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Imogen Greenberg , Isabel Greenberg

Discover... The Ancient Greeks

United States (2017)

TAGS: Achilles Aesop Aesop's Fables Alexander the Great Ancient Slavery Aphrodite Architecture Argo Argonauts Ariadne Athena Athens Chorus Crete Delos Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Egypt Fable Gods Golden Fleece Graeco-Persian Wars Greek Art Greek History Greek Music Greek Philosophy Greek Theatre Hades Harpies Hector Helen Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Homer Iliad Jason Labyrinth Laurel Wreath Maze Medea Menelaus Minos Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Oedipus Olympic Games Olympus Oracles Orpheus Paris (Trojan Prince) Penelope Pericles Poseidon Pythia Scylla Sirens Socrates Sophocles Sparta Theseus Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Zeus



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General information	
Title of the work	Discover… The Ancient Greeks
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States; United Kingdom
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ISBN	9781847809513
Genre	Illustrated works, Instructional and educational works
Target Audience	Children (c. 7–14)
Author of the Entry	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.

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Creators



Imogen Greenberg (Author)

Imogen Greenberg is a UK-based writer and theatre professional. She is the coordinator at Tonic Theatre (accessed: May 28, 2018), an organisation which works for gender equality in the arts and creative industries. Greenberg was formerly a press and publications officer at the Globe Theatre in London.She has a degree in history and a strong interest in all things cultural and historical. She has written *Secret History: The Romans*, *Secret History: The Ancient Egyptians*, *The Aztec Empire* and *The Ancient Greeks* which are all illustrated by her sister Isabel Greenberg. She is also the author of the *Discover...* series.

Source:

Profile at londoncalling.com (accessed: Febryary 14, 2019)

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk and Babette Puetz, Victoria University of Wellington, babette.puetz@vuw.ac.nz



Isabel Greenberg (in the middle) with Mike Carey and Stuart Kelly by byronv2. Retrieved from flickr.com, licensed

Isabel Greenberg (Illustrator)

Isabel Grenberg is an illustrator and writer based in the UK. Isabel studied illustration at the University of Brighton and experimental animation at the Royal College of Art. She has worked for a variety of clients including The Guardian, Nobrow Press, The National Trust, Seven Stories Press, First Second and The New York Times. She won the Observer Jonathan Cape Graphic Short Story Prize in 2011.

Her first graphic novel *The Encyclopaedia of Early Earth* was

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published in 2013 and has been translated into French, Spanish, Korean, German and Chinese. It won the Best Book category at the British Comic Awards, was nominated for two Eisner awards, was one of NPR's 100 Books of the Year, the Guardian's graphic novel pick of the month and in the New York Times Graphic Books bestseller list. Isabel Greenberg's second graphic novel *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* came out 2016, and also made the New York Times graphic books bestseller list and became one of the Observer's best graphic books of 2016.

She has so far written and/or illustrated about twenty graphic novels, comics and children's books.

Imogen Greenberg and Isabel Greenberg are sisters.

Source:

Official website (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk and Babette Puetz, Victoria University of Wellington, babette.puetz@vuw.ac.nz

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Additional information

Translation

Italian: Imogen Greenberg, *Scopri… gli antichi greci*, trans. P. Cantatore, New York: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, an imprint of Quarto Inc., 2017, 30 pp.

Summary

Discover... began in 2016. It is part of a series offering a light-hearted introduction to a range of ancient cultures, including *The Roman Empire*, *The Ancient Aztecs*, and *The Ancient Egyptians*.

Discover... The Ancient Greeks opens with the stated intention of exploring who the ancient Greeks really were. The book is divided into 2-page sub-sections, each discussing a different aspect of ancient Greek culture.

Analysis

Welcome to Ancient Greece introduces two guides: Nikias, an ancient Greek, and 'an archaeologist'. This is a well-conceived combination, as the ancient character provides an insider's view as part of an immersive look at Greek life, while the archaeologist provides a role-model for viewing antiquity from a distance and acts as a conduit for sharing information on how moderns find out about the past.

Greek Cities introduces the idea that Greece was divided into city-states. Corinth and Athens are shown on a map; Spartans and Peloponnesians are included below. Readers are informed that wars broke out when states argued, and that they competed more peacefully at the Olympic Games. This is illustrated by a fight scene in which the one about to lose replies that they will win in the Games (a little misleadingly, he says 'in the Marathon' – a post-antiquity event). This section brings out the Greeks' effective means of competing in different modes, something that is important about them as a culture, and which provides a significant contact point with the modern world. The Peloponnesian War is introduced via a jokey sea-battle cartoon. The Delian League and Peloponnesian League are named in a text-box, with reference to 'Peloponnesians' and 'Delians' on either side of the sea battle (this is slightly misleading as members of the Delian League would never have referred to themselves as 'Delians', and the reader will not find this term used in any further modern literature).

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Greek Rule is a politics section. It outlines the characteristics of three important forms of government in Greek antiquity. Tyranny has a man declaring himself ruler and promising to 'make things awesome again', possibly intended to resonate with the 2016 Trump campaign in the USA. Oligarchy features a cartoon in which the oligarchs cannot be bothered to rule. Democracy features an image of voting hands and the narrator, Nikias, meeting Cleisthenes. The text explains that more people are involved in decision-making in democracy than in the other forms of government. Unlike the other sections, Democracy twice refers to deciding what is 'best'; that is, Tyranny and Oligarchy focus on what may go wrong with those systems, while Democracy avoids that issue and presents it as the only form of government governing responsibly. While this is understandable in a Western children's book, it is clearly ideological in avoiding any of the criticisms of democracy that were raised in antiquity (or today). By including this politics section, readers are helped to understand Greece's contribution to political history and to consider that various forms of government are possible.

Greek Society raises the subject of social inequality. The reader is informed that women were excluded from politics and education and lived secluded lives. *Sort of unfair, right?* an ancient Greek woman asks, inviting the reader to consider how societies should be arranged. Slavery is introduced. Slaves are described as people who, 'along with their families', were excluded from politics and compelled to work for citizens without pay. This phrasing arguably supresses the roles of women (and children) as slaves, as the image equates free adult women and enslaved men, leaving enslaved women literally out of the picture. Dress also features in this section, emphasising the similarity between men and women's clothing and the possibility of class distinction via different materials. In the accompanying illustration, an older man asks a women if her tunic is also available in pink.

Hall of Fame features Leonidas, Pericles, Archimedes, Sappho, Herodotus, and Aesop. Between them, these figures cover careers focusing on warfare, politics, science, and literature, expressing the breadth of activity in ancient Greek culture. The description of Aesop includes 'You've probably heard of some of them, like *The Tortoise and the Hare*, which attempts explicitly to bridge between this essentially new information and material that the reader may already be familiar with; this has pedagogical value in and of itself, and it also helps to demonstrate the enduring impact of Greek myth and literature.

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Persian Wars recounts this 5th century conflict. The first section looks at the Persians' greater numbers and decision to march on Greece, illustrated by an image of Persian fighters which is based on the Persepolis reliefs or similar. Somewhat controversially, the invasion is presented as a purely aggressive advance, without reference to the Greek attack on Asia Minor or the Athenians' decision to revoke their pledge to Persia (see Herodotus, *Histories*). The second section depicts Xerxes' Hellespont Bridge. There is an erroneous claim that Xerxes brought elephants with him on this campaign (a mistake perhaps influenced by the 2006 film, *300*). The third and fourth sections feature the wooden-wall oracle, with depictions of the Pythia and ships at sea. Overall this is an effective introduction to the Persian Wars given the limitations of space.

Alexander the Great also does an effective job introducing a vast topic in a small section. The Alexander story is divided into the Greeks underestimating Alexander, Alexander's visit to Siwa (coupled with a summary of his achievements), and a depiction of Alexander battling Porus, which includes an illustration influenced by the 2004 film *Alexander*, which was itself influenced by Hellenistic coinage.

Having been given a section apart from *Greek Gods*, there is room for the Greek Religion section to focus on forms of worship and interaction with deities. Temples, festivals and the use of oracles to help with decision-making are the areas explored, which combine to convey a sense of the lived experience of Greek religion.

Greek Gods introduce some of the major deities: Zeus, Hera, Athena, Poseidon, Hades, Aphrodite, and Hermes. The Narrator, Nikias, notes that happy gods help humans, whereas unhappy ones punish. Although there is no explicit guidance on what makes a god happy or unhappy, the reader may be able to connect to the previous section in which the gods are offered things to please them. This human-focused description of the gods also helps the reader to approach the Greeks' lived experience of religion (i.e. thinking that a god may be helping or punishing you), rather than the more abstract approach.

Homer's Epics introduces the stories that the Greeks most loved to tell. The Trojan War is described as happening 'hundreds of years before', although 'before what' is not entirely clear. Illustrations introduce and highlight Paris and Helen, Hector and Achilles, and Odysseus. The *Iliad* section includes a wide interpretation of the story of the Trojan War, including Thetis making Achilles almost

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invulnerable, the Trojan horse, and the fall of Troy. Although this gives a somewhat misleading sense of what is in the *Iliad*, it gives a pithy and accessible guide to the Trojan War. The *Odyssey* section includes mention of the Cyclops and the Sirens, but the accompanying illustration is a more upbeat humorous image of Odysseus with his crew. The combined effect of this section is to encourage children to explore the epics (perhaps in the future) and to underline the importance of storytelling in Greek culture.

The *Mythology* section reinforces the importance of storytelling. Two myths are chosen to illustrate the genre, Jason and the Argonauts and Theseus and the Minotaur. Both stories are told briefly and following the traditional pattern. The Jason myth is told with reference to the island of androcidal women (Lemnian women, see Apollodorus, *Library*, 1.114; Quintus of Smyrna, *Fall of Troy,* 9.368; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 13.399) and the Harpies (Apollodorus of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, book 2), and with an illustration of Medea's father giving the instructions to yoke the bull and to kill the 'phantom warriors' born of dragon's teeth (Apollodorus of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, books 3 & 4). The 'brainy young lady', Medea, will help, and her father agrees, avoiding mention of family conflict. Similarly, Theseus and the Minotaur presents an upbeat version of the myth, with no mention of Aegeus or Ariadne's abandonment and a fun picture of Theseus fighting a furry-legged Minotaur in the middle of a stylized maze. This section presents Greek mythology as a genre of adventure and fun without attention on its moral complexities or angst.

The *Theater* section steps away from the 'lived experience' of Greek religion in the other sections by avoiding reference to the religious nature of theatre performances. It is stated that at Athens contests were held in the Theater of Dionysus and that there was a 'Dionysia Festival', but as readers have not been introduced to Dionysus, they are unlikely to make the connection without further help. The main tragedians are introduced as talking busts, and some of the angst of myths appears humorously in their descriptions of their work. The use of masks and chorus is shown in illustration, and the *Oresteia*, *Lysistrata*, and *Knights* are all mentioned by name.

Philosophy does an impressive job of presenting some key ideas of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle succinctly. Socrates and Aristotle are depicted both as real people and as statue busts. Plato appears as a bust, with an accompanying depiction of Plato's cave. The Socrates and Plato busts talk, giving examples of the sort of things they might

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say (e.g. *I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think. To find yourself, think for yourself.*). These are accompanied by short paragraphs explaining more about their ideas and a second image text combination. Socrates' features his execution, while Plato's has a visualisation of The Cave (for which see Plato, *Republic*, 514a–520a). The description of Aristotle's work summarises the huge range of subjects that he investigated. The image depicts Aristotle with the boy who ould become Alexander the Great. The narrator, Nikias, wonders if Aristotle inspired Alexander 'to try and conquer the world.'

The Olympic Games has its own section, perhaps because this connects so effectively to the reader's world. The Games are referred to as a festival, named by Hercules, but that aside there is no explicit mention of them being a religious occasion or held in honour of Zeus. It is mistakenly asserted twice that the Games took place at the foot of Mount Olympus (rather than in Olympia), and the illustration reinforces this by situating the Games at the foot of a snow-capped mountain. The Games themselves are represented through some charming illustrations of various events: javelin, discus, wrestling, and running, the latter in an image that reflects ancient pottery images. The athletes' nudity is covered by a selection of kilts, discreetly-placed leaves, and a series of architectural pillars.

Archaeology returns the reader to the idea of approaching antiquity from the modern age via excavation and artefacts. Key forms of evidence are introduced by the archaeologist showing the reader around a 'typical Greek city' with an agora, theatre, temples, mosaics, and pottery. There is a guide to the main orders of architecture.

Timeline and Map. A beautiful map folds out from the back of the book, including the Greek mainland, Crete, Asia Minor, and Macedonia, and also marking Mt Olympus, Delphi, Athens, Corinth, Sparta, and Ephesus. The timeline (on the reverse of the map) runs from the Trojan War, through other myths mentioned in the book, through classical Greece to the death of Alexander.

Overall this is a thorough introduction to ancient Greek culture that maintains a light, informal tone. Ancient Greece is presented as a rich and varied culture, that was not perfect, but which was nonetheless impressive, interesting, and influential. The extensive use of cartoonish illustrations adds to the accessible, informal tone of the book. Human figures are depicted in a wide variety of skin tones, reflecting the range of appearances that might be found in a

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	Mediterranean culture. This variety helps to balance the whiteness of the statue busts, which are more readily understood as marble when contrasted with living figures. As such, the busts fall more comprehensively within the book's tendency to present antiquity in part through the artefacts that the reader might see, rather than being understood as representing ultra-white ancient Greeks.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aesop Aesop's Fables Alexander the Great Ancient Slavery Aphrodite Architecture Argo Argonauts Ariadne Athena Athens Chorus Crete Delos Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Egypt Fable Gods Golden Fleece Graeco-Persian Wars Greek Art Greek History Greek Music Greek Philosophy Greek Theatre Hades Harpies Hector Helen Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Homer Iliad Jason Labyrinth Laurel Wreath Maze Medea Menelaus Minos Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Oedipus Olympic Games Olympus Oracles Orpheus Paris (Trojan Prince) Penelope Pericles Poseidon Pythia Scylla Sirens Socrates Sophocles Sparta Theseus Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Gender expectations/construction Heroism History Learning Past Relationships Society

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