Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Pandora’s Box and Perseus and the Gorgon’s Head by Marcia Dorothy Williams", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/681. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Marcia Dorothy Williams

# Pandora’s Box and Perseus and the Gorgon’s Head

*United Kingdom (1991)*

TAGS: Danae Epimetheus Medusa Pandora Perseus Prometheus Zeus






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

| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | Pandora’s Box and Perseus and the Gorgon’s Head |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United Kingdom |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | United Kingdom |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 1991 |
| *First Edition Details* | Marcia Williams, *Pandora’s Box & Perseus and the Gorgon’s Head*. London: Walker Books, 1991, 64 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9781406371581 |
| *Genre* | Adaptations |
| *Target Audience* | Children (age 7–11) |
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## Creators



**Marcia Dorothy Williams , b. 1945**
**(Author, Illustrator)**

Marcia Williams is a British author and illustrator. As a young child, she lived in several different countries with her mother (a writer), her stepfather (a diplomat) and her nanny. She was then sent to the UK where she attended several boarding schools. After working at several jobs, including as an interior designer and a nursery school teacher, she studied art at Richmond upon Thames College in Twickenham, London. She later went on to do an MA in Children's Literature at the University of Surrey, Roehampton in London. Williams is the author-illustrator of a number of books for children on mythological, historical and biblical topics including a number of retellings of classical myths and retellings of works of Shakespeare and Dickens. She began retelling classical myths to entertain her son when he was young. She continues to find out what entertains her young readers via regular visits to schools. She has won several awards including the UKLA Children's Book Award and The English 4–11 Picture Book Award.

According to the *Brief Biographies* entry on Williams, her 'mother, also a writer, had a passion for books, and when the two were together she would often read her daughter excerpts from classics and mythology. "I found Marcel Proust and the Greek myths a little hard going," the author recalled. "I was delighted, therefore, to discover later that many of these stories were exciting and amusing. I think this is why I enjoy making classic tales accessible to young children."'

Sources:

marciawilliams.co.uk (accessed: January 22, 2019).

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## Additional information

Summary

This book offers an adapted retelling of myths for children. The stories included are the creation of humanity by Prometheus, Prometheus and the sacrifice to Zeus, Prometheus and the gift of fire, Pandora's box, Perseus and the slaying of Medusa. There are little illustrations (cartoonish in style) which accompany the short stories (about 4 pages per story). The illustrations appear on almost every page.

Analysis

On the back cover it is noted that "the classics have never been so much fun." This is a precise description, as the stories are clearly meant to be light-hearted and even comical (the accompanying illustrations also help achieve this goal). The author delivers the myths in a humorous tone and alters them to accommodate the young readership. She pokes fun at Zeus, the king of the gods, who is described as rude, uncaring about humans and not as intelligent as Prometheus. He is a pompous and gluttonous king of the gods who punishes his subject mercilessly, and is arrogant about his power. For example, he boasts, "well, we're so heavenly...that the world would fall apart without us. We've got to go on forever, like it or not – and I like it – so pass the ambrosia!" (p. 9). The author, it seems, deliberately treats the gods as vain and even clueless, rather than as dignified or aloof beings, whose boasting seems empty and foolish.

It is Prometheus who receives the credit for creating human kind, for supplying them with food and fire. Prometheus is the saviour of mankind and his love for them is mentioned; his acts are contrasted with Zeus' who tries to harm them and extinguish all flame. This contrast between the two is attested in the ancient sources; the Aeschylean tragedy "Prometheus bound" emphasizes Prometheus' role as the savior of humankind. The gods are the ones who try to harm the people and destroy them. Pandora is described as "vain and self-centered" (p. 27), an annoying woman who constantly nags her husband. She is responsible for opening the box, since she thought it contained jewelry for herself. After Pandora opens the box and releases evils on the human world, Zeus is finally content and agrees to stop meddling with the humans for now. The first half of the book ends with the moral that hope will help humans face the challenges and troubles of life and that the gods will let them be.



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A slightly different approach is presented in the story of Perseus, who is aided by the gods Athena and Hermes. Athena seems to be struck by his beauty and bravery, saying that Perseus is "far too handsome to be turned to stone by Medusa" (p. 49). Since Athena is the virgin goddess of wisdom, it is a bit surprising that she agrees to help Perseus for what seems to be quite a trivial reason. It is interesting that although the author does not mention that Zeus is the father of Perseus (since the story of the golden shower would probably be difficult to explain to young children), she does write that Perseus was thought to be the son of a god due to his fine looks and bravery. She also does not shun from noting the prophecy given to Acrisius and its fulfillment, although she does not specify how he was killed by Perseus. What sums the story is the message that you cannot run away from fate; in the words of the author, you cannot outrun your fate, "even if you do lock it up in a box and push it out to sea!" (p. 63).

Thus both parts of the book end with didactic moral for the children, which suggests that while the stories are light and amusing, they also serve didactic purposes. It appears that this is why they were specifically chosen even when there is no apparent connection between the two parts.

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|---|---|
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Danae Epimetheus Medusa Pandora Perseus Prometheus Zeus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Adventure Humanity Prediction/prophecy Punishment Tricksters |



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