Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Iris the Colorful (Goddess Girls, 14) by Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/528. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Iris the Colorful (Goddess Girls, 14)

United States (2014)

TAGS: Aello Aglaia Amphitrite Antheia / Anthea Aphrodite Apollo Artemis Athena Celaeno Eurus / Euros Gaia / Gaea Harpies Hera Iris Medusa Notus / Notos Ocypete Pheme Phineus Styx Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Iris the Colorful (Goddess Girls, 14)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2014
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Goddess Girls: Iris the Colorful*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2014, 254 pp.
ISBN	9781442488236
Genre	Alternative histories (Fiction), Bildungsromans (Coming-of-age fiction), Fiction, Humor, Mythological fiction, Novels, School story*
Target Audience	Children (Older children, 8–12 yrs)
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 Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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?

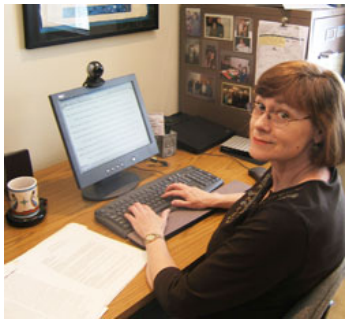
Suzanne Williams and I have written a new middle grade series called *Thunder Girls* (accessed: May 28, 2018), which is a twist on Norse mythology featuring strong girl characters. The first book Freya and the Magic Jewel releases May 2018 for ages 8–12, published by Simon and Schuster.

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 Iris. Iris' wishes make Zeus acknowledge her and her abilities, so she can be crowned as the goddess of rainbows. Meanwhile, the academy is facing a potential disaster when the titan Typhon is freed form Tartarus by his mother Gaia and comes to wreak havoc and destroy the Academy. Iris' resourcefulness, together with the four wind brothers, rescues the day. At the same time, Iris faces a dilemma when she and her best friend, Antheia, like the same boy.

In this book, Iris is facing a triple challenge; she needs to improve her rainbow-controlling in order for Zeus to recognize her talent; she needs to avoid being too embarrassed by her Harpy sisters and finally, she needs to decide whether to give up her crush on Zephyr for her best friend (and not for the first time). Juggling these tasks is complicated enough, but Iris then finds herself involved in Gaia's plan to destroy Zeus. But these are exactly the challenges that will make Iris a true goddess, not because she can better manipulate rainbows, but because she exhibits skill, wit and leadership. At the beginning of the story, Iris is frustrated; "it seemed like almost all the immortal MOA students were the goddesses or gods of something. However, even though Iris was a goddess, too, she wasn't officially the goddess of anything special." (p. 4). At the same time, while striving to belong and be one of the group, Iris equally tries to differentiate herself from her Harpy-sisters. This is more than an attempt to find an independent place in the word; as so often in the series, Iris' family is a source of embarrassment. In Iris' case, this is of course an extreme situation that practically forces her to be different from her sister. She is mostly afraid what others would think of her if they knew about her family ties. After realising her inner strength and coming to terms with her feelings, Iris can truly become the goddess of rainbows.

Analysis

Family and friendship are two important motifs which recur frequently throughout the *Goddess Girls* series. The peer group almost always appears as a second family, if not the more important of the two. The book emphasizes socialization as an important value. The bonds and relationships the students form help them in their path to adulthood.

The book emphasizes the sense of individuality, the desire to stand

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out. The wish to belong to the group and be like everyone else is a powerful emotion in teenage life, gods and humans alike. Iris wishes to be special too; yet by the end of the story she will discover that her strength makes her special, and not any official title.

Iris presents a very common emotion, shared by goddess girls and boys, as well as their mortal readership. Iris admits, “it can be hard to stand out at MOA…I’m not brainy like Athena…in fact, I’m not the official goddess of anything.” (p. 181). A similar sentiment is shared by Poseidon in *Amphitrite the Bubbly*, and reflects an issue of importance to many teens. Teenagers who believe they do not excel at anything feel that they are inferior to their peers. The purpose of these books is to teach that they all people special in their own unique ways. The book thus emphasizes the power of individuality, important in encouraging teen readers to develop self-esteem.

There is no attempt to portray the Harpies in a kind way, but, in a comic twist, they run a café in which they try to steal the food form the guests’ plates. Iris “loved her older sisters, but the three of them had a bad reputation for thieving and driving people crazy… She was always trying to keep their reputation from rubbing off on her.” (p. 99). This is a very common situation for adolescents; while they love their families, they try to build their own distinctive persona. Reputation is very important at this stage. The authors constantly use humor and comic situations in order to soften and smooth over harsher realities in life. Iris’ sister is a typical example of that. The sisters are portrayed as mischievous more than villains, and there is a sense of family love between them and Iris. The Harpies are not presented as their monstrous mythological counterparts; just as embarrassing and quirky sisters the readers can relate to.

Iris’s final step of maturation in the story is her decision to let go of her own crush on Zephyr in order not to risk her friendship with Antheia. However, in the end, she confesses her crush to her friends and this revelation brings them even closer. Thus Iris keeps her best friend and her crush. The moral is of course that girlfriends should not fight over a boy, but that the truth can help solve many misunderstandings.

The fact that Iris is the goddess of rainbows can also seem symbolic. Iris’ family is colourful and has many shades, from her Harpy sister to her more delicate image. Rainbows are a symbol of acceptance and peace, in this book they represent the inner peace and happiness Iris

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	achieves after her emotional development and growth. The rainbow is a symbol that Iris can accept herself, her family and her friends, without losing her own shine. The combination of all these elements, all these complicated emotions, contribute to the development of a stronger Iris and her strong rainbow.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aello Aglaia Amphitrite Antheia / Anthea Aphrodite Apollo Artemis Athena Celaeno Eurus / Euros Gaia / Gaea Harpies Hera Iris Medusa Notus / Notos Ocypete Pheme Phineus Styx Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Adventure Appearances Authority Character traits Coming of age Communication Conflict Desires Emotions Expectations Family Fashion Freedom Friendship Gaining understanding Girls Good deeds Good vs evil Humour Identity Individuality Integrity Invention Journeys Judgement Learning Love Magic Magic powers Maturity Names Parents (and children) Peers Relationships Respect School Siblings Success and failure Teenagers Travel Truth and lies Values Violence War

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