Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Nyx the Mysterious (Goddess Girls, 22) by Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/522. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Nyx the Mysterious (Goddess Girls, 22)

United States (2017)

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Echidna Eos Hades Hebe Hera Heracles Hercules Hypnos Morpheus Nyx Persephone Phobetor Tartarus Thanatos Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Nyx the Mysterious (Goddess Girls, 22)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Goddess Girls: Nyx the Mysterious*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2017, 271 pp.
ISBN	9781481470148
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, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.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?

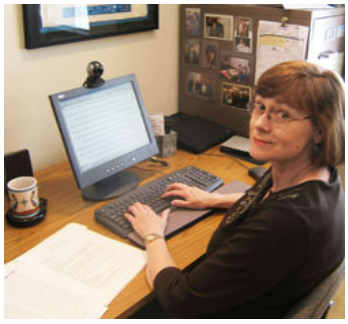
Suzanne Williams and I have written a new middle grade series called *Thunder Girls* (accessed: May 28, 2018), which is a twist on Norse mythology featuring strong girl characters. The first book Freya and the Magic Jewel releases May 2018 for ages 8–12, published by Simon and Schuster.

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

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

In this installment, we meet Nyx, the goddess of the night. 12 years old Nyx is a loner. She lives alone in Hades, from where she ascends to the heaven to cover the world with a unique night-cape. Nyx is invited to MOA by Athena and Artemis as an "unsung hero". She wishes to take this opportunity to educate the students and Zeus on the importance of night for relaxing and rejuvenating. She wishes to prove to them it is not frightening or alarming. She loves her job and is proud of it. In a related side-story, Zeus oversleeps because of the Oneiroi and mistakenly blames Nyx for this. He is angry because he missed a call for help from stranded sailors.

Analysis

The premise of Nyx's lone existence might seem a bit troubling to the young readers. Although Nyx is described as living a happy and fulfilling life, she is strangely the only character in the series thus far who is completely alone, without family or close relations (except her friends from the underworld, the brothers Hypnos and Thanatos and her two parrots). While adult supervision is problematic for some of the characters (for example Medea), they still have some kind of family relation to someone or to their substitute family at school. Even the nymph Echo attended school. Yet, Nyx is completely devoid of any social relations. She also resides in the underworld, yet she has no close ties with Hades for example. This is an interesting, yet somewhat puzzling, choice on behalf of the authors. Yet, associating night as glorious as Nyx makes it seem, with the loneliest character in the series, who also resides in the scariest place, is perplexing. Why couldn't Nyx attend MOA as well? Or have friends? Is it because night is still considered as a lonely time? Nyx's home also affects her; "living in Tartarus, she was surrounded by death and found it comforting and familiar." (p. 21). Again, the authors try to convey the idea that one should not fear night or death. But making death comforting to a twelve year old girl, even if she is a goddess, is a bit unsettling; she may be used to it, but can death be comforting? It depends on the circumstances.

Nyx is also described as a bit of an outsider, which is understandable due to her remoteness from society. She is a Goth (wearing black, with dark makeup etc.) and as a consequence she does not appear as happy and bright like the other girls, such as Aphrodite. The authors

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make it clear that it is okay for Nyx to look the way she wants, but, when Aphrodite gives her a makeover, the other students compliment her for looking more "normal". (p. 122). The new look does not feel natural to Nyx at all, however, and she soon returns to her usual appearance. "Normal" is somewhat of a sensitive concept regarding appearance, especially when dealing with adolescents. Why would the loner girl look different than anyone else? It is understandable that being a Goth corresponds to Nyx's identity as the goddess of night. However, being alone and looking different from everyone makes Nyx a target, whether intentionally or not. Even if in the end she is accepted by everyone, she is still the strange girl, the outsider. The authors aim at empowering girls and an important part of it is acceptance; accept those who are different than you, giving them a chance. Nyx is different than the other girls, and they are not sure how to accept his difference at first. Emphasising acceptance is challenging and thus the authors had to create a very different character to carry their point. Yet, it is puzzling why Nyx was chosen. She is described as stranger than Medusa for example, who is Green. Is this because night is a problematic concept? Do all the girls at MOA need to be the same? Nyx knows that people might be afraid of her (and her looks?), yet the authors again emphasize that what is important is who you are and not how you look or what you do.

Nyx is also the only character who was suspended from MOA by Zeus, who suspected her of causing him to oversleep. Thus again, Nyx is victimised and feared because of who she is and what she does, although she is perfectly innocent. While conflicts and misunderstandings occur in other books in the series , Nyx is the only one treated in this way. Even Echo was treated better after the troubles she unwittingly caused. Despite her efforts, night is linked to evil. Yet the authors are careful to show that these are false accusations and in the end, Nyx and the night are not bad at all, and should not be falsely feared (or accused).

The authors accentuate Nyx's insecurity with a very visual sign; a dark mist that covers her (and the room) when she feels uncomfortable and anxious. Such visualization of an inner feeling is interesting, since teenagers in similar situations may feel suffocated by their anxieties. Thus, Nyx's rather threatening mist is something with which readers can identify.

The book also raises an interesting concept regarding the role of the gods. Zeus explains to Hera, "if mortals can't depend on me – on all of

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	us gods – to help in times of need, how long do you think it will be before they stop listening to us and obeying our rules." (p. 198). This is a very interesting comment in the context of the series. While the relations between the gods and the mortals are described and the gods are asked to protect and help the mortals, this kind of lack of faith has not previously been mentioned, nor has the danger of mortals stopping believing in the gods ever been raised before. In the context of the series, there is no doubt that the gods exist, and the mortals can view them; they even shop in the Immortal Market, yet the faith of mortals is here presented as being dependent on the gods themselves. Neither is it clear which laws humans would stop obeying, or if the gods or men created the laws of society, nor, indeed, what would happen if the people stopped obeying them. This idea is not developed further and is restricted to this specific argument. Yet it does reveal a bit of the world of the series. In a world where gods are visible, then people perhaps have larger expectations from them. *Do ut des*. It is thought-provoking to find philosophical theorising regarding divinity and fate in such a series; perhaps this is reading too much into the authors' words, yet it does warrant further thought on the theme.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Echidna Eos Hades Hebe Hera Heracles Hercules Hypnos Morpheus Nyx Persephone Phobetor Tartarus Thanatos Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Appearances Character traits Coming of age Communication Conflict Death Emotions Fashion Friendship Gaining understanding Good vs evil Homesickness Identity Individuality Integrity Journeys Judgement Learning Magic Magic powers Names Peers Relationships Respect School Success and failure Teenagers Truth and lies

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