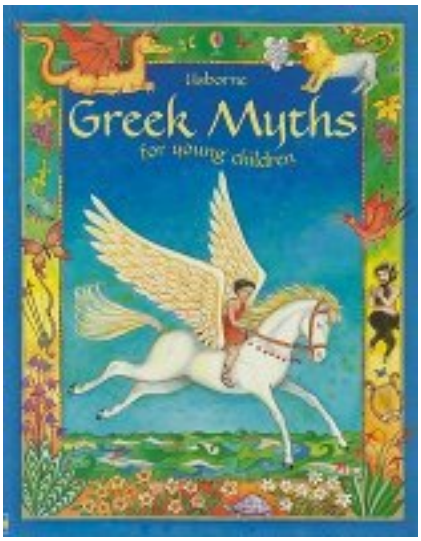
Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Greek Myths for Young Children by Heather Amery, Linda Edwards", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Dorota Mackenzie. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/324. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Heather Amery , Linda Edwards

Greek Myths for Young Children

United Kingdom; Spain (2000)



Courtesy of Usborne Publishing, publisher.

TAGS: Andromeda Aphrodite Apollo Arachne Ariadne Artemis Atalanta Athena Atlas Bellerophon Centaur(s) Cerberus Charon Chimera / Chimaera Chiron / Cheiron Circe Cupid Cyclops / Cyclopes Daedalus Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Echo Eros Greek Art Hades Harpies Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Icarus Jason Medea Medusa Midas Minos Minotaur Narcissus Odysseus / Ulysses Olympus Pandora Pandora's Box Pegasus Penelope Persephone Perseus Phaethon Polyphemus Poseidon Prometheus Psyche Pygmalion Telemachus Theseus Trojan Horse Trojan War Twelve Labours of Heracles Zeus



General information	
Title of the work	Greek Myths for Young Children
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2000
First Edition Details	Heather Amery, *Greek Myths for Young Children*. London: Usborne, 2000, 128 pp.
ISBN	9780746037256
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Target Audience	Children (c. 6–11)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@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.

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Creators



Heather Amery (Author)

Heather Amery is a prolific children's author and adaptor. She has contributed several titles to the Usborne 'First thousand words' series, the Usborne Wind-Up Books series. Amery is also the author of the *Usborne Illustrated Children's Bible*, *The Usborne Book of Fairy Stories*, *The Amazing Adventures of Ulysses* (Usborne Young Readers;) *The Complete Book of Farmyard Tales*, *Rome and Romans*, and *Usborne Stories from Around the World*.

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Linda Edwards (Illustrator)

Linda Edwards is an artist and illustrator. She was born in Africa and is now based in Shropshire in the UK. Edwards describes her work as having a "lyrical, naive, decorative style". (see here, accessed: July 3, 2018).

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Additional information

Translation

Spanish: Heather Amery, *Mitos griegos para niños*, transl. Pilar Dunster, Usborne, 2004.

Summary

This is a highly illustrated volume of myths retold for children.

Contents:

1. *About the Greek Myths*
2. *The Gift of Fire*
3. *Pandora's Box*
4. *Persephone and the Seasons*
5. *The Story of Arachne*
6. *The Many Tasks of Heracles (Intro, plus 12 Labours)*
7. *Echo and Narcissus*
8. *Daedalus and Icarus*
9. *Bellerophon and the Flying Horse*
10. *Jason and the Golden Fleece (Intro, Argo Sets Sail, The Harpies, The Clashing Rocks, Fire-Breathing Bulls and Dragon's Teeth, The Golden Fleece).*
11. *King Midas*
12. *The Adventures of Perseus (Intro, Medusa, Andromeda, Prophecy).*
13. *The Chariot of the Sun*
14. *The Adventures of Odysseus (Intro, The Wooden Horse, Cyclops – the One-Eyed Giant, A Bag of Winds, Circe's Magic, The Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, Sacred Cattle, Storm and Shipwreck, The Goddess Calypso, Home at Last, The Test of Strength).*
15. *Theseus and the Minotaur*
16. *Pygmalion and his Wife*
17. *Eros and Psyche*
18. *Greek Names*

Analysis

About the Greek Myths explains that the myths are stories from 'thousands of years ago', and that ancient Greeks 'believed that gods and goddesses were all around them'; the deities could be kind or

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mean; ordinary people got 'caught up in extraordinary events, 'foolish and wicked people are punished, but the brave and daring are richly rewarded.' The myths that follow are retold in a light narrative style suitable for young readers. All of the myths are presented with illustrations, but not all pages, or double-pages contain illustrations; as such, while this book is suitable for young readers who have recently learned to read, it is not aimed primarily at those who cannot yet read. All of the pages contain decorative borders, with motifs from ancient artwork or nature. Most of the gods and heroes are depicted with black hair. In *Eros and Psyche*, Chiron is depicted as a grey-bearded white man wearing a long, dark hooded robe, in the manner of a sinister medieval monk or similar.

Pandora's Box is explicitly linked to the preceding story of fire, which softens the sense of blame attached to Pandora when things go wrong (Zeus 'decided to punish' mortals). This reflects the Hesiodic traditions, in which Pandora is sent by Zeus to earth with the jar of evils in order to punish mortals for learning things that he wished to keep from them – particularly the secret of fire (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 42–108; Hesiod, *Theogony*, 585–615). The box is twice depicted as a small, highly decorated jewellery-style box, after the 16th century CE Lilius Giraldus of Ferrara tradition. The sorrows are depicted as a stream of horned, spear-wielding demons and bats. Hope is 'very small and pretty', but not explicitly described beyond that or depicted.

Persephone and the Seasons tells the story of Persephone's descent and return from the Underworld, drawing on the traditions found in the *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. This retelling normalises Hades' abduction of Persephone (he 'had fallen in love with her, but knew Demeter would never…'). Nonetheless, Hades, not Demeter, is represented as the ultimate cause of the decline on earth, with a sympathetic account of Demeter's desperate search helping the reader to understand that Hades' actions had a negative impact on her and, as a result, on everybody else. An unnamed goddess advises Zeus that Hades must release Persephone so that *Demeter will save the Earth*. Hermes tells Hades that he should *be reasonable. You know Persephone doesn't love you and won't marry you*. Persephone's consumption of the pomegranate seeds that bind her to the Underworld is presented as a mistake – she denies that she had any appetite to eat while in Hades, and when an anonymous gardener reveals that he saw her eat the pomegranate she explains that this was due to her thirst. As such, there is no sense of Persephone accepting Hades/accepting them from Hades, so the narrative avoids

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the problematic implication that abduction leads to romantic attachment. Persephone and Demeter 'accept' the compromise, although it is implied that they are both happier when Persephone is away from Hades. This is an interesting representation of a myth that presents challenges in retellings for young children. While the description of Hades' 'love' for Persephone initially provides a justification for a violent act, the story goes no further in presenting the abduction narrative as a 'love story' as such. As such, this retelling communicates the essentials of the traditional myth, particularly the aetiology for the seasons, while largely avoiding conveying messages that endorse coercive marriage or rape culture.

The Story of Arachne is a retelling of the myth of Arachne, known from antiquity now only through Ovid's version (and perhaps invented by Ovid himself) (*Metamorphoses*, 6.5–145). This retelling largely follows Ovid's account, but with the overall removal of elements of sex and violence. Ovid emphasises the brilliance of the obscene scene that Arachne weaves into her tapestry, which is superior to Athene's. In this version, Arachne and Athene weave 'unusual patterns'. Ovid has Athene transform Arachne into a spider after the young woman has hanged herself. Here Athena transforms her straightaway in revenge.

The Many Tasks of Heracles is explicit that Heracles is Hera's 'step-son'. The Intro includes the snake attack in the cradle, and the murder of Heracles' children, before the 12 labours appear as separate though related stories. Reflecting ancient iconography, there is repeated reference to and a depiction of King Eurystheus hiding in a large pot, a detail drawn from ancient images of Eurystheus hiding in a pot to escape the Erymanthian Boar The Erymanthian Boar myth is related according to the tradition in Apollodorus (*Library*, 2. 83) in which Heracles feasts with centaur friends before the hunt; it is the centaurs rather than the boar that are depicted, perhaps because of the appeal of their fantastical forms. During the quest for The Amazon Queen's Belt, Heracles kills Hippolyta accidentally in the fight, which makes him 'very sad.' This is an effective compromise in relating the traditional myth in a softer way for a young, modern audience; Heracles is not as violent as he can appear in ancient traditions surrounding this myth and the narrator intervention describing Heracles' feelings about Hippolyta's death also help to guide the young reader in their response to the killing of an innocent woman.

In *Echo and Narcissus*, Echo is punished for telling lies as well as talking too much. Artemis punishes Narcissus 'for being so vain and

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cruel'. He falls in love with his own 'beautiful' face; the reader knows that Narcissus does not recognise himself, but there is no speculation on who he thinks it is (unlike e.g. Enid Blyton's 1965 *Tales of Long Ago*, with an entry elsewhere in this database in which he thinks it is an explicitly female nymph). The story concludes with Narcissus killing himself because he feels 'rejected' by 'the face,' and his narcissus flowers springing up 'where his body lay'.

Daedalus and Icarus connects the disparate parts of this myth by opening with 'cruel, wicked' King Minos inviting Daedalus to do some work for him. Daedalus creates the labyrinth, but is disconcerted when he learns that it is to house the Minotaur. Minos then declares that he will keep the inventor and his son prisoner so that they cannot reveal the secret of the maze. Over-excited, Icarus forgets Daedalus' flying advice and drowns. By including the traditions about the Minotaur and the maze, less emphasis is placed on Icarus' 'fault' in flying recklessly. The story becomes more of a series of unfortunate, unlooked-for consequences. While the message about remembering good parental advice remains, it is balanced by other factors. The tradition about Daedalus murdering his nephew and flee to Crete is avoided (Diodorus 4.76–79; Apollodorus 3.15; 3.65). This is perhaps because of a combination of its sinister quality and because of the way it complicates an already complex set of events in a way that might prove unnecessarily challenging for a young reader.

Bellerophon and the Flying Horse begins, rather unusually in children's retellings, with the explanation of why Bellerophon is challenged to kill the Chimera. Rather than detailing the false rape accusation, which most people would consider unsuitable for a young audience, the narrator explains that the king's wife told the king that Bellerophon had 'insulted her', and that 'the King didn’t know that this wasn’t true and was very, very angry.' The narrator then explains why King Proteus and King Iobates felt uncomfortable about killing Bellerophon , their guest. Athene helps by providing the bridle. The Chimera is killed by arrows in the side and mouth (without the extended details about lead and poisoning and so on). In a further unusual development, the story then concludes with the account of Bellerophon becoming 'conceited' and ending up an outcast. As this is a sombre note to finish on, not all modern authors include it in children's retellings, however its appearance here conveys a moral message about being a good winner.

Jason and the Golden Fleece includes the tradition about Jason

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earning Hera's help when he unknowingly helps her across a river. Athene also appears in the story, providing a 'magic oak branch' to protect the Argo. Atalanta, 'the huntress' is included amongst the Argonauts, following the Apollodorus tradition (*Bibliotheca* 1. 9. 16), rather than Apollonius of Rhodes who has Jason reject her (*Argonautica*, 1.769–773). Orpheus, Heracles, and the twin sons of the North Wind are also named, and the latter can be seen in the illustration flying above the ship by means of their winged ankles. The Harpies and Cashing rocks are described as well as the challenge to get the fleece itself. Medea helps Jason because she falls in lve with him and knows that he cannot succeed without her interventions. Jason then takes the throne from Pelias, and Jason and Medea live happily for many years ruling Corinth and Iolcus 'wisely and well.' This description finishes the story on a satisfying positive note, without getting into the difficulties described in Euripides' Medea.

King Midas includes both the golden touch and donkey ears myths. Midas gets his wish from Dionysus because of the assistance Midas provides to Dionysus' 'companion', the satyr Silenus. Dionysus tries to warn Midas, but Midas is too excited to consider his decision properly. The donkey ears myth is related with the explanation that 'Midas had learned not to be greedy, but he was still foolish.'

Athene and Hermes appear to Perseus in *The Adventures of Perseus*, providing him with the shield, winged sandals, helmet of invisibility, sickle, and bag that he needs to overcome Medusa. The account of his fight with the monster is very brief. The story moves swiftly onto Andromeda, who Perseus rescues and marries. This retelling is unusual in ending with the fulfilment of the prophecy: Perseus accidently kills his grandfather with a discus.

The Chariot of the Sun shares the responsibility for the outcome between Phaeton and Helios. Zeus calls Phaeton a 'foolish young man', but the story ends on Helios resolving to 'never, ever let anyone drive his sun chariot again.' There is aetiology for deserts, but not dark skin.

In *The Adventures of Odysseus*, Odysseus is described as having led the Greeks to Troy. This alteration of the traditional story (for which see primarily Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) appears to have been made in order to add sense to the simplified version of the end of the war, which has no other named leaders (although there is reference to another king). Helen has been 'captured', and the war is to rescue her. Some say a 'thousand ships' came to Troy, a detail which echoes

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Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*':

FAUSTUS: Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,

And burnt the topless towers of Ilium—

Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.—

(Act 5, Sc.1)

These lines from Marlowe's 16th century play, in which the shade of Helen makes a brief appearance, represent one of the most famous references to Helen of Troy, and arguably to the Trojan War itself. In including the paraphrase in this retelling, the author familiarises young readers with this aspect of the later Troy tradition, as well as the ancient. By hearing them early in their lives, in this context, young readers are being inducted into a wider cultural tradition and helped to relate the lines of the play to their knowledge of myth.

The Sirens are illustrated with human feet, distinguishing them from mermaids. Poseidon changes the Phaeacians' ship to stone as it drops Odysseus off on Ithaca. The story ends with Penelope and Odysseus reunited following the bed-test. The ending stresses the importance of homecoming that is so fundamental to the Odyssey, and is arguably a more satisfying ending than the unsettling open-endedness of the winnowing fan prophecy.

Theseus and the Minotaur tells the myth in a traditional manner, except that there is no inclusion of the Aegeus sail-message sub-narrative, or of Theseus abandoning Ariadne, so the story finishes on an upbeat note as the escapees leave for Athens. Theseus is described as 'a very brave, clever young man', a contrast to, for example, Savior Pirotta's 'brave but foolhardy' Theseus (see *First Greek Myths*, 2003, elsewhere in this database).

Pygmalion wants to get married but cannot find a woman he likes because he considers them, *all cold and hard-hearted*. This essentially misogynistic position is clearly presented as Pygmalion's own, but the narrator or the development of the narrative, leaving the myth's ancient values in place, does not challenge it in any way.

The story of *Eros and Psyche* concludes the collection, drawing on Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (also known as *The Golden Ass*). Zeus, 'in a good mood', makes Psyche immortal. The myths conclude with them

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	being 'very happy.' A pronunciation guide to Greek names at the back of the book encourages child and adult readers to have confidence in reading potentially unfamiliar names. This is a charming collection of myths which demonstrates the author's care in researching ancient traditions as well as their judgement in softening elements of sex, violence and, to some extent, sexism and racism that appear in some of the ancient traditions. Typically heroes are represented as less morally ambiguous than they are in some ancient traditions: Theseus does not let down his father or Ariadne; Heracles does not mean to kill Hippolyta. Some of the potentially scary elements of the stories are included, however; such as Bellerophon's fall, and Narcissus' suicide. The myths therefore present a complex world, and child readers have many challenging topics to explore. As promised in the book's introduction, the gods appear throughout the stories, providing help and doling out revenge. Ancient Greece is thereby rendered a fantastic and magical environment in which astonishing things can happen, bringing horror and joy.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Andromeda Aphrodite Apollo Arachne Ariadne Artemis Atalanta Athena Atlas Bellerophon Centaur(s) Cerberus Charon Chimera / Chimaera Chiron / Cheiron Circe Cupid Cyclops / Cyclopes Daedalus Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Echo Eros Greek Art Hades Harpies Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Icarus Jason Medea Medusa Midas Minos Minotaur Narcissus Odysseus / Ulysses Olympus Pandora Pandora's Box Pegasus Penelope Persephone Perseus Phaethon Polyphemus Poseidon Prometheus Psyche Pygmalion Telemachus Theseus Trojan Horse Trojan War Twelve Labours of Heracles Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Coming of age Death Family Heroism Parents (and children) Relationships Suicide
Further Reading	Foley, Helene P., *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Princeton: Princeton

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