Charlotte Farrell, "Entry on: So You Want to Be a Roman Soldier? by Takayo Akiyama, Georgia Amson-Bradshaw", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1342. Entry version as of November 02, 2026.

Takayo Akiyama , Georgia Amson-Bradshaw

So You Want to Be a Roman Soldier?

United Kingdom (2019)

TAGS: Caesar Jupiter Latin (Language) Laurel Wreath Roman Empire





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

General information	
Title of the work	So You Want to Be a Roman Soldier?
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2019
First Edition Details	Georgia, Amson-Bradshaw, *So You Want to Be a Roman Soldier?* London: Thames & Hudson, 2019, 96 pp.
ISBN	9780500651834
Genre	Action and adventure comics, War comics
Target Audience	Children (9–12 years)
Author of the Entry	Charlotte Farrell, University of New England, charlottefarrell@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

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Creators

Takayo Akiyama (Illustrator)

Takayo Akiyama is a London-based, Japanese illustrator/cartoonist and artist with a background in print making and textile design. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design from Musashino Art University, and a Masters in Communication Design from Central Saint Martins in 2006. Her artwork has been exhibited in London, Tokyo, and the Angoulême International Comics Festival in France. Her comic books have been published by Edition Cambourakis and Misma Editions in France, and her illustrated books have been published by Thames and Hudson in the UK. Akiyama also conducts comic workshops for children.

Sources:

Author's website (accessed: July 21, 2021).

Author's profile on the Bookshop (accessed: July 21, 2021).

Bio prepared by Charlotte Farrell, University of New England, charlottefarrell@gmail.com



Georgia Amson-Bradshaw (Author)

Georgia Amson-Bradshaw is a children's writer, editor, and publisher. Her award-winning science books include the Royal Society Young People's Book Prize winner *Eye Benders*, and the London Science Museum activity book *This Book Thinks You're a Scientist*. Her passion for the natural world and ecological sustainability informs many of her publications. Her book, *Brilliant Women* and the book

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series, "I'm a Global Citizen" explore social issues including feminism, global warming, cultural diversity, and activism for the young reader. She lives in Brighton, East Sussex.

Sources:

Author's profile on the publisher's website (accessed: July 8, 2021).

Author's website (accessed: July 21, 2021).

Bio prepared by Charlotte Farrell, University of New England, charlottefarrell@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

Inspired by the book, *Legionary: The Roman Soldier's (Unofficial) Manual* by Philip Matyszak, *So You Want to be a Roman Soldier?* is an adventurous comic book that follows child characters Eddie, Kate and Angus as they explore what it takes to be a Roman solider. Their adventure begins in the Ancient Rome 100 CE wing at the history museum, where the children observe artifacts of various figures from ancient Rome: a stern image of Junia on a plaque; statues of Leontius and Metella; and a painting of Caesar. These figures morph to life when Kate and Eddie begin to imagine what it would be like to be Roman soldiers. The reader is taken along on their journey as they discover what it would have been like to have been a legionary, with an initially reluctant and much younger Angus in tow.

Junia sits at a career advice table handing out propaganda fliers that read, "The Empire Needs You!". An application form is presented to the children that requires them to testify that they are Roman citizens, are at least 5 ft 8 inches tall (with some exceptions for those who are particularly "sturdy"), have all their body parts, are unmarried, and have good eye sight. The children are then required to complete an entrance exam.

A quiz is provided to ascertain the most appropriate legion for the reader if they were to become a Roman soldier. This interactive aspect enables the reader to participate in the quiz and retrieve the answer on the following page. There is also a note for the reader to turn to page 93 if they want to learn to how decode Roman numerals. Through a speech bubble, Junia explains that there were thirty different legions named after either their motto or an emperor. Here the reader learns that legionary is another term for Roman soldier. Key technical terms such as these are bolded throughout the book and can be revisited in the Glossary.

Metella provides a "what to wear in the army" guide (pp. 22–23). She draws on historical facts to playfully educate the reader around why certain garments were more appropriate for certain regions due to climate, etc. She explains that red was a popular color for tunics because it's "cheap and it hides bloodstains really nicely" (p. 22). This sense of humor and play, particularly surrounding the more violent aspects of the Roman empire's military, recurs throughout the book.

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Once the importance of 34-piece armor, proper footwear, and helmets are explained to the children, they appear dressed up in military uniform with their weapons: a strong blade with a non-slip handle, well-fitting scabbard, shield, dagger and spear. The purpose of these weapons are explained to them by an intimating, shouting Caesar. Throughout the book, Caesar is the children's Centurion (soldiers who oversee a cohort of legionaries). He is a bully, barking orders at them and calling them "puny weaklings" and "maggot"'.

The army training challenges begin. The reader learns about the cavalry, Auxilia, Navy, and Praetorian Guard. Each description of these roles is accompanied by a pros and cons list, adding to the playfulness of the book. All of these roles are marketed as viable career options to both the reader and child characters in the book.

Along with Centurions that oversee a cohort of legionaries, the reader is introduced to other high-ranking figures including Military Tribunes, Praefectus Castorum, Tribunus Laticlavus, and the Legate. The Roman's enemies are introduced: Picts, Germans, Judeans, Berbers, Dacians, and Parthians. The regions that they come from (Caledonia in the case of The Picts which is modern-day Scotland) are explained, and a map on pages 88–89 clearly illustrates where these countries bordered with the Roman Empire.

After establishing these details, Eddie, Kate, and Angus all arrive at base camp, and the reader learns how grueling and tedious day-to-day life is like as a Roman soldier. The grounds are illustrated on page 53, visually representing the Principa and Barracks described on the opposite page. The soldier's daily routine is outlined: showers and toileting are social activities, where soldiers had to share a brush to wipe their dirty bottoms – what the author calls playfully a "bum sponge". Breakfast would follow, which would consist of cheese and cold meat. Roman soldiers were among the best fed of citizens because they had to be strong. Breakfast would be followed by a parade and roll call, sentry duty, housework, and more training. Following this, war preparations would be in order, including making a battle plan.

The physical formation of the group of soldiers - the "column of march" – en route to the battlefield is explained, with scouts (path clearers) at the front and rearguard at the back. The realities of one's campaign (mission) are shown to include building camp, and that a legion would march with a herd of cattle that it could periodically

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slaughter for its food, along with (lots of) grain. Negotiation with an enemy, before escalating to besieging a city, are introduced as more "peaceful methods" before violent battle would ensue. After storming a city, Metella gives another "how to guide": this time, on looting (p. 74).

Then, it's time for the Roman soldiers to fight, followed by (presumed) victory. The reader is instructed on how to celebrate a victory as well as how to qualify for one (including killing at least 5000 enemies). There is a list of activities when celebrating a victory "Roman style", including sacrificing a white oxen to Jupiter, and parading the General through the crowds in a chariot with his face painted red, also in honor of Jupiter.

At the end of the book, Junia asks if the children really want to be Roman soldiers. Both and Kate and Eddie decline, but Angus, the youngest, has "found [his] calling as a Praetorian Guard" (p. 87). Other Ancient job options are provided on page 96, directing the reader to the other book in the series, *So You Want to be a Viking?*

Analysis

Rigorous historical facts balanced with wonderful illustrations and humorous comic tropes make this book an engaging and fun way to educate young readers on the realities of life as a soldier in Ancient Rome. The illustrations by Takayo Akiyama are in various shades of grey, blue and orange, brightly leaping off the page. The characters are pictured with large and expressive facial features. Akiyama employs many effective comic book tropes in her illustrations including dotted effects in the vein of Roy Lichtenstein. There is a witty use of speech bubbles throughout the book, which often operate as playful, comic relief to the more detailed historical facts therein. The facts, however, are also expressed in a way that is frivolous and fun: the book employs lists, quizzes, and illustrations to communicate historical details in ways that clearly distinguish the book from an educational manual. Rather, How to be a Roman Soldier is a funny, playfully interactive book that uses humor to make details of the Ancient Roman military accessible and exciting for children ages 9–12. The book's humor is also effective when dealing with the more violent militaristic content.

In terms of engagement with the classics, the figures from Ancient Rome that appear in the book are introduced in the history museum at

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the beginning: Junia, Leontius, Caesar, and Metella. Kate, Eddie, and Angus' commentary about these characters is the only time in the book where there is an explicit engagement with them. Kate likes Junia, she says, because she was a teacher and bold and brainy "just like me". By identifying Leontius and Caesar's armor, Eddie notes that they must have been Roman soldiers. Angus says they look "scary", though "Metella looks kind" (p. 5).

Junia's presence in the book points to the author's feminist engagement with history. Junia is the famously eclipsed apostle from Romans 16.7 of the New Testament,* though another figure named Junia was the daughter of Caesar's mistress, Servilia** and was rumored to be Caesar's child. However, her representation in the comic is that of an older woman wearing a laurel wreath crown, so it is unlikely she represents the latter. Junia was also a common name of the period, so she may not represent a particular character from Ancient Rome but stand in as a general female figure in the book.

Furthering the feminist impetus of *So You Want to be a Roman Soldier?*, Kate furiously responds to Eddie's observation that "girls weren't allowed in the army back then" (p. 6). Kate retorts that Boudicca was Britain's warrior queen and she would have beaten the Roman army. Eddie ends up agreeing that Kate would make a great Roman soldier. Further, through an asterisks after the body parts proviso on the application form to enter the army, the author states that soldiers had to have "a willy" which they comment is "daft, huh?". In pointing this out, the author acknowledges the historical realities of sexism, while using Kate's excitement to participate as a Roman solider as a re-writing of this history for the young reader.

While many accounts of Metella paint her as "a woman of loose character"***, in *So You Want to be a Roman Soldier?* she is recast as a fashion-forward and friendly person, albeit materialistic as demonstrated by her "how to" guides on military fashion and looting precious objects. Caesar is the characteristic oppressive dictator, screaming commands at the children. Leontius appears only around the battle scenes, and in this book is also the author of "How to Storm Cities and Vanquish Enemies", a "bestseller" (having sold ten copies).

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* Ehrensperger, Karen, "Feminist Criticism", in Paula Gooder, ed., *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New*

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	Testament, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, 140–143. ** Smith, William, *A Dictionary of Greek And Roman Biography And Mythology*, London: J. Murray, 1876, 793. *** Ibidem, 526.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Caesar Jupiter Latin (Language) Laurel Wreath Roman Empire
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Adversity Authority Child, children Conflict Disobedience Fashion Femininity Freedom Gender expectations/construction Heroism Humour Interactivity Journeys Learning Obedience Past Peers Propaganda Punishment Sacrifice Travel Violence War
Further Reading	Ehrensperger, Karen, "Feminist Criticism", in Paula Gooder, ed., *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, 140–143. Smith, William, *A Dictionary of Greek And Roman Biography And Mythology*, London: J. Murray, 1876, 793. Kovacs, George and C. W. Marshall, eds., *Classics and Comics*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

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