Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Athena & the Island Enchantress (Little Goddess Girls, 5) by Yuyi Chen, Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1194. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Yuyi Chen , Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

Athena & the Island Enchantress (Little Goddess Girls, 5)

United States of America (2020)

TAGS: Aphrodite Artemis Athena Circe Hephaestus Olympus Persephone





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

General information	
Title of the work	Athena & the Island Enchantress (Little Goddess Girls, 5)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2020
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, ill. Yuyi Chen, *Little Goddess Girls: Athena & the Island Enchantress*. New York: Aladdin Quix, 2020, 88 pp.
ISBN	9781534479609 (ebook)
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Children (5–8 years)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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



Yuyi Chen (Illustrator)

Yuyi Chen is an American children's book illustrator from Washington. She also did 3D modelling, design and texturing and animation. Her books include *Doris the Bookasaurus* and *Going to Grandma's House*.

Source:

Official website (accessed: August 11, 2020).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il



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

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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

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

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

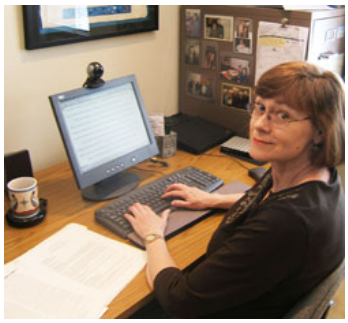
Each book in the *Goddess Girls* series (ages 8–12, Simon and Schuster) and *Heroes in Training* series (ages 7–10, Simon and Schuster) is a retelling of one or two Greek myths, with a twist. We stay as true as possible to the core bones of an original myth in order to give young readers a good understanding, 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.

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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



Courtesy of the Author from her personal website.

Suzanne Williams , b. 1953
(Author)

Suzanne Williams is an American prolific children's author and former 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

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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?

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 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

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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?

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.

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Additional information

Summary

In the fifth book of the *Little Goddess Girls* series, Athena, who has returned home in the previous book, is contacted by the fairy goddess Hestia who asks her to come back to the magical land of Olympus for a quest. Athena quickly clicks her magic winged sandals and is miraculously transported to a mysterious island. Upon arriving there, she is met by a yellow owl, Owlie, who hands her a key with an attached note that reads: "Help Heracles" (Athena has no idea who or what Heracles is). Owlie then asks her to follow him. On their way, the two arrive at a lake, where a sign reads: "Beware of Hydras." They soon encounter three sea monsters, a green one with 13 heads, a purple one with 10 heads and a red one with 5 heads. Athena and Owlie manage to escape while the Hydras start bickering among themselves. They arrive at a small shed and Athena manages to open the door with her key. Inside, they find a young boy (Heracles) holding a big club. He is shackled and deeply asleep. When Athena opens his shackles with her key, he wakes up. He was apparently under a spell. He tells Athena that he was asked by Hestia to rescue the queen of this island who, although is the rightful ruler, was captured by the evil and rich king Hephaestus who uses evil magic, and of whom everyone on the island is afraid. Heracles tells them he is going to ask the enchantress Circe to help him in his mission. Athena and Owlie join Heracles on his journey to Circe's palace. Heracles tells Athena that Circe blinks to switch her faces and each of her eleven faces has a specific personality. They find Circe in a room made of mirrors. Circe is reluctant to help them, believing they are spies of the evil king. Then she locks Athena in a tower and threatens the guards that she might turn them into pigs unless they do as she says.

Poor Athena is locked in her room when she suddenly sees a golden chariot pulled by white doves flying across the sky. Her three goddess friends, Aphrodite, Persephone and Artemis, have come to Circe's tower as well. They soon succeeded in freeing Athena. The group tries to convince Circe to join them in freeing the queen when suddenly the three Hydras burst into the palace. Together with the goddesses, Circe and Heracles manage to stop them. Hestia appears in order to congratulate the group on their victory and warn them of further dangers during their quest. The queen is said to be locked in the underground palace of the king so the group decides to go there and free her, no matter how difficult and dangerous it might be.

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In this instalment as well, the illustrations remain appealingly cute and cuddly. Even the Hydras are not frightening, reflecting the fantastic world of 8-year-old children.

The book includes a list of characters, a word list, questions on the story and authors' note, in which they give brief explanations about the goddesses, Circe and Heracles.

Analysis

The authors note that for this book they were influenced by *Ozma of Oz* (Chicago, 1907), the third book of Frank Baum's "Oz" series, with the character of the enchantress with the spinning face and the quest to save a queen.

This book, for the first time in the series, does not offer an independent, stand-alone, story, but rather serves as the introduction for the coming quest to free the queen. We meet new characters (Heracles and Circe), a new location (the magical island) and a new villain (King Hephaestus). Yet, the core remains the friendship as well as the individual growth of each character.

This story focuses on Athena. She was the group's leader previously who used her wits during their adventures, yet now she is facing failure, to which she is unaccustomed. After being locked in by Circe, Athena is disappointed in herself: "Goddess! She'd failed Hestia and the queen. Not to mention Heracles and Yellow Wing. Feeling sad and tired, she curled up on a stone bench and slept." (p. 44). She also blames herself for causing trouble for her friends who came to her rescue. It appears as if Athena takes all the responsibility upon herself, and needs to let others help as well. This approach is apparent during her conversation with Hestia after the battle with the Hydras, "Soon the tiny, glowing fairy-like goddess appeared. "Well done, all of you!" she said. "Huh? But what about the queen?" Athena asked in confusion. "I didn't rescue her yet. Didn't you want me to—" She broke off to glance around at the others. Hestia had called on all of them to help, she realized. Not just her. Good thing, too. Because it had taken teamwork to get this far. "I mean didn't you want… us to rescue her?" she finished." (pp. 72–73).

Athena learns to appreciate the help from her friends and realizes that they were all called in to help in this quest, it's not her sole responsibility any more. Hestia, who seems to read Athena's mind,

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replies that "Even the best of plans can run into wrinkles." (p. 73). Athena appreciates Hestia's use of "wrinkles" instead of "failures" since wrinkles can be smooth over. Hence, this story educates the readers on how to cope with failure and how to not let obstacles discourage you.

Regarding the mythological elements, the entire group is facing a Herculean task in freeing the queen. While the authors mentioned only the Hydra, the mentioning of the underground palace suggests that perhaps Cerberus might make his appearance as well. Heracles is a group player here and not an individual. Although he initially thinks he does not need Athena's help, only Circe's, he soon realizes the importance of being part of a group. Hence he is not a superhero by himself, all the friends share his success. We do not receive any additional details on this boy at this time, or how he possesses such strength. Circe is also an individual turned group player here. She joins the team and contribute her talents to the mission for the greater good, and not for her own personal benefit.

It remains to be seen in the next volume how Hephaestus' character is written into the plot and of course, the identity of the mysterious queen.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Artemis Athena Circe Hephaestus Olympus Persephone
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Emotions Friendship Journeys Magic

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