Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Perseus and the Monstrous Medusa (Heroes in Training, 12) by Joan Holub, Craig Phillips, Suzanne Williams ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/534. Entry version as of September 16, 2026.

Joan Holub , Craig Phillips , Suzanne Williams

Perseus and the Monstrous Medusa (Heroes in Training, 12)

United States (2016)

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Demeter Hades Hera Hestia Medusa Oracles Perseus Poseidon Zeus

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

General information	
Title of the work	Perseus and the Monstrous Medusa (Heroes in Training, 12)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2016
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Heroes in Training: Perseus and the Monstrous Medusa.* New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2016, 117 pp.
ISBN	9781481435154
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Alternative histories (Fiction), Bildungsromans (Coming-of-age fiction), Humor, Illustrated works, Mythological fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Children (Older children, 8–14 years old)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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

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 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

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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?

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 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

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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.

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

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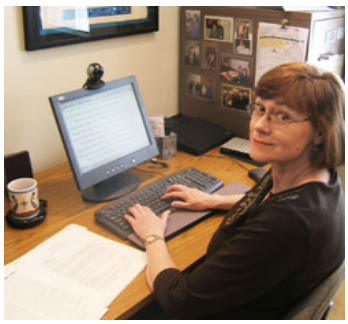
Craig Phillips (Illustrator)

Phillips is an Australian award winning illustrator who works with various publishers, including Random House, Simon & Schuster, Penguin, Scholastic, Bloomsbury, Egmont, Hardie Grant, and many more. As a child he was inspired by mythology and cartoons, and fantasy novels such as the *Hobbit* and *Conan the Barbarian*. He is still fascinated by the cartoons, comics, novels and stories that he enjoyed as a child and tries to capture that feeling in his work. His comics have been serialised in children's literary magazines and were collected and published as *Giants, Trolls, Witches, Beasts: Ten Tales from the Deep, Dark Woods* in 2017 by Allen and Unwin. He lives in New Zealand.

Source:

Official website (accessed: October 12, 2018).

Bio prepared by 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.

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Source:

Official website (accessed: May 29, 2018).

Bio prepared by 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?

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.

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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 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

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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

This is the twelfth book in the *Heroes in Training* series (see for example *Zeus and the Thunderbolt of Doom*). The Olympians are divided into smaller groups in their search for hairy snakes. This quest gives them their chance to get to know each other more and also encounter a new mysterious boy, Perseus. The sudden appearance of Perseus shakes the delicate balance in the team, as most team members do not trust him. This quest also brings to the surface old tensions. When Hephaestus offers that the group should split up into three groups to search for the snakes, Zeus's reaction is as follows, "Zeus frowned. Hephaestus had once tried to overthrow him as leader of the Olympians. He'd given up on that but still often argued with Zeus's commands." (p. 44). While Hephaestus' offer seems reasonable in the current circumstances, it is hard for Zeus to treat it fairly, without looking for ulterior motives. Therefore his reply that he does not wish for the group to split could well be out of concern for his friends, but also his reluctance to share leadership and to adhere to his rival's plan. This implies that in term of leadership, Zeus is still in training, as the title suggest. He is not confident enough in his own position yet. Finally Zeus agrees to the split but insists on going with Perseus since he does not trust him. In this manner Zeus positions himself again, even unconsciously, as the leader who needs to protect the others from Perseus. This process of splitting up also uncovers the inner dynamics within the group: Hera, Hestia and Demeter stick together as sisters, while Apollo and Artemis also stay together. Although they are all siblings in a way, some of the bonds are stronger than others. Ares follows Aphrodite and Athena follows Zeus. While Hephaestus is the mythological son of Hera, he does not react to her in any special form in this narrative but prefers Aphrodite, again a relationship with mythological basis.

They also hear a rumor of another possible Olympian, Hermes.

Analysis

The Olympians continue their search following the oracles' obscure guidelines. As in the previous stories, there is still tension inside the group regarding its leadership, as, for example, Hera constantly contradicts Zeus. The continued motif of leadership and rivalry is proceeded with the clash between Zeus and Perseus.

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	Zeus feels attacked by Hera yet also threatened by Hephaestus. Thus at the same time he needs to present himself as the ultimate leader whilst constantly refutes the accusations of his siblings, especially Hera who refuses to accept his leadership and keeps challenging it and him. Also interesting is the emphasis put on Hephaestus's role. The fact that Hera contradicts Zeus is more in keeping with the turbulent relations between the two, but in Classical myth Hephaestus was never a strong contender for Zeus's role. Yet in this series he positions himself as Zeus's equal, due to his ingenuity and skill. In his view, intelligence and technology are enough for leadership; yet Hephaestus lacks some of the more human points of leadership. Perseus plays the role of the intruder from the outside. He interferes with the group and causes tension, especially to Zeus but he also forces the group to work together and by doing so reaffirms Zeus's position as leader. This is the moral lesson of the story, the group is as strong as its leader and the gradual strengthening of both occurs simultaneously.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Demeter Hades Hera Hestia Medusa Oracles Perseus Poseidon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Adventure Adversity Authority Character traits Conflict Desires Emotions Expectations Friendship Good vs evil Heroism Identity Individuality Integrity Invention Journeys Judgement Learning Magic Maturity Names Parents (and children) Peers Rejection Relationships Respect Siblings Success and failure Travel Truth and lies Values War

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