Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: The Girls Games (Goddess Girls, Super Special) 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/531. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

# The Girls Games (Goddess Girls, Super Special)

*United States (2012)*

TAGS: Actaeon Amazons Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Bellerophon Chimera / Chimaera Egyptian Mythology Hades Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hercules Hippolyta Medusa Norse Mythology Pandora Pegasus Penthesilea Persephone Pheme Poseidon Thetis Zeus






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

| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | The Girls Games (Goddess Girls, Super Special) |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United States of America |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | Worldwide |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 2012 |
| *First Edition Details* | Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Goddess Girls: Super Special: The Girls Games.* New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2012, 320 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9781442449343 (ebook) |
| *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<br>Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com |



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## 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.

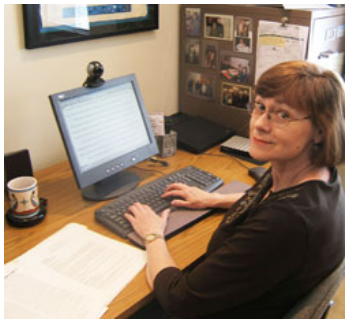
Prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com and Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

**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 special issue, the four goddess girls, Athena, Aphrodite, Artemis and Persephone, decide to establish an all-girls Olympic Games, after girls were excluded from the regular Olympic Games. This story also shows that small ripples can make a big wave. Now even the god boys are interested in the games, as Persephone wonders, “Since when had the boys started caring so much? … Not long ago they hadn’t even wanted the girls to have their own Games!” (pp. 205–206). The boys are caught up in the excitement and this leads to mutual work and understanding. At the same time, the girls learn about responsibility when Aphrodite finds a kitten, Adonis, and decides to adopt it, which causes rivalry between her and Persephone for the cat’s affection, in a humorous take on the mythological story.

Analysis

This special issue is one of the most girl-empowering moments in the series, with girls who do not give in and actively try to change things. Since the games are intended for girls only, paralleling the regular boys-only games, this is the first example of equality being achieved on Olympus. However, things prove to be harder than imagined, as there is no real sense of girls’ comradery at the start. Interestingly, the ones who make things more difficult for Artemis, are the Amazons. Artemis is nervous; she wants to prove she can organize the games, and muses that “If you acted brave, people usually believed you were.” (p. 163). The gap between appearances and inner feelings is a recurring motif in the series (as it is a regular behaviour in real life). Artemis’ own anxiety and her will to prove she can handle everything on her own causes the other girls to misunderstand her, as Athena thinks, “When it came to the Games, it was like Artemis had forgotten how to trust anyone else to do anything to help out!” (pp. 370–371). Artemis therefore misses the true meaning of the games, which are supposed to celebrate sisterhood around the world.

While the girls and the boys are not separate groups, but all work together to achieve a common goal, yet the girls are still afraid to disappoint the boys who coach them for the competitions. Thus on the one hand we have an all-girls event, yet on the other, the girls are still conscious of the boys, which dilutes the girl empowerment message somewhat.



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|---|---|
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Actaeon Amazons Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Bellerophon Chimera / Chimaera Egyptian Mythology Hades Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hercules Hippolyta Medusa Norse Mythology Pandora Pegasus Penthesilea Persephone Pheme Poseidon Thetis Zeus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Adolescence Adventure Adversity Animals Appearances Character traits Communication Conflict Desires Emotions Expectations Family Fashion Friendship Gaining understanding Girls Humour Identity Individuality Judgement Love Magic Magic powers Parents (and children) Peers Rejection Relationships Respect School Self Siblings Success and failure Teenagers Travel Truth and lies Values |
| Addenda | This review refers to the Kindle edition. |



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