Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Olympia. On the Ball (Olympia, 7) by Shoo Rayner ", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/887. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

Shoo Rayner

Olympia. On the Ball (Olympia, 7)

United Kingdom (2011)

TAGS: Ancient Sacrifice Episkyros Eurydice Olympia Olympic Games Orpheus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Olympia. On the Ball (Olympia, 7)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	Shoo Rayner, *Olympia: On the Ball*. London: Orchard Books, 2011, 64 pp.
ISBN	9781408311936
Genre	Illustrated works
Target Audience	Children (aged 8–10)
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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Creators



Shoo Rayner , b. 1956
(Author, Illustrator)

Shoo (Hugh) Rayner is an author, illustrator, and teacher of drawing. He was born in Kingston-upon-Thames, the child of a member of the British Army who moved around the world. He spent his childhood in Germany, Pakistan, Yemen, and the United Kingdom. He is a graduate of Anglia Ruskin University (formerly Cambridge College of Art and Technology). He lives in Gloucestershire, near the Forest of Dean.He has illustrated over 250 books, and has two successful Youtube sites teaching drawing (Shoo Rayner Drawing, and Draw Stuff Real Easy).

Rayner creates picture books and middle-grade fiction for children. He admits that after failing his English O level he developed a visual approach to writing and telling stories. He refers to himself as a "storyteller illustrator" (see here, accessed: December 4, 2019). His published output is prolific: he has published a large number of series of Early Readers for children, including the *Lydia* series, the *Victor* series, the *Little Horror*s series, the *Ginger Ninja* series, the *Monster Boy* series, and the *Olympia* series.

Rayner's work in these series involves simple, easy-to-read stories, aimed at readers "at the most important stage of reading development where they can be put off, or enthused for life." (*Something about the Author*, 169)

Sources:

Official website (accessed: December 4, 2019)

Official channel on You Tube (accessed: December 4, 2019)

DrawStuffRealEasy, channel on You Tube (accessed: December 4, 2019)

Profile at en.wikipedia.org (accessed: April 6, 2019)

'Hugh (Shoo) Rayner,' *Something About the Author,* Ed. Lisa Kumar.

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Vol. 151. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2004, p. 168-171.

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au and Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com

Questionnaire

Response to author's questionnaire on Author's Vimeo channel (accessed: April 4, 2019).

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Additional information

Summary

On the Ball is the seventh in author-illustrator Shoo Rayner's *Olympia* series of chapter books, which show what life was like for ordinary children in Ancient Greece. It features Olly, whose father runs the gymnasium where the great athletes train, and who dreams of being an Olympic champion. In *On the Ball*, the athletes are having a break from their training, and playing a Spartan ball game called *episkyros*, for a bit of fun. Olly watches excitedly as they play, and the rules are explained for young readers. At the end of the game, the ball has been crushed, and Olly's father Ariston says the boys can have it for their own games. Olly goes to the temple and asks Linos, the butcher, for a bladder to blow up inside the leather skin of the ball. Linos has no spare bladders, but gives him feathers to stuff the ball with.His cousin, Chloe helps him by stitching up the ball. At lunch, the boys listen to Simonedes, the historian, who tells relevant stories while the athletes eat. This time, he tells the story of Orpheus and Eurydice: the moral of the story, Simonedes says, is "never look back! Ahead of you lies victory—behind you only defeat" (p. 40). Olly bears this in mind later, when the children play a game of *episkyros* and Spiro tries to throw Olly off with trickery. Furthermore, Kerberos, Spiro's fierce dog enters the game, and chases the boys, grabbing the ball and bursting it in a cloud of feathers. However, Olly's team still wins the day, and Olly smiles to himself as he walks home, reflecting that he will always keep his sights on victory.

The story closes with a page of Olympic Facts, about *episkyros*, and about how the Greeks made balls for sports.

Analysis

On the Ball is an educational reader for primary-school aged children (see here).

Here, the story about Olly's enjoyment of different sports, is tied to explanation about how the athletes of ancient Greece played a ball game called *episkyros*. Rayner provides factual description of the rules of this game and also sheds some light on how ancient sports equipment was made. A loose connection to the idea of keeping one's eye on the ball is made by Simonedes' retelling of the Orpheus myth, connecting to the idea of winning which permeates the series. Olly's desire to win seems driven by the desire to defeat his 'arch-enemy'

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	Spiro. The Orpheus myth is unusually presented, and the moral of the story – that looking back slows one down, and inhibits victory – is an unusual interpretation, perhaps twisted to connect with ideas about winning and competition.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ancient Sacrifice Episkyros Eurydice Olympia Olympic Games Orpheus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Boys Child, children Child's view Girls History Masculinity Parents (and children) Sport

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