Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Brush Your Hair, Medusa! 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/378. Entry version as of November 03, 2026.

Joan Holub , Leslie Patricelli

Brush Your Hair, Medusa!

United States (2015)

TAGS: Architecture Athena Hermes Medusa Nymphs Perseus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Brush Your Hair, Medusa!
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 Date	2015
First Edition Details	Joan Holub. *Brush Your Hair, Medusa!* "Mini Myths", New York: Abrams Appleseed, 2015, 22 pp.
ISBN	9781419709531
Available Onllne	abramsbooks.com (accessed: July 12, 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 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).

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Additional information

Summary

Medusa in this work is a very young child living in the modern world. The book opens with her looking crossly at a hairbrush. The reader follows Medusa's father's vain attempts to brush her hair. She prevaricates, jumping on the bed, doing somersaults, and brushing her toy mermaid's hair. Grandma arrives and is shocked to see Medusa's wild locks. Grandma takes Medusa on a trip. As far as Medusa is concerned, the trip is to get sweets. Medusa is taken to a hairdresser, who finally manages to tame her hair, and Medusa is satisfied when she gets a lollypop. The story closes with Medusa's father beginning an attempt to brush Medusa's teeth. A one-page summary of the traditional ancient myth closes the book. The summary is written in a slightly different register, written for the adult reader and/or children at the outer edge of the age bracket that the book is aimed at (i.e. 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. 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 *Brush Your Hair, Medusa!*, the dedication is *To finding your style*. This plays out in the book through the theme of Medusa's strong preferences, mixed with the need for her to conform to at least some extent.

Aspects of the myth of Medusa are carefully introduced into the visual landscape. Ancient Medusa is infamous for her head of snake hair; here Medusa has wild hair and plays with a snake toy. *Mini Myths* Medusa also has a mermaid toy, and the mermaid figure has a pronounced history of association with ancient myth through its frequent conflation with the Sirens. When Grandma comes to collect Medusa, a close-up shows her shocked – petrified – by Medusa's wild hair, a detail which reflects the tradition that a look from Medusa

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turns mortals to stone. Typically in this myth, Perseus defeats Medusa with the help of Hermes, which includes the gift of winged boots. Here the male hairdresser wears a cap which has a pair of ancient style wings on each side, echoing aspects of both Perseus and Hermes.

This title is unusual in the series for being the only one in which the child character is created from a monster rather than a human protagonist. This creates the potential challenge of the need to "defeat" the monster/child. This challenge is well-handled by the decision to focus on the adults tackling Medusa's essentially tame bad behavior and extreme hair, rather than more explicitly challenging or changing Medusa herself. Cutting the hair replaces cutting the head off, but Medusa does not actually feel chastened by the experience of going to the hairdressers, in fact she is pleased to have a lollipop. Her "wildness" is tamed without her spirit being crushed. This is well-handled in the sense that the book's primary aim is to help children face challenges in their young lives, and children who dislike having their hair combed or cut are likely to be encouraged by Medusa's positive response, where representation of more drastic action would be off-putting and therefore counter-productive.

The summary of the myth that comes at the end is also careful about the depiction of the dynamics within the myth. It refers to Hermes and Athena helping Perseus by providing *a sickle as sharp as scissors and a mirrored shield*, and nymphs providing "winged sandals" (for ancient traditions on this see e.g. Hesiod, *Shield of Heracles*, lines 216–236; Euripides, *Electra*, line 460; Apollodorus, *Library*, 2. 36–42; Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 3. 17. 3, and numerous vase depictions). Medusa is simply said to have been "defeated," avoiding reference to her death or decapitation – details perhaps regarded as too violent for a section still available to children, even if this section appears to be aimed at slightly older children.

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 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 for anyone, regardless of their ethnic background. Children at the outer edge of the age bracket for these books can also enjoy the summary that comes at the end of the book, which creates the

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	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	Architecture Athena Hermes Medusa Nymphs Perseus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Appearances Authority Child, children Disobedience Family Parents (and children)
Further Reading	Weinlich, Barbara, "The Metanarrative of Picture Books: 'Reading' Greek Myth for (and to) Children", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature. Heroes and Eagles,* Leiden: Brill, 2015.

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