

Rick Riordan

## Percy Jackson & The Olympians (Series, Book 1): The Lightning Thief

United States (2005)

TAGS: [Ares](#) [Athena/ Athene](#) [Centaur](#) [Cerberus](#) [Charon](#) [Chimaera](#) [Chimera](#) [Delphic Oracle](#) [Dionysus](#) [Echidna](#) [Furies](#) [Hades](#) [Heroic itinerary](#) [Iris](#) [Katabasis](#) [Kronos / Cronus / Cronos](#) [Land of the Lotus Eaters](#) [Lotus-eater](#) [Medusa](#) [Minotaur](#) [Monsters](#) [Nereid](#) [Olympus](#) [Pan](#) [Perseus](#) [Poseidon](#) [Procrustes](#) [Satyr](#) [Underworld](#) [Zeus](#)



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

General information	
<i>Title of the work</i>	Percy Jackson & The Olympians (Series, Book 1): The Lightning Thief
<i>Country of the First Edition</i>	United States of America
<i>Country/countries of popularity</i>	Worldwide
<i>Original Language</i>	English
<i>First Edition Date</i>	2005
<i>First Edition Details</i>	Rick Riordan, <i>Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief</i> . New York: Hyperion books for children, 2005, 375 pp.
<i>ISBN</i>	9780141319131
<i>Official Website</i>	<a href="http://rickriordan.com">rickriordan.com</a> (accessed: July 6, 2018)

<i>Awards</i>	Sunshine State Young Readers' Award for Grades 6-8 in 2007; Young Readers' Choice Award in 2008; South Carolina Book Award for Junior Book in 2008; Grand Canyon Reader Award for Tween Book in 2008; Nene Award in 2008; Massachusetts Children's Book Award in 2008; Pennsylvania Young Readers' Choice Award for Grades 6-8 in 2008; Pacific Northwest Library Association Young Readers' Choice Award for Intermediate in 2008; Oklahoma Sequoyah Award for YA in 2008; Rebecca Caudill Young Reader's Book Award in 2009; Iowa Teen Award in 2009; Books I Loved Best Yearly (BILBY) Awards for Older Readers in 2011.
<i>Genre</i>	Action and adventure comics, Alternative histories (Fiction), Fantasy fiction, Mythological fiction, Novels
<i>Target Audience</i>	Crossover (Aimed at ages 9+. The protagonist begins the series aged 12. Used in U.K. schools as part of the Ancient Greece module in the 9-11 age range.)
<i>Author of the Entry</i>	Kimberly MacNeill, University of Roehampton, macneilk@roehampton.ac.uk
<i>Peer-reviewer of the Entry</i>	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Dorota Mackenzie, Warsaw University, dorota.mackenzie@gmail.com



## Creators



### **Rick Riordan , b. 1964 (Author)**

Rick Riordan previously taught History and English at middle school in the American education system. He began writing mystery novels for adult readers before creating the *Percy Jackson* series, which began as a bedtime story for his son. Prior to *Percy Jackson*, his adult crime novels the *Tres Navarre* series received numerous nominations and awards. Most notably the final novel in the series, *Rebel Island*, won the Anthony Award, Shamus Award and The Edgar Allan Poe Award - the "big three" of the mystery genre. Though it is through the success of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* and its subsequent purchase by Disney which has led Riordan to leave teaching to pursue writing as a full-time career. He is now one of the *New York Times* bestselling authors.

[Q&A](#) with the Author (accessed: January 10, 2018).

Bio prepared by Kimberly MacNeill, University of Roehampton,  
[macneilk@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:macneilk@roehampton.ac.uk)

---



### Additional information

#### Adaptations

Audiobook: English, German, Polish, Swedish

Film: *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, 2010, (20th Century Fox, directed by Chris Columbus .

Graphic novel: *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief: The Graphic Novel*. Adapted by Robert Venditti, Art by Attila Futaki, 2010, Puffin books.

Musical: Opened off Broadway March, music and lyrics by Rob Rokicki (accessed: January 10, 2018).

---

#### Translation

Translated into 35 languages:

Bengali: *পের্‌সি জ্যাকসন ও অলিম্পিয়ান* . trans. Moheul Islam Mithu, *পের্‌সি জ্যাকসন*, 2014.

Bulgarian: *Похитителят на мълнии*. trans. Владимир Молев, Егмонт България, 2010.

Chinese: *The Lightning Thief*. Yuan Liu Chu Ban Gong 2009.

Croatian: *Kradljivac gromov*. trans. Andrea Marić, Algoritam, 2010.

Czech: *Zloděj blesku*. Fragment, 2009.

Danish: *Lyntyven*. Carlsen, 2010.

Dutch: *De bliksemdief*. trans. Marce Noordenbos, Mynx, 2009.

Estonian: *Välguvaras*,. trans. Sash Uusjärv, Pegasus, 2014.

Finnish: *Salamavaras*. trans. Ilkka Rekiaro, Otava, 2008.

French: *Percy Jackson: Le Voleur de foudre*. trans. Mona de Pracontal, Albion Michel, 2008.

Georgian: *მეხის ქურდი*. trans. ნიკა სამუშია, ბაკურ სულაკაურის გამომცემლობა, 2014.

---



Greek (modern): *Η κλοπή της αστραπής*. trans. Αναστασία Λαμπροπούλου, Πάπυρος, 2009.

German: *Percy Jackson Diebe im Olymp*. Carlsen, 2010.

Hebrew: פֶּרְסִי ג'ַ'קֶּסֶן וְהַגֵּבּוּלִים. trans. אֶבְרָהָם בֶּרֶק, publisher אֶבְרָהָם בֶּרֶק 2008, אֶבְרָהָם.

Hungarian: *A villámtolvaj*. 2008.

Indonesian: *The Lightning Thief - Pencuri Petir*. trans. Femmy Syahrani, Mizan Fantasi, 2008.

Italian: *Il ladro di fulmini*. trans. Loredana Baldinucci, Mondadori, 2010.

Japanese: パーシ・ジャクソンと雷の盗人. 2006.

Lithuanian: *Žaibo vagis*. trans. Jūratė Pavlovičienė, Obuolys, 2010.

Norwegian: *Lyntyven*. trans. Torleif Sjøgren-Erichsen, Schibsted Forlag, 2012.

Polish: *Złodziej pioruna*. trans. Agnieszka Fulińska, Galeria Książki, 2009.

Portuguese: *O Ladrão de Raios*. trans. Ricardo Gouveia, Intrínseca, 2008.

Romanian: *Hoțul fulgerului*. Editura Arts, 2016.

Russian: *Перси Джексон и похититель молний*. Эксмо, Домино, 2010.

Slovak: *Zlodej blesku*. trans. Jana Veselá, Vydavateľstvo Fragment, 2009.

Slovenian: *Tat strele*. Morfem, 2014.

Spanish: *El ladrón del rayo (Percy Jackson y los dioses del Olimpo 1)*. trans. Libertad Aguilera Ballester, Salamandra, 2013.

Swedish: *Född till hjälte*. trans. Anders Bellis, Bonnier Carlsen, 2012.

Thai: เพอร์ซี แจ็กสัน และขโมยสายฟ้า. trans. เพอร์ซี แจ็กสัน



□□□□□□□□□□, Enter Books, 2010.

Turkish: *Şimşek Hırsızı Percy Jackson ve Olimposlular*. trans. Kadir Yiğit Us, Doğan Egmont Yayıncılık, 2010.

Ukrainian: *Персі Джексон та Викрадач Блискавок*. trans. І. Є. Бондар-Терещенко, Видавництво, 2016.

Vietnamese: *Kẻ Cắp Tia Chớp*. trans. Vũ Kim Dung, Thời Đại, Chibooks, 2010.

---

## Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

*Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters,*

*Percy Jackson and the Titan's Curse,*

*Percy Jackson and the Battle of the Labyrinth,*

*Percy Jackson and the Last Olympian,*

*Percy Jackson: The Demigod Files,*

*The Heroes of Olympus series: The Lost Hero, The Son of Neptune, The Mark of Athena, The House of Hades, The Blood of Olympus, The Demigod Diaries,*

*Percy Jackson and the Greek Gods,*

*Percy Jackson and the Greek Heroes,*

*Percy Jackson: The Ultimate Guide.*

---

## Summary

Percy Jackson is the twelve-year-old protagonist of the series and narrates the events of the book. Percy is dyslexic and has ADHD, and his behaviour leads to his expulsion from a number of schools. His life changes dramatically after his maths teacher transforms into a fury during a school trip demanding Percy return something that has been



stolen. This leads to Percy discovering that he is a demigod and that the gods, heroes and monsters of Ancient Greece are in fact real and that they inhabit the modern world under various disguises. Percy's best friend Grover is revealed to be a satyr and his Latin teacher the centaur Chiron; both of whom have been sent to protect him from the various gods and monsters that would want to kill him. This ruse is broken by the theft of Zeus' thunderbolt and the threat of a war between the gods; with Percy identified as the possible thief.

With his safety in jeopardy, his mother and Grover take Percy to Camp Half-Blood, a retreat for young demigods managed by the god Dionysus. En route to the camp, they are attacked by the Minotaur. Though Percy manages to defeat the monster his mother disappears and is presumed dead. Once at the camp he makes friends with Annabeth (daughter of Athena) and Luke (son of Hermes). Percy is badly wounded during a violent game of Capture the Flag and finds that contact with water not only heals, but strengthens him, revealing that he is the son of Poseidon. Percy's birth breaks a seventy-year agreement between the "big three" (Zeus, Poseidon, Hades) not to have any offspring. A troubled Chiron sends Percy to speak with the Delphic oracle, a ghoulish skeletal figure living in the attic at the main house of the camp. Encouraged by Chiron and the Oracle's words, Percy sets out on a quest to retrieve the thunderbolt from Hades, the perceived true thief, and return it to Zeus before the summer solstice deadline. Though his true motive is to rescue his mother who he now believes may be in the Underworld and retrievable based on the stories he knows of other heroic descent. Grover and Annabeth accompany Percy on his quest taking Annabeth's cap of invisibility, a pair of flying shoes from Luke and a pen, which transforms into a sword, given to Percy by Chiron. The trio must head west to LA, the entrance to the Underworld.

During the trio's cross country road trip they are attacked by various monsters including the furies, Medusa, Echidna and the Chimera with Percy dreaming of a voice asking him to set it free, something he keeps hidden from his friends. In addition to avoiding mythical monsters, the three find themselves hiding from the police as Percy has been implicated in his mother's disappearance by his abusive stepfather. On the run, and having lost all of their money, the three encounter the god Ares, under the guise of a biker. He offers them supplies and transport to LA if they can retrieve his shield, and, being desperate, they accept. Once in Los Angeles, Percy, Annabeth and Grover travel to the Underworld where they meet Charon, a



disgruntled employee and Cerberus who resembles a three headed Rottweiler. On entering the inner domain of the Underworld, Grover, wearing the winged shoes, finds himself being pulled uncontrollably down towards Tartarus and Percy once again hears the voice from his dreams. After Grover's rescue, in an encounter with Hades, they learn that his Helmet of Invisibility has also been stolen. Zeus' thunderbolt then appears in Percy's rucksack (and Percy now suspects they were tricked by Ares) angering Hades. Forced to make a quick escape Percy must leave his mother, but promises to find the thief and return the helmet to Hades in exchange for her release.

With the deadline for the thunderbolt's return approaching, Percy, Annabeth and Grover encounter Ares once more and it is revealed that he put the thunderbolt in Percy's rucksack, but that he was not the original thief. Percy battles Ares on the beach and using strength drawn from the sea defeats him. Ares disappears and in his place Hades' helmet is revealed. Percy returns this to the furies, headed by Percy's old maths teacher. Having watched the whole battle, the furies now know that Percy was telling the truth and is not the thief. Percy and his friends then head back East to the Empire State Building where Olympus now resides and Percy returns the bolt to Zeus. With the thunderbolt restored, a war is averted and Zeus allows Poseidon to acknowledge Percy as his son. Furthermore, Hades honours the agreement and Percy and mother are reconciled, though Percy decides to return to Camp Half-Blood for the duration of the summer. There he meets with Luke who reveals himself to be the true thief of the bolt and working for the Titan Kronos. Percy is poisoned by Luke, but survives and informs Chiron and Annabeth of Luke's deception and Kronos' plans to escape Tartarus. The end of the summer sees the trio going their separate ways, but with a promise to reunite the following year.

---

## Analysis

Narrated by the twelve-year-old protagonist, the book is written in an adolescent-like conversational tone. The result is the gods, heroes and monsters of Ancient Greece are approached from a twelve year old's perspective and therefore are to some extent free from the sense of gravitas usually applied to the retelling of the myths. This has had a dual effect: in one respect Greek mythology is made more accessible to its target audience, whilst, in another respect also potentially alienating the series from a strong adult readership such as that





enjoyed by the Harry Potter series.

A strong message throughout the book is that the study of the classical world is relevant outside of the classroom. In many of the encounters on the quest it is Percy's ability to identify the character and their mythological allegiances, which enables him and friends to escape rather than simply his fighting ability. This is exemplified by at the beginning of the book when Percy is revising for a school test and worries about getting Chiron and Charon confused; he later meets both figures.

Metonymy that the pen is mightier than the sword is made literal as a pen given to Percy physically transforms into a sword when uncapped. The motif of the power of knowledge and the word, both written and spoken, runs throughout the book.

Though most of the references to Greek myth are discussed explicitly and therefore require no prior knowledge, there are some subtler references. For instance the relationship Percy and his mother have with his abusive stepfather, Gabe, mirrors that of Perseus and Polydectes. In a modern take on the myth, it is Percy's mother who petrifies Gabe with the head of Medusa, noting that she must take control of her own destiny. At the centre of the story, Percy undertakes a katabasis, part of the classical heroic itinerary and it functions as such in the story. Percy descends as a perceived thief with few friends and on the run from mythical gods and monsters as well as the human police. On his return, though he fails in his attempt to rescue his mother and is shown to already unwittingly have the lightning bolt, he is welcomed back Camp Half-blood as a hero now acknowledged by his father and with the respect of other mythological characters such as the Furies.

The gods and monsters are described as moving to wherever the cradle of Western Civilisation currently sits. Therefore, as Mount Olympus is now accessed by lift at the Empire State Building, it is implied that that is now America. To add to this, the gods have fully embraced the new world as recognisable insignia is fused or replaced with Americana. For instance, Dionysus now drinks Diet Coke, the winged sandals of Hermes are basketball high tops and Annabeth has a baseball cap of invisibility. The author's use of American cultural references are in contrast to his rejection of American literature in favour of that of Ancient Greece, as may be demonstrated by Percy's aversion to Tom Sawyer; the hero notes he has not read it and unlike



the Greece myths he doesn't require any of the knowledge contained in it during his quest.

Percy's status as a demigod and son of one of the three most important of the Olympians satisfies the genre of the abandoned child who, whilst a misfit in the real world, is destined for greatest success in the fantastical world. Camp Half-blood replaces a children's home as all of its inhabitants have been abandoned not only by their immortal, but also by their mortal, parent. The motif of disability being a hidden strength runs through the book. Percy's dyslexia and ADHD are, in fact, stated to be his predisposition for Ancient Greek and his battle reflexes: his abilities, meanwhile, aren't suited to the classroom. Similarly, both Grover and Mr Brunner display physical disabilities which are shown to be disguises for their true forms of powerful mythical beasts: a satyr and centaur respectively.

The acknowledgment of personal heritage and its importance in terms of identity and success, feature in the book. Both Percy and Annabeth reconcile the other side to their persona during the quest and leave with a sense of being in control of their destinies. For Annabeth this is returning to her human father and acknowledging that her mortal side is also important, demonstrated by the use of mortal dog training to escape Cerberus in the Underworld. The author's choice to make Poseidon Percy's father rather than Zeus, could be considered as symbolic in terms of America (associated with the eagle) and Britain (a sea power). On gaining independence America took inspiration for its insignia and political system from the Roman world in a conscious move away from the Grecian Britain, yet the author uses the Greek form of the gods. The author himself used the writing of British author Roger Lancelyn Green as his source material, particular Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes* (1958) rather than the American author Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* (1853). Green's book was reprinted in 2010 as a tie in to the release of the film adaptation of *The Lightning Thief* with an introduction by Riordan. If the katabasis is a key feature of the classical heroic journey, the road trip can perhaps be perceived as the equivalent for the American hero. In the book the trio undertake a trip from the East to the West of America beginning with the greyhound bus, another iconic part of American culture. With the mix of Greek Mythology and Americana the author aims for Percy Jackson to satisfy the itinerary for both the Ancient Greek and the American hero, celebrating his dual heritage.



Classical, Mythological,  
Traditional Motifs,  
Characters, and  
Concepts

[Ares](#) [Athena/ Athene](#) [Centaur](#) [Cerberus](#) [Charon](#) [Chimaera](#) [Chimera](#)  
[Delphic Oracle](#) [Dionysus](#) [Echidna](#) [Furies](#) [Hades](#) [Heroic itinerary](#) [Iris](#)  
[Katabasis](#) [Kronos / Cronus / Cronos](#) [Land of the Lotus Eaters](#) [Lotus-eater](#)  
[Medusa](#) [Minotaur](#) [Monsters](#) [Nereid](#) [Olympus](#) [Pan](#) [Perseus](#)  
[Poseidon](#) [Procrustes](#) [Satyr](#) [Underworld](#) [Zeus](#)

---

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

[Coming of age](#) [Heritage](#) [Humanity](#) [Identity](#) [Individuality](#) [Knowledge](#)  
[Learning](#) [Relationships](#) [School](#) [Science](#) [Students](#) [Teachers](#)

---

Further Reading

Benker J., "And now for something completely different: addressing assumptions about myth." *The Classical Journal*, 109(1), 2013, pp. 114-122.

Mead, R. "The Percy Jackson Problem." *The New Yorker* (Oct. 2014) (online - accessed: January 10, 2018). (Opinion piece questioning whether the Percy Jackson have a positive or negative impact on how children understand Greek Mythology).

Murnaghan S. "Classics for Cool Kids: Popular and Unpopular Versions of Antiquity for Children." *The Classical World*, 104(3), 2011, pp. 339-353.

Paul J. "Percy Jackson and Myth-making in the Twenty-First Century." in H. Hoyle and V. Zajko (eds.), *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017.

---

