

Joan Holub , Suzanne Williams

## Persephone the Phony (Goddess Girls, 2)

United States (2010)

TAGS: [Aphrodite](#) [Artemis](#) [Athena](#) [Cerberus](#) [Charon](#) [Cyclops / Cyclopes](#) [Demeter](#) [Hades](#) [Hydra](#) [Pandora](#) [Persephone](#) [PHEME](#) [Tartarus](#) [Thanatos](#) [Zeus](#)



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

General information	
Title of the work	Persephone the Phony (Goddess Girls, 2)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2010
First Edition Details	Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, <i>Persephone the Phony</i> (Goddess Girls). New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, Aladdin Press, 2010, 160 pp.
ISBN	9781416982722 (paperback) / 9781405511636 (ebook)
Genre	Alternative histories (Fiction), Bildungsromans (Coming-of-age fiction), Fiction, Humor, Mythological fiction, Novels, School story*
Target Audience	Children (Older children, 8-12 years)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, mauril68@gmail.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

## 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).

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### **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?**

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](http://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**



### **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.

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### **Suzanne Williams , b. 1953 (Author)**

Suzanne Williams is an American prolific children's author and former





Courtesy of the Author  
from her personal  
website.

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.

Source:

Official [website](#) (accessed: May 29, 2018).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University,  
[ayelet.peer@gmail.com](mailto: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.

## **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 Myths* by Kevin Crossley-Holland, *D'Aulaires' Book of Norse Myths*, *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 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

General summary for the series see under [Athena the Brain](#).

In this installment we follow the adventures of Persephone, a shy and reserved goddessgirl and her first encounters with Hades, a 'bad boy' godboy. Persephone's overbearing mother, Demeter, heavily interferes with her social life until Persephone feels the need to rebel. The moral of the story here is that Persephone needs to grow up and a part of it is understating also the emotions of those around her, like her mother. Her mother also needs to understand her little girl is becoming a young adult. Furthermore, the book also explores the importance of not prejudicing people because of where they live and how they look (Hades). The book uses an adolescent romance plot to explore the budding relationship between Persephone and Hades, this is of course in complete contrast to the dark and violent myth.

### Analysis

Persephone is the heroine of this book, and she is quite different from the other girls. This story reflects her growing up and maturing. It could relate to many wallflowers that will read it and find comfort in Persephone's journey towards self-acceptance. In the end Persephone needs to find her own voice and strength; she needs to accept herself before asking others to accept her the way she is.

From the start we get the impression that Persephone is more reserved than the other girls, especially Aphrodite, and that her mom, Demeter (who runs a flower shop - a nice reference to her being the goddess of crops) can be overbearing and does not let her participate in any activity involving boys. Persephone is afraid not to get along and so she complies with Aphrodite for things she does not entirely want to do, like going to the market place or wearing makeup: "Persephone pretended to be excited too, but in truth she was bored." (p. 11).

Persephone appears to be a kind of a wallflower, and her friend do not notice: "They were talking about her as if she wasn't even there! But she continued to stand between them as they tossed remarks about her back and forth over her head." (p. 12). Of course every girl who ever felt transparent can relate to his feeling. Persephone's feeling of non-existence is also accentuated by her pail skin tone. She is almost



virtually invisible. Persephone is disappointed in herself: "Her words sounded so false. Couldn't anyone else see what a phony she was? Even the sound of her name seemed to show it: PersePHONY. But she lacked the guts to say how she really felt about even the smallest things." (pp. 13-14).

Her hint at her mythological role as queen of the underworld is causally given when Persephone stumbles across a cemetery and feels right at home; "Because she couldn't die - that's what it means to be immortal, after all - death had always fascinated Persephone." (p. 17).

A reference to the mythological source happens when suddenly the godboy Hades appears from a crack in the ground in the cemetery where Persephone sits. Yet unlike the mythological tale, he does not harm her but befriends her. The two are having a good conversation and Hades is interested in her; "Usually people liked to talk about themselves. It was weird to have someone ask about her." (p. 26). It appears that the two loners have their loneliness as a common ground and therefore they feel so comfortable with one another. Their relationship does not seem forced as in the myth but harmonious. The boy who lives where nothing grows and the girl who can grow things. This is in fact the logic behind the original myth, told without the violence accompanied with it.

Demeter is here portrayed as over protecting and harsh and she is the one who forcefully takes Persephone from Hades "whirling around, she gave Hades a look that would've killed if he hadn't already been immortal. "Stay away from my daughter, godboy!" she warned him." (p. 29). Persephone is embarrassed by her mother's behaviour; "this, she couldn't help thinking that Aphrodite, Artemis and Athena were fortunate not to have mums around." (pp. 30-31). Once more a very common teenage reaction is transferred to the mythological sphere; Aphrodite has no parents because she was born from the sea foams and Athena's mother was a fly. Therefore they could not understand Persephone's anger at her mom.

Struggling against prejudice is another key idea of this book. Her friends do not like Hades either because he is from the underworld. Persephone resents this bias: "Just because someone comes from the wrong side of the world, it doesn't mean they aren't worth knowing." (p. 49). Here we have a message of accepting others, again coated with a mythological flair. Persephone is being convinced by her



friends that Hades is bad news and then she retorts to being her old-self again: "Once again she was going along to get along. Once again she'd slipped into being PersePHONY." (p. 56). Ironically, only with Hades she feels completely comfortable.

In another twisting of the story, when Persephone goes to the cemetery again and meets Hades, she offers him her pomegranate seeds. We can now see that Hades' bad reputation was probably started by PHEME, the rumour goddess. She saw him at Zeus' the principal office and immediately figured he was in trouble, yet Hades liked talking to Zeus (again in contrast with the myth of a rivalry between the brothers; here Zeus is the responsible adult). We have a strong message here on how disastrous rumours can be. Hades, who is rumoured to be bad news, is actually being bullied himself (another interesting take on the frightening image of the mythological lord of the underworld).

Angry at her mother, Persephone runs away from home to Hades. Her traveling to the underworld is not traumatic or scary. When Hades finds her he advises her to go home and she sadly does. Then she sits down with her mother and openly discuss her feelings: "Her eyes pleaded with her mum as she said, "How can I get better at making judgements if you won't let me make my own?" (p. 99). In the end, Persephone grows up under the good advice and supervision of her mom and Zeus. Unlike the original myth, she does not need to choose between Hades or her mother and she makes her own decisions and is not kidnapped or grabbed like a helpless child. She discovers the strength to be who she truly is, and defends Hades against the rumors at school. Only when Persephone truly admits to her own feelings can she be honest and open with her mother and friends.

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Classical, Mythological,  
Traditional Motifs,  
Characters, and  
Concepts

[Aphrodite](#) [Artemis](#) [Athena](#) [Cerberus](#) [Charon](#) [Cyclops / Cyclopes](#)  
[Demeter](#) [Hades](#) [Hydra](#) [Pandora](#) [Persephone](#) [PHEME](#) [Tartarus](#) [Thanatos](#)  
[Zeus](#)

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

[Character traits](#) [Coming of age](#) [Friendship](#) [Gaining understanding](#)  
[Individuality](#) [Knowledge](#) [Learning](#) [Love](#) [Parents \(and children\)](#)  
[Relationships](#) [School](#) [Teachers](#) [Violence](#)



## Culture

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### Addenda

The review refers to the Kindle edition:

Holub, Joan. *Persephone the Phony: Book 2 (Goddess Girls)* (p. iv).  
Hachette Children's Group. Kindle Edition.

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