Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Medusa Jones by Ross Collins", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1052. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Ross Collins

Medusa Jones

United States of America (2008)

TAGS: Cassandra Centaur(s) Cerberus Chiron / Cheiron Medea Medusa Minotaur Perseus Theseus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Medusa Jones
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2008
First Edition Details	Ross Collins, *Medusa Jones*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books (Scholastic Inc.), 2008, 138 pp.
ISBN	9780439901000
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Children (9–12 years)
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Creators



Photo courtesy of the Author/Illustrator.

Ross Collins (Author, Illustrator)

Ross Collins is an award winning illustrator from Scotland. He graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 1994. At 1994 he also won the MacMillan Children's Book Prize for his first book *The Sea Hole*. He has illustrated over 100 books and written more than a dozen, inluding *Medusa Jones*. London's Royal National Theatre adapted his book *The Elephantom* into a play with puppets which won great acclaim.

Source:

Official website (accessed: September 10, 2019)

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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?

I grew up reading the greek myths and watching dramatisations of them like *Clash of the Titans* Ray Harryhausen films and *The Storyteller* so have always had a fondness for them. I always particularly liked Medusa as a character and wanted to imagine what life would be like for a young Gorgon. I played pretty free and easy with the mythology so was able to just use the characters as archetypes to build my own story around.

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2. Why do you think classical/ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?

I think children will always be drawn to stories of heroes and monsters and the Greek myths have seldom been bettered. A lot of the stories are fairly simple and easy to grasp for a young mind and then the author can play with the characters and update them for each new generation.

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 studied Latin in secondary school and was appalling at it. My main inspiration were the books and films that I grew up with. I wrote the outline for my story, then researched the myths online and in libraries. I'm afraid as I wrote the book a number of years ago I can't remember particular sources.

4. Did you think about how Classical Antiquity would translate for young readers, esp. in (insert relevant country)?

My idea was to put Medusa in school with friends, Chron & Mino [see *Medusa Jones*]. They were the "freaks" and the "heroes" were the "cool kids". Young readers in any country could then easily identify with the characters.

5. 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 spirit rather than being tied down at the level of detail – is this something you thought about?)

I wasn't overly concerned with "accuracy or fidelity" as I was just using the characters for my own story and mixing up the legends. I didn't really have to be faithful to the original myths. In saying that, I didn't want to do anything that was completely wrong for a character

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– you come up with strange "lines in the sand" in your head when writing that isn't always evident to readers! However I did hope that young readers who already knew the myths would get a kick from seeing these great characters as children and that other readers who hadn't read the myths may have their curiosity spiked by my tale and use it as a jumping off point into the original stories.

6. Are you planning any further forays into classical material?

Not at the moment but never say never. I'd hoped to write a sequel to *Medusa Jones* where Medusa and her friends travel to Hades but sadly that never happened. I have had several notes of interest from animation companies for the characters so who knows...

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Additional information

Summary

Medusa Jones the gorgon lives with her parents in ancient Greece. She attends school but is bullied by the "Champions" group, Theseus, Perseus and Cassandra. They laugh at her and call her a freak since she (like her parents) has snakes for hair. Medusa is not allowed to use her powers and turn others to stone. Apparently, her grandmother, who lives in a cave, used to act in this manner yet Medusa's mother disapproves of such behaviour and tells Medusa that her grandmother is insane. Medusa wishes to be regular, in order not to be bullied anymore. Medusa's best friends are Chiron the Centaur and Mino the Minotaur, who are also bullied by the Champions; the trio forms the "Freaks' group". One day Medusa and her friends are forced to go on a camping trip with the Champions. While they try to distance themselves as much as possible, in the end the Freaks find themselves saving the Champions. Due to a terrible storm, the Champions are stranded on a narrow rock and the Freaks help them to cross safely to the other side. While they do not become friends, the townspeople appreciate the Freaks' heroic deed and congratulate them. The Champions, however, continue to harass them, being ungrateful, and in the deliberately vague end, we get the impression that Medusa finally turned them to stone.

The text is accompanied by the author's illustrations, which greatly contribute to the story. We see Freaks and Champions alike as regular children, with specific attributes for the Freak group. The illustrations also complement the comical tone of the story.

Analysis

In the prologue, the author writes that "a long time ago, in ancient Greece, lived a little girl named Medusa Jones. Medusa was a gorgon. But apart from that, pretty normal." This sets the tone for the story; a tongue-in cheek fictional tale using mythological characters. The addition of "Jones" to Medusa's name give her a more modern and "normal" feeling, she has an ordinary family name like any other girl. In fact, she is the only character who has one, therefore she is the most "normal" of them all despite the fact that she has snakes for hair.

Although the setting of the story may be ancient Greece and the characters are named after the mythological beings, nevertheless this world greatly resembles our modern one, as the illustrations perfectly

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show. The Champions act like bullies from modern schools. Medusa rides a school "bus" (a carriage) and even visits a beauty salon run by a French stylist. The author purposely makes the ancient context feels very close to the modern world of the readers. Medusa's monster-like friends are similar to regular children (except horns and horse's parts), Chiron even wears glasses. The mythological background is minutely woven into this tale, in the form of subtle hints. Readers who are familiar with the ancient stories would understand the irony and the in-jokes better, and those who do not will enjoy the story as is. For example, Mino's house is constantly being renovated hence it becomes a giant maze. Or the hints at Medusa's grandmother which recall the ancient myth of Medusa. Medusa's house has a collection of unique statutes, postmen turn to stone; the family treats them as likable decorations. The horror becomes an ironical joke.

The heart of the story, as in many growing up tales, is finding and accepting one's identity and self. At first, tired of the constant bullying, Medusa tries to become someone else and hide her hair. She even goes to a beauty salon and tells the hair stylist, "I'm sick of being an original…I want something normal." (p. 32). Medusa wishes to reinvent herself, to lose any sign of her uniqueness and blend in with the crowd. She does not see her originality as a positive mark, but as a curse; she wants to be like everyone else. This is a very natural feeling for adolescents, many of whom, especially if they are being bullied, wish to draw as little attention as possible to themselves and just blend in, or in a way, disappear.

Medusa finds out, however, that losing a big part of yourself is not that easy. In her case, it is very graphically shown when the designer tries to cut the snakes but they bite him back. This is a very obvious example of the harm one may cause oneself by attempting to forcibly erase one's own individuality. Furthermore, what is normal? We hear that the designer makes elaborate hairpieces, like a monkey riding a bicycle. It sounds absurd and laughable, and probably it would not have given Medusa the normality she aspires, since she considers normal what the readers would have considered funny.

The exterior grown-up world is also presented as trying to suppress the children's unique individuality. The grumpy teacher, Medea, is a stereotypical bad teacher who cares nothing for her students and also refers to them as freaks; her name may indicate that she is not suitable to educate young children. The only adult Medusa can turn to is her mother, who calms her and empowers her. She insists Medusa

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joins the field trip but helps her sneak in her three-headed dog, Cerberus. The dog gives Medusa and her friends the love and support they need while camping alone with the Champions. Caring for her dog reveals Medusa' soft side, her humanity (we should keep in mind she was human in Ovid's version of her myth for example), a quality the Champions clearly lack. Furthermore, in the illustrations the Freak appear to be wearing capes. They are probably blankets sheltering them form the storm, yet it makes them look like super-heroes, with flying capes, as they set out to save the Champions.

The author describes Medusa's feelings while using her powers. Usually we read that Medusa can look at an object and it turns to stone. Here, the author tried to imagine how it would *feel* for her to use her powers. She is not a monster, she chooses when and how to execute her powers. She feels great pain in her head, she can almost visualize this pain, which is "cold and white and sweet" (p. 127). Consequently it pains her to use it but it also has a sweet sensation. As Elizabeth Hale notes regarding the description of Medusa's powers, "This is a common trope in children's and YA representations of Medusa, which recuperate her and make her sympathetic. A victim rather than a villain."

It is not a surprising twist that the Champions are displayed as hollow, stupid and cowardly and the Freaks must save their lives. The true twist comes at the end. The Freaks return as heroes, they have grown up and learnt from this ordeal. Yet the Champions refuse to accept them and hence they are finally duly punished by Medusa. They become stone since they have no desire to change themselves and their attitude, perhaps, as Lisa Maurice suggest, they have a heart pf stone "so have become stone physically as well."

This story uses a reversal of the myth in that the heroes are bad and the "monsters" are good. It is similar to the concept of *Mount Olympus Academy* (Mythverse) for example, in which the gods are also revealed as evil and the monsters as better. The philosophical question of what makes someone a monster is insinuated between the lines of our story. In the end, we may conclude, the author wished to illustrate the message that it is not how good you look, but how well you behave and how good you are inside, that really matters.

Classical, Mythological, Cassandra Centaur(s) Cerberus Chiron / Cheiron Medea Medusa Minotaur Perseus Theseus

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Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Adversity Emotions Friendship Journeys Magic

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