Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Pheme the Gossip (Goddess Girls, 10) by Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/395. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Pheme the Gossip (Goddess Girls, 10)

United States (2013)

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Eros Helios Heracles Hercules Hermes Hydra Medusa Pandora Persephone Phaethon Pheme Poseidon Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Pheme the Gossip (Goddess Girls, 10)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Pheme the Gossip* (Goddess Girls, 10). New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2013, 272 pp.
ISBN	9781442449374 (paperback) / 9781442449381 (ebook)
Genre	Alternative histories (Fiction), Bildungsromans (Coming-of-age fiction), Fiction, Humor, Mythological fiction, Novels, School story*
Target Audience	Children (Older children, 8–12 years old)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, mauril68@gmail.com Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@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.

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?

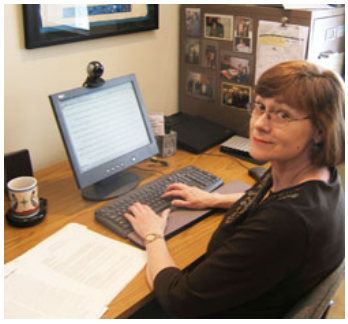
Suzanne Williams and I have written a new middle grade series called *Thunder Girls* (accessed: May 28, 2018), which is a twist on Norse mythology featuring strong girl characters. The first book Freya and the Magic Jewel releases May 2018 for ages 8–12, published by Simon and Schuster.

Prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com and Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

Suzanne Williams , b. 1953
(Author)

Suzanne Williams is an American prolific children's author and former

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Courtesy of the Author from her personal website.

elementary school librarian. She has written over 60 books for children.

She grew up in Oregon and graduated with a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's in library science from the University of Oregon. She currently lives in Reno, Washington.

Source:

Official website (accessed: May 29, 2018).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

Questionnaire

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?

Writing about Greek mythology was my co-author, Joan Holub's idea. She's loved mythology since childhood. Her enthusiasm for the subject got me excited about it too. *Goddess Girls* (ages 8–12) was our very first collaboration. Soon there will be 26 books in that series. One of the challenges we've faced in writing our (soon to be four) myth-based series for young readers is how to handle the sexual and violent content of many of the myths.

To downplay the violence, we often make it cartoonish and lighten it with humor. Since most of our gods and goddesses are pre-teens (as are our readers!), we deal with inappropriate sexual content by making changes that still allow us to keep to the spirit of the myth. For example: in introducing the Adonis myth, in which Aphrodite and Persephone fight over a beautiful youth they both desire, we decided to make Adonis a kitten, rather than a young man.

Another challenge has involved familial relationships among the

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various gods and goddesses. In *Goddess Girls*, Zeus is an adult, the principal of Mount Olympus Academy, the school attended by our "goddessgirls" and "godboys". In mythology he would likely have fathered a good portion of the student body! So we made a decision that only Athena would call him "Dad". (Until Hebe popped forth from a lettuce in Book 21, that is.) We do acknowledge many other family relationships. For example: Apollo and Artemis as brother and sister. Medusa and her sisters Euryale and Stheno. Persephone and her mother, Demeter.

2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

Myths have got all the elements that draw us to stories: action, conflict, drama, humor, etc. What's not to like?

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?

Neither Joan nor I have a classical education. I did take an online Greek and Roman mythology class a few years ago, however. (Taught by Peter Struck, University of Pennsylvania.) Terrific class!

For our Greek mythology-based series, Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* is the reference we rely on the most. My co-author and I do consult Wikipedia and other online resources, especially for lists of monsters and maps and general information about ancient Greece. References for *Thunder Girls*, our soon-to-be-published Norse mythology-based series include: *The Norse Myths* by Kevin Crossley-Holland, D'Aulaires' *Book of Norse Myths*, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* by John Lindow, *The Poetic Edda* (translated and edited by Jackson Crawford), and *The Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson (Penguin Classics).

4. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?

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In addition to *Goddess Girls*, my co-author and I have also collaborated on a second Greek mythology-based series called *Heroes in Training* (ages 6–9). It's a humorous quest/adventure series with Zeus, Poseidon, Hades and other Olympians as ten-year-olds on the run from King Cronus and the Titans. *Freya and the Magic Jewel*, the first book in *Thunder Girls*, our Norse mythology-based series, publishes May 1, 2018. I travel to Norway frequently to visit my daughter, granddaughter, and Norwegian son-in-law, so I am very excited to be doing a Norse-myth series. Aladdin (Simon & Schuster) publishes all three of Joan's and my mythology-based series. We will be doing a fourth myth-based series with them soon – for ages 5–8. Tentative title is *Little Goddess Girls*, and it will be another Greek myth-based series.

Prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

General summary for the series see under Athena the Brain.

The gossip girl Pheme is the centre of this book. Pheme appeared in many of the books so far, but always as a very marginal character who only contributed gossip. Here her story is developed. As the Goddess Girl of Gossip and Rumour, Pheme sees it as her duty and job description to get into everyone's business and report on it, often before she thinks of the consequences of her tales. She considers her gossip an art form. Pheme's words circle in little cloud-letters from her mouth, a graphic representation of how gossip and rumour spreads.

Currently, Pheme is trying to get into Principal Zeus' good graces so he will write her a recommendation letter so she can apply for a job in Teen Scrollazine, the hottest magazine around. All she needs is a really good piece of information to take to Zeus. Thus she snoops in the girls' dorms, seeing this as part of her job as hall monitor; being in charge of safety, "she'd probably even saved lives!" (p. 9). When Pheme snoops in Athena's room and reads her diary scroll because she is looking for something "juicy", a spell is cast on her by Athena which makes it impossible for her to gossip for a full day. When a stowaway is about to do something that will cause harm to the entire earth, she wants to tell someone and cannot. Her words come out as gibberish that makes no sense. How can she communicate the danger without the ability to speak? With the support of her friend Eros, she does her best to avert disaster.

Analysis

The goddess of rumour's dream job is writing for Teen Scrollazine magazine. She wants to cover important news stories and get some respect. So being a reporter gives her an official pretext to be noisy. This is a clever twist for the story; the Pheme learns to channel her nosiness into something more organized and she learns some responsibility along the way.

Pheme's personality is developed sympathetically in this book as the reader is shown that even nosy girls feel insecure, and that there is a reason behind her nosiness: "A surge of panic flowed through her as it always did when she worried others might find her

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uninteresting." (pp. 13–14). Pheme also wishes she had wings – an interesting wish befitting a gossip goddess.

Pheme is friendly with Pandora; "Maybe that was because she was as curious as Pheme was nosy, so they had a lot in common. The two of them, ignored by many students, had become friends." (pp. 40–41). The girls are not completely responsible for the way they are; they just need to learn to control their rather annoying habits in order to make more friends. The authors try to present them positively; Pheme is after all the goddess of rumor, how could she behave otherwise? Furthermore, we learn that she had a big family and felt ignored – another reason behind her behaviour. Later when Pheme goes for one day without gossiping, she gets a taste of her own medicine, learning through this experience: "It felt strange to be the object of rumors, instead of the source of them." (p. 139).

Interestingly, Eros, a godboy, likes Pheme. He says that their talents are similar: "Because we both try to help people. I help them fall in love. You help make them famous. Or infamous," (p. 144). It is an interesting concept to bind love and rumour in this way. He also mentions that if things go wrong when they use their talents, they are automatically blamed.

Another story introduced here is Phaeton's sneaking into the academy and riding Artemis' chariot without her permission, since he wanted to prove that his father truly was Helios and to reach him. This incident demonstrates how Pheme's rumour telling could be used for the greater good and is not always bad since she helped save Phaeton.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Eros Helios Heracles Hercules Hermes Hydra Medusa Pandora Persephone Phaethon Pheme Poseidon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Communication Family Friendship School Self Success and failure Values Violence

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Addenda

The review refers to the Kindle edition.

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