition to his crew's preference for safety and home. Ancient Odysseus ends up learning a similar lesson to young Odysseus – the importance of prioritising safety. Unlike the ancient Odysseus, young Odysseus is not cunning, resourceful, or a trickster.Rather,in a manner appropriate to the age of the character and readership, he gets caught up in exploration and adventure and, after getting lost, he re-learns his appreciation of home and safety and (it is implied) the behaviour that goes with that.

The ancient Odysseus is protected in some crises by the intervention of the gods, particularly Athena (e.g. *Odyssey*, 6.229–237; 13.396–438; 16.167–171; 17.360; Hermes: 10.277–307). The safety and comfort of his home is to some extent characterised by the figures of his parents and, more so, of his wife, Penelope. His home-coming is marked by reunion with his wife and father (*Odyssey*, book 23; 24.289–360). Aspects of these roles are reworked in *Don't Get Lost*, with the roles taken by young Odysseus' parent After he has initially bolted away from her, Odysseus' mother quickly discovers him at the play area and she is depicted watching over him from above as he plays there, enabling her to appear as if out of nowhere to rescue and comfort him when he gets into difficulty. She apparently wields the omniscience and protective power of a deity whilst offering the comfort and safety of a parent. This depiction of parental power is fitting for the very young age-group aimed at in this work.

The summary of the myth at the end of the book relates that 'long ago', Odysseus and the Greek army planned to return to Greece after overtaking the city of Troy. Odysseus 'missed his family.', they got

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lost; 'mermaids called Sirens tried to sing them to sleep forever; sea monsters tried to sink them; 'they were captured by a one-eyed giant called a Cyclops'; they visited islands; and it took 10 years for Odysseus to get home. There is no mention of the fates of the rest of the army, the death of his companions being perhaps deemed too potentially distressing for a young audience.' A man named Homer wrote a famous story about his adventures called *The Odyssey*.' This section gives the adult reader or an older child the ability to see how the ancient myth has been re-written into the current story, and reference to the *Odyssey* gives them the opportunity to explore the ancient material in further depth if they so choose. The episodes chosen for the summary are frightening yet essentially child-friendly (as is the expression 'sleep forever' rather than 'death'). The conflation of mermaids and Sirens does not do justice to the ancient tradition, in which Sirens are distinct from mermaids (Sirens have bird bodies rather than fish, see e.g. Apollonius, *Argonautica*, 4.896–898 and Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 5.552–563, and especially in Greek art; more generally on the Sirens see *Odyssey* 12.39–54; 12.158–200; Apollonius, *Argonautica*, 4.891–919; Lycophron, *Alexandra*, 712ff.; Apollodorus, 1.7.4; Plato, *Republic*, 617b;.); this may be a mistake, or a conflation intended to familiarise the Sirens by equating them with the arguably more famous figure of the mermaid.

Aspects of the *Odyssey* which are mentioned in the summary also reflect ancient mythic elements which are included in the book's thoughtful illustrations. The entrance to the adventure playground features an arch in the style of a curved ionic column, topped by three smiling child-mermaids. The friendly expressions of the mermaids seem to invite Odysseus to harmless enjoyment even though they actually tempt him into danger. The letters on the arch, 'PLAYLAND', are rendered in angular letters reminiscent of Greek inscriptions. Within the arch, the reader sees a ship, an island, and a Cyclops-shaped slide. Ancient Greece, Sirens, sailing, islands, and monster-Cyclops are thus included within a single image of the play area.

Other aspects of antiquity and the ancient version of the myth of Odysseus are included within the visual appearance of the book. The major colour of the work is blue, which forms the background colour and much of the incidental colouring, reflecting the importance of the sea. This is emphasised further when Odysseus realises that he is lost as the plain blue background turns to bluey-green wave pattern, visually suggesting the idea of being lost at sea. The entrance to the mall features blue ionic columns and plant pots decorated in blue and

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white with a Greek key. Young Odysseus wears a top decorated with an anchor to stress the nautical connection. The incorporation of the Cyclops into a slide is particularly creative. It expresses the monstrosity of the Cyclops through focus on the single central eye, albeit rendered in a friendly way – wide-eyed and smiling. The monstrosity is then taken further, as the slide goes through the body of the Cyclops; children must enter the body of the Cyclops and pass through it to experience the ride – effectively reenacting being eaten by the monster, like ancient Odysseus' crew-mates.

Don't Get Lost, Odysseus incorporates other characters from the Mini Myths series; Medusa can be seen walking home happily from the hair-dressers, while Midas, Hercules, Aphrodite, Pandora, and Athena play in the play area (with Hercules characteristically trying to push down a tree). Although the primary intention of this is presumably to carry-out the necessary population of the environment in a way that integrates the series, it also suggests the inter-connectedness of the ancient mythic world.

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. At a very fundamental level, these books also act on and communicate the idea that ancient mythology contains concepts that can help in children's development – social and emotional. The families in the books come from a range of ethnicities, with the implication that classical myths can be enjoyed by anyone , regardless of their ethnic background. Children at the outer edge of the age bracket (over four) for these books 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.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Aphrodite Architecture Athena Cyclops / Cyclopes Gods Heracles Hercules Homer Medusa Midas Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Pandora Penelope Polyphemus Sirens Trojan War

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Child, children Disobedience Family Gaining understanding Morality Multiculturalism Parents (and children)

Further Reading

Burgess, Jonathan S., *Homer*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2014.

Eisenberg, William D., "Morals, Morals Everywhere: Values in Children's Fiction", *The Elementary School Journal* 72.2 (1971): 76–80.

Fowler, Robert, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Hall, Edith, *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2008.

Malkin, Irad, *The Returns of Odysseus: Colonization and Ethnicity*, Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1998.

Miles, Geoffrey, "Chasing Odysseus in Twenty-First Century Children's Fiction", in 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.

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

Practitioner's Note: This book has proved extremely popular amongst the children I have read it with (aged 2–4). They enjoy the images and lay-out. They readily appreciate the situation that is presented,

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making it easy to lead into simple conversations about keeping safe in public spaces. They can also interpret the emotions that are depicted (frustration, excitement, curiosity, distress, comfort) supporting constructive discussion of distress – how it feels, how to calm down, and how people can support one another. The older children recognised Odysseus' name from previous stories of ancient Odysseus and found it thought-provoking to find the story retold in this alternative form.

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