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Jean Marzollo

Pandora's Box

United States of America (2006)

TAGS: Epimetheus Pandora Prometheus Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Pandora's Box
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2006
First Edition Details	Jean Marzollo, *Pandora's Box*. New York, Bostaon, London: Little Brown and Company, 2006, 32 pp.
ISBN	9780316741330
Genre	Adaptations, Illustrated works, Myths
Target Audience	Children (5–10 years)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
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Creators



Jean Marzollo , b. 1945
(Author)

Jean Marzollo is an American children's writer who has written more than a hundred books. She studied at the University of Connecticut and Harvard Graduate School of Education. She also worked as a high school English teacher. Her most famous book series is I Spy.

Source:

Official website (accessed: February 3, 2020)

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Additional information

Summary

The story begins with Prometheus stealing fire from the gods. Zeus decides to punish humankind with the creation of a beautiful woman named Pandora. Pandora weds Epimetheus and Zeus gives them a special wedding present: a big box they are not allowed to open. Pandora finally succumbs to her curiosity and opens the box and evil bugs fly out of it. The bugs try to take Hope away from the box yet Pandora manages to trap Hope inside the box and save it.

This book is a combination between picture book and comic book. The colorful illustrations are large and take up all of the page but there are also specific words coming out of the characters, not as text balloons, but as floating text above or near the characters when they speak in first person. At the bottom of each page there is a row of little birds and some of them make humorous notes or question the events; for example why the bugs did not try to catch Hope in the box etc. However, there are no answers to these questions.

Analysis

On the inside of the cover the author writes to parents, teachers and librarians. She notes that Pandora's story was first told by Hesiod and she has tried to make his words less obscure for children and more visual. She adds that she discussed their own troubles and worries with a class of second graders, and this was what inspired the trouble bugs in the book. She mentions that the story can be read as a play (hence the word "bubbles" for the characters) and that the birds at the bottom are meant to represent a Greek chorus (hence the birds' musing on the plot).

The author narrates the story in a light tone. While she does narrate Zeus' anger at humankind, she tries to maintain a more humorous tone to show the unfolding events. For example, after receiving the fire, Epimetheus uses it to prepare oatmeal. Prometheus and Epimetheus are not described as titans, perhaps to avoid confusion between them and the gods, since the story is aimed at young readership.

From the beginning, Zeus reveals his plan to punish humankind using Pandora and her curiosity, using the box. The author chooses to illustrate and describe a very large box, big enough for both Pandora

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and Epimetheus to sit on, despite the fact that in the original myth Pandora receives a jar. It is possible that the author wished to make the reader empathize with Pandora, since such a big box surely intrigues one's curiously. The author then shows how Pandora vehemently tries to open the box, even jumping on top of it. This is a visual manifestation of her increasing and uncontrollable curiosity.

Regrading the evils which reside in the box, the author uses a pun to describe them: "out flew a flurry of trouble bugs. Each was named for a trouble that would now "bug" people on Earth." This is a nice and clear way to explain to young readers the meaning of the evils which were let loose. Among these bugs are also pushy bug, lazy bug, teasy bug, show off bug; thus the author deliberately chose to accentuate that the box contained not just the usual evils such as destruction or evil bugs, but also more mundane ones, which the young readers can more easily understand and comprehend since they are visible in their daily life as well. It is also a novel idea to relate faults such as "loudmouth" or "two-faced" to Zeus' punishment, and this shows that these bugs affected every aspect of human life and human interactions, and not only great catastrophes. For young readers, these concepts are more accessible and their illustrations also make the situation more comical, for although these bugs are not pleasant, they are easier to accept than apocalyptic evils.

In keeping with lighter tone of the book, the author provides the trouble bugs with their own voices. They speak to each other. They all turn against Hope and try to pull it out of the box. When Pandora realizes their plan she quickly shuts the ox, trapping Hope inside. This means that we never hear Hope and Hope does not offer any counsel or consolation in this story; rather, it is Pandora who understands herself the meaning of Hope. Hope is not a bug but a string of blue-green hearts on each of which a letter is written to form the word HOPE.

On the next page, we encounter Pandora, Epimetheus and Prometheus sitting together beside a bonfire. Prometheus is not punished in this tale and Epimetheus wears a HOPE logo on his yellow chiton. The logo is pictured with colorful letters.

Pandora asks Epimetheus whether people will always remember her for unleashing the trouble bugs and he replies that he hopes people will remember her more fondly. Prometheus tells her that it was his act of stealing the fire which brought the punishments on humans but

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it was she who gave them hope. This conversation breaks the mythological fourth wall in a way. Pandora is conscious about her reputation for generations to come and she has a right to worry, because she is remembered mostly for unleashing evils into the world and finding Hope is only her saving grace. In Pandora's stories, Prometheus is often not presented at all as the cause for Zeus' anger and he does not share the blame with her. The author tries her to rectify the myth by emphasising that Zeus' punishment was not due to Pandora's actions, but rather to Prometheus'. She was another victim. The birds at the bottom of the last page equate the dangers of fire and curiously and thus contribute to this sharing of the blame between Pandora and Prometheus.

At the end, the author offers her own interpretation of Zeus' conduct. It is concluded that Zeus was not "THAT mad at people" since he put Hope in the box as well and let them keep the fire. The author notes that "maybe everything that happened was part of his plan". It sounds reasonable that everything was indeed part of Zeus' plan, but it may be questioned whether the inclusion of Hope was enough to exonerate him from unleashing all the evils on humankind, and indeed from keeping fire from them in the first place? Zeus' pettiness is somewhat avoided and he is made the god who acts in mysterious ways for the benefit of humankind.

In Ciara Lendino's 2011 retelling of Pandora's story, Zeus (although he is not specifically named) is also made a benevolent king in the end, when Hope explains that the nameless king put her in the box on purpose.

The mythological Zeus put Hope in the box with the rest of the evils, yet he does not receive any special gratitude for this in the ancient narrative of the tale. There is less emphasis on Hope than in the modern adaptations of the myth, perhaps because of the ancients' belief of the deterioration of generations, since Hope does not make much of a difference if things decline anyway. In the modern context, however, of societies which grow more and more estranged and apart, the symbol of Hope is a very powerful one, that can change lives. The children to whom these adaptations are aimed, are given Hope as a positive and encouraging sign for the future, a beacon to shine their way of growing up.

Epimetheus Pandora Prometheus Zeus

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Adventure Conflict Emotions Good vs evil

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