Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Surprise, Trojans!: The Story of the Trojan Horse by Joan Holub, Dani Jones ", 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/410. Entry version as of October 07, 2026.

Joan Holub , Dani Jones

Surprise, Trojans!: The Story of the Trojan Horse

United States (2014)

TAGS: Cassandra Helen Menelaus Odysseus / Ulysses Paris (Trojan Prince) Priam Sparta Trojan Horse Troy

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

General information	
Title of the work	Surprise, Trojans!: The Story of the Trojan Horse
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2014
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Dani Jones, *Surprise, Trojans!: The Story of the Trojan Horse* (Ready-to-Read). New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014, 32 pp.
ISBN	9781481420860 (paper book)
Genre	Instructional and educational works, Myths, Picture books
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il 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

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Dani Jones (Illustrator)

Dani Jones is an illustrator and writer form New England. She is an author and illustrator of numerous children's books. She has also produced and self-published several projects.

Source:

Official website (accessed: December 18, 2019)

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

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Additional information

Summary

This is an illustrated retelling of the Trojan War for a young readership, from the escape of Helen and Paris to the Trojan Horse. The main focus is on the Trojan horse which the Trojans unsuspectedly receive as a present. They celebrate the reception of the horse and the end of the Trojan War and they do not realize the horse is part of the Greeks' plan to attack Troy.

Analysis

Before the story begins, we have a short note from the author regarding the nature of Greek myth. This section is repeated throughout the series. The author also mentions at the beginning that the story she is about to tell is what the ancient Greek writers told.

The story is very clear and can easily be understood. Helen is said to have fled with Paris, without getting into too much detail. Only three Greek kings are mentioned – Menelaus, Agamemnon and Odysseus. We have no mention of any Trojans other than Priam. It is stated however that Troy was in Turkey. While it gives the children some indication regarding the whereabouts of Troy, they might think Turkey existed during the time of the Trojan War.

Menelaus is shown as quite mean, he also looks older than his young pretty wife. Paris is illustrated as a naive looking young man. Unlike Paris' honest face and big open eyes, Helen appears to be a bit mischievous, with narrowly closed eyes and a bit of a crooked smile. At the end we see her unhappy expression when she is taken back in Odysseus' ship (although it is mentioned that it took him ten years to return home). The blame for the war is not directed at Helen; it is said that Paris was the one who fell in love with her and took her to Troy. One interesting detail which is missing regarding Helen is her being the most beautiful woman in the world. It is interesting that the author chose to ignore such a dominant feature about Helen. Perhaps she did not wish to make her beauty the centre of the narrative. Maybe she wished to show Paris loved her not just because of her looks.

There is a general description of the wars as fierce ("It was War!") and then there is an explanation of Odysseus' plan to build the Horse and how the horse entered Troy. Cassandra is also mentioned as

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	warning against receiving the horse, but Laocoön is not mentioned. Even with these omissions, the story is easily understood and does not deviate from the mythological narrative. It delivers the tale of the Trojan War briefly yet efficiently.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Cassandra Helen Menelaus Odysseus / Ulysses Paris (Trojan Prince) Priam Sparta Trojan Horse Troy
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Love Tricksters War
Addenda	This review refered to Kindle edition.

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