Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Medusa the Rich (Goddess Girls, 16) 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/530. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Medusa the Rich (Goddess Girls, 16)

United States (2015)

TAGS: Ares Artemis Athena Ceto Dionysus / Dionysos Euryale Hera Medusa Midas Pheme Phorcys Stheno Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Medusa the Rich (Goddess Girls, 16)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2015
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Goddess Girls: Medusa the Rich*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2015, 255 pp.
ISBN	9781442488298
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 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?

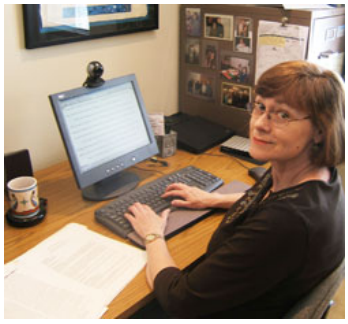
Suzanne Williams and I have written a new middle grade series called *Thunder Girls* (accessed: May 28, 2018), which is a twist on Norse mythology featuring strong girl characters. The first book Freya and the Magic Jewel releases May 2018 for ages 8–12, published by Simon and Schuster.

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 Myth*s by Kevin Crossley-Holland, D'Aulaires' *Book of Norse Myth*s, *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 of the *Goddess Girls* series, Medusa learns the hard way that all that glitters is not gold. Medusa, who needs to be careful not to hurt mortals with her stone gaze, deliberately asks for the golden touch. Medusa is the main heroine of the story and she accompanies Dionysus to his visit to King Midas; then she agrees to take the golden touch from the king, thinking it would resolve her financial problems. In this retelling of the myth, Midas is reluctant to have a golden touch; he is even eagerly encouraged to ask for it by Medusa. Midas is described as a gentle king who only wishes to help his kingdom recover after natural calamities caused by the Titan Typhon. Contrary to his traditional portrayal, he is not greedy, and when his touch turns his beloved roses to gold he quickly renounces the gift. The focus is certainly on Medusa and the lesson she needs to learn about the most important things in life.

Throughout the story we learn more about Medusa's unhappy home and her escape from her troubles through drawing comics. In the end, Medusa learns that friends are more important than riches, that keeping secrets from your loved ones is difficult and that she can always rely on her friends for help.

Analysis

The girl who can turn mortals to stone acquires also a special ability to turn objects to gold. This dual play on Medusa's abilities is a recurring theme in the book. This was probably the reason why her character was chosen to play a part in Midas' touch story.

Another part of the narrative is dedicated to Medusa's literary endeavours. We know from the introductory book that Medusa wrote a comic about her life and experiences (dubbing herself "the Queen on Mean"). In this story she wins a literary competition. The importance and therapeutic significance of this comic to her is emphasized; "in her comic-scrolls she could remake the world however she wanted. Which meant she could be an immortal superhero with parents who adored her!" (pp. 6–7). This is of course a heart-breaking statement. Later Medusa admits her mother never hugged her. Throughout the book we see how Medusa copes with an unhappy and unloving home; the reader almost wishes that her ideas about her parents are unjustified, but when they briefly appear, this proves that Medusa is

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right. Her parents were only interested in her sudden golden touch ability, and still do not really care about her who is constantly being belittled by her sisters. In fact the only ones who show real concern for Medusa are her pet snakes on her head.

There is a strong message in this story; reality is not always pretty and picture-perfect (even on Olympus) and sadly there are families like Medusa's in which children feel unloved. The book (and every installment which focuses on Medusa) empowers boys or girls in such a situation, by showing them that they are worthy. They can achieve great things on their own. What defines them in the end is not what their family thinks of them, but how they perceive themselves. They can still make good friends with others, and even find love on their own. This is the truly golden touch – the ability to create friendships and to sympathize with others.

Thus the series which aims at empowering girls in particular, shows the gradual change in Medusa's character through the stories focused on her. From a mean outsider she gradually becomes an integral part of the group of goddess girls, loved and befriended by them. She also learns to accept herself, regardless of what her family thinks of her. Each installment brings forth Medusa's strong yet relatable character. Although she could easily fall into the victim or monster clichés (a sin in the original myth), she proves to be stronger than that, a much more developed and humane character.

Only after Medusa accepts who she truly is, with her strength as well as weakness, she can be a true hero who helps others. (She even saves Dionysus in the process). The path to being a hero is the path through self-acceptance and friendship. Even a mortal girl like Medusa, who feels constantly conscious about her mortality in a world of immortals, can be a true hero.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ares Artemis Athena Ceto Dionysus / Dionysos Euryale Hera Medusa Midas Pheme Phorcys Stheno Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures,	Adolescence Adventure Adversity Animals Appearances Authority Character traits Coming of age Communication Conflict Desires

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and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Emotions Expectations Family Fashion Freedom Friendship Girls Good deeds Humour Identity Individuality Integrity Invention Isolation/loneliness Journeys Joy of reading Judgement Learning Love Magic Magic powers Maturity Names Parents (and children) Past Peers Rejection Relationships Respect School Siblings Success and failure Teenagers Travel Truth and lies Values Violence

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