DEMGODS AND MONSTERS

Your Favorite Authors on Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians Series

EDITED BY RICK RIORDAN
At the beginning of The Lightning Thief, Percy Jackson tells us to stop reading: if we suspect we, too, might be demigods, we should put the book down right away. But how can we, when the world he lives in is so much fun?

Spend a little more time in that world—a place where the gods bike among us, monsters man snack bars, and each of us has the potential to become a hero.

FIND OUT:

- The pros and cons of having a god as a parent
- Why Dionysus might actually be the best director Camp Half-Blood could have
- How even if we aren’t facing manticores and minotaurs, reading myths can still help us deal with the scary things in our own lives

PLUS, consult our glossary of people, places and things from Greek myth: how Medusa got her snake hair extensions, why Chiron isn’t into partying and paintball like the rest of his centaur family, and the whole story on Percy’s mythical namesake (could it hold clues to Percy’s fate?)

RICK RIORDAN is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of the Percy Jackson and the Olympians series. He lives in San Antonio with his wife and two sons.

DEMIGODS AND MONSTERS
AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY AT BORDERS

teenlibris.com
CONTENTS

Introduction
Rick Riordan / vii

Excerpt from Monster Recognition for Beginners
Rosemary Clement-Moore / 1

Excerpt from Dionysus: Who Let Him Run a Summer Camp?
Ellen Steiber / 45

Excerpt from Percy, I Am Your Father
Sarah Beth Durst / 95
DEMIGODS AND MONSTERS FULL CONTENTS

Introduction
Rick Riordan

Monster Recognition for Beginners
Rosemary Clement-Moore

Why Do So Many Monsters Go Into Retail?
Cameron Dokey

Stealing Fire From the Gods
Paul Collins

Would You Want to Be One of Artemis’s Hunters?
Carolyn MacCullough

Dionysus: Who Let Him Run a Summer Camp?
Ellen Steiber

The Gods Among Us
Elizabeth M. Rees

Eeny Meeny Miney Mo(m)
Jenny Han

Percy, I Am Your Father
Sarah Beth Durst

Not Even the Gods Are Perfect
Elizabeth E. Wein

Frozen Eyeballs
Kathi Appelt

Language of the Heart
Sophie Masson

A Glossary of Ancient Greek Myth
Nigel Rodgers
X-Raying the Author’s Head

Many years ago, before Percy Jackson appeared in my life, I was known primarily as a writer of grown-up mystery novels. One night I was doing an event with two other authors, and one of them was explaining why he liked my book The Devil Went Down to Austin.

“The structure is amazing,” he told the audience. “It’s a book about scuba diving, and as the characters go deeper into the dark murky water, the plot also gets darker and murkier. The symbolism is really clever.”

The audience looked suitably impressed. I looked confused.

I use symbolism? Who would’ve guessed?

After the event, when I confessed to the other author that I hadn’t done the murky structure thing intentionally, that perhaps it was just the result of my faulty outlining, his jaw dropped. He’d studied my writing. He’d made brilliant insights. And I’d just been telling a story? Impossible!

That doesn’t mean his insights weren’t valuable, or that the symbolism wasn’t there. But this does raise an important point about the difference between writing a story and analyzing it.
Any book, for children or adults, can be read on many levels. We can simply enjoy it. Or we can look for hidden meanings and nuances. We can even write essays about the book, exploring it from different angles.

The writer's job is to write the book. The careful reader's job is to find meaning in the book. Both jobs are important. The meanings you find can enlighten, fascinate, and surprise. They can even surprise the author. The author, at least this author, uses symbols and themes subconsciously. I don't think about it, anymore than a native speaker of English consciously thinks about subject-verb agreement as he speaks.

The front matter to *Huckleberry Finn* has always been one of my favorite Mark Twain quotes. Twain was adamant that readers simply read his book, not scrutinize it for morals or messages, much less a plot structure. Of course, this has not stopped generations of English majors from writing their graduate theses on the novel.

When I was first approached about editing this anthology, I wasn't sure what to think. Why would so many talented writers want to write about my children's books? And yet, when I read their essays, I was amazed. Each had a different angle on Percy Jackson—all of them fascinating and thought-provoking. Many of them made me think, “Is *that* what I was doing in the series?” It was like having someone take an x-ray of my head. Suddenly, I saw all this stuff going on inside that I was never aware of.

Maybe that's why Mark Twain tried to warn off critics who wanted to interpret his work. It's not that the interpretations are wrong. It's that they tend to be a little too close to home!

**The Accidental Demigod**

I never intended to write the Percy Jackson series.

When my oldest son was in second grade, he began having problems in school. He couldn't focus. He didn't want to sit down and read. Writing was a painful challenge.
Being a novelist and a middle school teacher, I had a hard time accepting that my son hated school. Then came the fateful parent conference when the teachers suggested my son get a full psychoeducational evaluation. A few weeks later we got the results: ADHD and dyslexia.

These were not new concepts to me. I had taught many students with learning differences. I had made modifications. I’d filled out evaluation forms.

But when the child in question is your own son, it’s different.

How could I help him make sense of what was going on with him? How could I frame the problem in a positive way?

In the end, I fell back on what I knew best—storytelling.

My son’s saving grace in second grade was Greek mythology. This was the only part of the curriculum he enjoyed. Every night, he would ask me to tell him bedtime stories from the myths, and when I ran out of them, he asked me to make up a new one.

And so it sprang from my mind unbidden—like Athena from Zeus’ forehead—the myth of how ADHD and dyslexia came to be. I created Percy Jackson, a Greek demigod in the tradition of Hercules and Theseus and Perseus, except Percy is a modern kid. He has ADHD and dyslexia, and he learns that taken together, those two conditions indicate without a doubt that he has Olympian blood.

In *The Lightning Thief*, ADHD means you have finely tuned senses. You see too much, not too little. These reflexes don’t serve you well in a boring classroom, but they would keep you alive on the battlefield. Dyslexia indicates that your brain is hard-wired for Ancient Greek, so of course reading English is a struggle.

My son had no trouble buying this theory at all.

In the story, Percy Jackson discovers that being different can be a source of strength—and a mark of greatness. Being academically hopeless does not mean you are a hopeless person. Percy was my way of honoring all the children I’ve taught who have ADHD and
dyslexia, but more importantly he was a myth for my son to make sense of who he is.

When I was done telling the story, my son told me to write it down. I was dubious. I didn’t think anyone would like it, and I didn’t exactly have a lot of spare time. I was already teaching full-time and writing a mystery novel a year. But I made the time and wrote *The Lightning Thief*.

My son loved the final version. Apprehensively, I gave the manuscript to some of my students. They loved it too. I sent it off to the publishers under a pseudonym so I wouldn’t be embarrassed by the flood of rejection notes. Within weeks, the book went to auction and was snapped up by the Disney Book Group.

At the end of that school year I became a full-time children’s writer. The Percy Jackson series was soon published around the world.

If you’d told me five years ago that someone would want to create an anthology of essays based on a bedtime story I made up for my son, I would’ve called you crazy.

**The Power of Myth**

So why does the series resonate with young readers? Why do people still want to read Greek myths? These are stories from a long time ago about a very different society. What possible relevance could they have in the twenty-first century?

Certainly, you can get through life knowing no mythology, but it would be a pretty poor existence. Mythology is the symbolism of civilization. It contains our most deeply embedded archetypes. Once you know mythology, you see it everywhere—from the names of our days of the week to our art and architecture. You would be hard-pressed to find any work of English literature that does not draw to some extent on classical mythology, whether it’s the hero’s quest or allusions to the Olympians.
So knowing mythology makes one a more informed member of society, but its importance goes beyond that. Mythology is a way of understanding the human condition. Myths have always been man’s attempt to explain phenomena—and not just why the sun travels across the sky. Myths also explain love, fear, hate, revenge, and the whole range of human feelings.

When I speak to school groups, I often ask children what Greek god they would like for a parent. My favorite answer was from a schoolgirl in Texas who said, “Batman!” Actually, the girl’s suggestion of Batman as a Greek god is not too far off, because it’s the same idea at work: creating a superhuman version of humanity so that we can explore our problems, strengths, and weaknesses writ large. If the novel puts life under the microscope, mythology blows it up to billboard size.

Myths aren’t something that happened in the past, either. We didn’t leave them behind with the Bronze Age. We are still creating myths all the time. My books, among other things, explore the myth of America as the beacon of civilization, the myth of New York, and the myth of the American teenager.

When we understand classical mythology, we understand something of our own nature, and how we attempt to explain things we don’t comprehend. And as long as we’re human, there will be things we don’t comprehend.

On a more basic level, Greek mythology is simply fun! The stories have adventure, magic, romance, monsters, brave heroes, horrible villains, fantastic quests. What’s not to love?

Mythology especially appeals to middle grade readers because they can relate to the idea of demigods. Like Hercules, Jason, and Theseus, Percy Jackson is half-man, half-god. He is constantly struggling to understand his identity, because he straddles two worlds, but belongs in neither. Middle schoolers understand being in between. They are between adulthood and childhood. They feel stuck in the middle all the time, trapped in an awkward state. Everything is changing for them—physically, socially, emotionally. The
demigod is a perfect metaphor for their situation, which is why the hero’s quest resonates for them.

When I do school events, I usually play a trivia game on Greek mythology with the kids. It doesn’t matter what school I visit, or how little mythology the students have done in the classroom. The students always know the answers, and the adults are always amazed. I can almost guarantee some teacher will come up afterwards, wide-eyed, and say, “I didn’t know our students knew so much mythology!”

It’s not a surprise to me. Young readers own mythology. They see themselves as the hero. They gain hope in their own struggles by following the quests. And yes, sometimes they even see their teachers as the monsters!

About This Anthology

Within these pages, you will find out what really makes Dionysus tick. You’ll learn how to assign a letter grade to your parents. You’ll explore the coolest monsters and most horrible villains of the Percy Jackson series. You’ll decide whether becoming a hunter of Artemis is a good deal or a disastrous mistake. You’ll even learn how to unfreeze your eyeballs and recognize your own prophecy. Which essay comes closest to the truth? It’s not for me to say.

About a year ago at a signing for The Lightning Thief, a boy raised his hand in the audience and asked, “What is the theme of your book?”

I stared at him blankly. “I don’t know.”

“Darn it!” he said. “I need that for my report!”

The lesson here: If you want to know the theme of a book, the last person to ask is the author. This anthology, however, offers fresh perspectives and amazing insights. If you’re looking for something to lift the Mist from your eyes and make you say, “Aha! There are monsters!”, then you’ve come to the right place.

Rick Riordan
Monster Recognition for Beginners

Lessons from Percy Jackson on Monsters and Heroes

Rosemary Clement-Moore

What would you do if you woke up one morning and found a satyr on your front porch, and he explained that he was going to take you to a special camp for people like you: half-god, half-human?
You might be tempted to laugh, thinking it’s a practical joke. Or maybe you’d think it was great. But if you’ve read the Percy Jackson books, you would also be seriously worried. Being a demigod may sound glamorous, but in Percy’s world, the child of a god can look forward to a life full of hardships and danger. Heroes, whether they are on a quest or just trying to live through the school year, must always stay on their toes and on the lookout for monsters.

Imagine you’re living in Percy’s world: Does that donut store on the corner make a shiver run down your spine? Does the popularity of a certain coffee chain have anything to do with the mermaid on its logo? And what about the homeless man under the bridge near your apartment: Does no one think it strange that he wears a muffler and trench coat all year round?

Or maybe you live in the country, and suddenly a lot of cattle are mysteriously disappearing. Is it a coyote problem, or a wandering monster snacking on your Uncle Walt’s best milk cows? What really started those California wildfires: a careless camper or a fire-breathing chimera?

To Percy and his classmates, asking these kinds of questions could mean the difference between life and death. Not to mention the success of a quest. Ignoring their instincts could lead to death... or worse, humiliating defeat.

If you suddenly discover you are a demigod like the ones in Percy Jackson’s world, don’t be lured into spending all your time on rock climbing and archery practice. These things are important, but if you really want to survive a monster attack, you need to learn how to recognize them. That way you can make a plan for fighting, or fleeing, whichever seems more prudent. Percy Jackson has had to learn these lessons the hard way. While some of his classmates might consider the constant threats to life and limb opportunities for personal growth, the wise hero should take a page from the children of Athena and fight smarter, not harder.
Fortunately, we have Percy’s triumphs—and mistakes—to learn from. So just in case you do open your door to a satyr one morning, here’s some of what I’ve learned from reading the Percy Jackson books: how to survive in a world full of monsters who want to kill you in three easy lessons.

**Lesson One: Monsters and You**

The first thing to realize in dealing with mythical creatures is the basic nature of the relationship between hero and monster: There is a very good chance that even a random encounter between them will result in death for one or both. Simply stated, heroes kill monsters, and monsters resent that fact.

Let us take some examples from the ancient world: Bellerophon, Theseus, Hercules, and Perseus\(^1\). All of them heroes, all of them slayers of monsters—chimera, Minotaur, Hydra, and Gorgon. And the monsters never forget it. Youth is no protection, either; monsters have no ethics, so they don’t have an ethical problem with getting rid of their natural enemies while they are still young and vulnerable.

Now, a demigod has certain advantages over monsters. Depending on the type of creature he’s facing, the demigod may be faster or more mobile. His ability to use a weapon may counter the natural advantage of, say, a bulletproof hide, like the Nemean Lion, or seven heads that always grow back, like the Hydra. The human half makes the hero smarter than the average monster, provided the hero actually uses his brain. The god half doubtlessly adds advantages as well, though of course this would largely depend on the god in question.

The monsters’ biggest advantage—besides the obvious things like claws, teeth, and poison, and superior size and strength—is that

\(^1\) The original one, not Percy Jackson of *The Lightning Thief*, etc. The ancient Perseus was the son of Zeus, not Poseidon, so it’s curious that his mother picked that name.
they never really die. The centaur Chiron tells us monsters are “archetypes.” An archetype is the original, basic idea of something. This means that when similar characters pop up in different books and movies, all of them are based on the original archetype. For instance, the character of “Fluffy,” the three-headed dog who guards the sorcerer’s stone in the first Harry Potter book, comes from the idea of Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards the entrance to the underworld.²

So monsters, like ideas, can never be killed, and they have very long memories. If you’re a hero and you encounter a magical creature, it may have been turned to dust many times over the years by heroes just like you. It would be wise to assume that it is holding a grudge and would be happy to help you along to your doom.

Percy Jackson has this harsh reality thrust upon him in no uncertain terms, and it’s an experience we can learn from: Nothing says “your days are numbered” like a Minotaur on your doorstep.

It should be noted that children of the less powerful gods aren’t going to attract as much monstrous attention as those with more powerful parents. You might think it would be “cool” if your Olympian parent was one of the major gods, but that kind of status comes with a big price tag.

Percy is the perfect example of this. Having Poseidon as his father may give him some awesome powers, but it also makes him a very high-profile target. So even if you had skills remarkable for a demigod, this in no way would guarantee you an easy time of it.³

The world of gods and monsters is a harsh one. A hero can’t rely on his immortal parent for help. There are rules against direct inter-

² Chiron wouldn’t use this example, of course, because in his world there are no such things as wizards. That would be just silly.
³ Just the opposite, since according to the agreement between the Big Three, you should not even exist, and lots of creatures would be trying to arrange it so you didn’t.
ference, and it seems as though the higher in the echelon a god is, the more limited he or she is in stepping in to help. After Annabeth Chase runs away from her father’s house, her mother Athena helps her by making sure she meets up with an older, more powerful half-blood. Thalia, daughter of Zeus⁴, leads her friends almost to the safety of the camp, but when she is about to be killed by a horde of monsters, all that Zeus can do is turn her into a tree on top of Half-Blood Hill.

Ultimately it is up to young heroes to watch out for themselves. A parent or patron may be some help, but it’s the nature of the hero to have to face the monsters on his or her own.

CONTINUED IN DEMIGODS AND MONSTERS

⁴ See previous footnote re: unauthorized offspring.
Could there be a more bizarre choice for director of Camp Half-Blood than Dionysus?

Rick Riordan has a gift for playing with the Greek myths. He delights in taking the gods and their stories and giving them just enough of a twist to make them completely believable in our world while still retaining the essence of the ancient beliefs. His Dionysus, more safely referred to as Mr. D (names are, after all, powerful
things), takes the image of the Greek god of wine and revelry and twists it into a believable contemporary portrait: If you spent most of your time drinking and partying like Mr. D, there’s a good chance that by the time you reached middle age, you too would be overweight, badly dressed, and not care a fig about anything except when you could get your next drink. You certainly wouldn’t be thrilled by having a bunch of “brats” foisted on you. And there’s a good chance you wouldn’t be the most responsible guardian.

Certainly this is Percy Jackson’s take on Mr. D when Percy first arrives at Camp Half-Blood. But first and even fifth impressions don’t tell the whole story when dealing with the Greek gods, who are complex deities. Most of them are multitaskers. Dionysus is not only god of wine and the vine, but the god of fertility, who rules all growing things. (You see this side of Mr. D in Camp Half-Blood’s strawberry fields, which grow so effortlessly and fruitfully that the camp is able to pay all its bills by selling its strawberries to New York restaurants.) He’s also the god of madness, revelry, and theater, as well as the god of joy and divine ecstasy. In the first three books Riordan describes some of these facets and hints at others. How much of Mr. D, I found myself wondering, was actually part of what the Greeks believed about Dionysus? And what do the stories featuring Dionysus tell us not only about Mr. D but about Camp Half-Blood?

Percy is not impressed when he’s first introduced to the camp director. Mr. D is short, pudgy, and tends to dress in either loud Hawaiian shirts or tacky running suits featuring tiger or leopard prints. Thanks to Smelly Gabe, his mother’s repulsive husband, Percy immediately knows that Mr. D has a serious acquaintance with alcohol. He looks like a middle-aged drunk going rapidly to seed. What Percy doesn’t immediately pick up on is that he’s facing a god. He doesn’t understand why Grover seems so frightened of Mr. D—until Mr. D allows him a glimpse of his true nature:
He turned to look at me straight on, and I saw a kind of purplish fire in his eyes. . . . I saw visions of grape vines [sic] choking unbelievers to death, drunken warriors insane with battle lust, sailors screaming as their hands turned to flippers, their faces elongating into dolphin snouts. I knew that if I pushed him . . . he would plant a disease in my brain that would leave me wearing a strait-jacket in a rubber room for the rest of my life.

This is a very accurate description of some of Dionysus’ favorite methods for punishing those who’ve angered him. These include trapping the poor mortals with suddenly sprouting grape and ivy vines, turning them into animals, and driving them completely mad. The Greek stories of Dionysus often depict a frighteningly cruel, vengeful god, yet the images of him almost always show either a beautiful youth surrounded by grapevines or a handsome man with curling, black hair and a luxurious beard. In fact, this image is so consistent that Dionysus is remarkably easy to identify on the vases and urns that have survived from Ancient Greece. The classic Dionysus looks nothing like Riordan’s pudgy, bleary Mr. D. I think there may be a couple of reasons that Riordan’s version of Dionysus is so unattractive. The first goes back to the myths. Like his father Zeus, Dionysus was a master of disguise and often appeared to mortals in other forms. He was known to show up as a ram, a lion, or even a young girl; he was easy to underestimate. I also suspect his incarnation as Mr. D is a warning of sorts on Riordan’s part; no one meeting that unappealing little man could possibly imagine that drinking is a good idea.

You might think that the god of joy and revels would at least guarantee a good time at camp. But no. Beyond his slovenly appearance, Mr. D’s also got an attitude problem. He’s snarky and sullen and contemptuous of both humans and half-bloods. Though he
obviously knows the campers’ true names, he makes a point of pretending he can’t remember them. One of the running jokes of the series is Mr. D referring to Percy as Peter Johnson. Chiron explains that Mr. D is unhappy because he “hates his job.” Zeus, it turns out, is the one who ordered Dionysus to run Camp Half-Blood, as a punishment for chasing an off-limits nymph. Not only is Dionysus essentially grounded on Earth for a hundred years, but he’s forbidden to drink his beloved wine. His mission is to keep the young heroes safe. And he’s not happy about any of it.

On the surface, choosing Mr. D to run the camp is so ridiculous, it’s comic. It may even be Riordan’s sly acknowledgement of the fact that sometimes the adults who are put in charge of kids are the most inappropriate for the job. Nearly everyone has had teachers who range from inept to damaging to occasionally downright scary. Mr. D seems to be all of those rolled into one.

Percy takes an instant dislike to the whiny camp director, and you can hardly blame him. Even though Mr. D is supposed to be keeping the half-gods safe, he doesn’t seem to care about any of them and he certainly doesn’t bother to help or train them. All of that boring detail he leaves to the centaur Chiron. In the third book, *The Titan’s Curse*, Mr. D even confesses that he doesn’t like heroes. He married Ariadne after the hero Theseus abandoned her, and he’s held a grudge against heroes ever since. He considers heroes selfish ingrates who use and betray others. To Percy (and yours truly), Mr. D’s description of the heroes sounds more like a description of most of the gods. What Riordan doesn’t tell us, though, is that Dionysus also had a bit of history with the original Perseus, the hero who defeated the Gorgons and Medusa. According to Robert Graves’s *The Greek Myths*, Perseus fought Dionysus when the wine god came to Argos, killing many of his followers. Dionysus retaliated by driving the women of Argos mad, to the point that they began to eat their own children. Perseus finally had the good sense to appease the god
by building him a great temple. So in addition to not liking heroes, Dionysus might simply dislike Percy because of his name.

Moody and difficult as he is, Mr. D is the first god whom Percy confronts directly, and I can’t help thinking that’s significant. Mr. D defies expectations. He’s not beautiful or even likeable. He’s the embodiment of divine indifference—a god who barely notices that mortals exist. Percy meets him at a point when he, Percy, doesn’t believe in gods, and yet there’s Mr. D, undeniably real and scary. The wine god is irrefutable evidence of the new truths that Percy must accept: that not only are the Greek gods real and still messing with mortals, but that one of them is his father. Shortly after meeting Mr. D, a confused Percy asks Chiron:

“Who . . . who am I?”

“Who are you?” [Chiron] mused. “Well, that’s the question we all want answered, isn’t it?”

It is indeed. The gods want to know because they’ve got a prophecy to contend with, and Percy needs to know because what he discovers at Camp Half-Blood is the key to his identity. That question is really the one that Percy has come to Camp Half-Blood to answer. And the more I look at the myths, the more I believe that of all the gods, Dionysus is the perfect choice to preside over the place where questions like Percy’s get answered.

What Dionysus Did Before He Ran Camp Half-Blood

To really understand what Riordan does with Dionysus, it helps to look at the myths about the wine god. The most popular version of his story starts with his mother, Semele, who was not a goddess but a princess, the daughter of Cadmus, King of Thebes. Zeus fell in love with the young princess and swore by the River Styx that he would do anything she asked. But falling in love with Zeus never works out
well for mortals. When Hera, Zeus’ wife, found out about the
romance, she disguised herself as an old woman and persuaded the
princess to ask Zeus to prove his love by showing himself to her as
he showed himself to Hera, in his undisguised divine form. Zeus,
knowing that no mortal could survive such a sight, begged the girl to
ask for something else. Semele, already six months pregnant and
wanting to know the truth about her child’s father, refused. Bound
by his own oath, Zeus showed himself in his true form, an immense,
glorious vision blazing with thunder and lightning. I suspect this
was the equivalent of looking at a nuclear blast up close. Semele was
by some accounts frightened to death; by others, she was incinerated
on the spot. What nearly all versions of the myth agree on is that in
the moment before she died, the god managed to rescue the child
she was carrying. Zeus hid the unborn child by sewing him into his
own thigh and only undid the stitches when Dionysus was ready to
be born.

One interesting thing about Dionysus’ birth is that, of the twelve
great Olympian gods, only Dionysus had a mortal parent. Dionysus,
though fully divine, is the only god who started life as a half-blood.
Which gives him a rather unique qualification to run the summer
camp.

I think it’s fair to say that Dionysus had a difficult childhood.
According to one version of his story, Hera, not content with
destroying his mother, ordered the Titans to seize the infant. What
happened next was not only violent but seriously gross. The Titans
tore the baby to pieces then boiled the pieces in a cauldron. A pome-
granate tree sprang from the place on the earth where the infant’s
blood had fallen, and Rhea, Dionysus’ grandmother,\(^1\) somehow
brought the child back to life.

\(^1\) Rhea, an ancient earth goddess, was the wife of the Titan Cronus and mother
of Zeus, Demeter, Hades, Hera, Hestia, and Poseidon.
Realizing that Olympus was not the safest place for the child, Zeus put Dionysus in the care of King Athamas and his wife Ino, who was one of Semele’s sisters. They hid the young boy in the women’s quarters, where he was disguised as a woman (which may account for some of the descriptions of Dionysus as having a feminine appearance\(^2\)). This arrangement lasted until Hera found out about it and drove both the king and his wife mad. The king in his madness even killed his eldest son, thinking him a stag.

Zeus then put Hermes on the case. Hermes disguised Dionysus as a young ram and managed to get him safely into the care of the five nymphs who lived on Mount Nysa. They were more successful guardians, raising the young godling in a cave, feeding him on honey. Zeus, grateful to the nymphs, set their images in the sky as stars and called them the Hyades. These are the stars that are believed to bring rain when they are near the horizon. As Edith Hamilton puts it in *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*:

> So the God of the Vine was born of fire and nursed by rain, the hard burning heat that ripens the grapes and water that keeps the plants alive.

Dionysus managed to survive childhood and apparently even made his first wine on Mount Nysa. According to Robert Graves’s *The Greek Myths*, soon after Dionysus reached manhood, Hera recognized him as Semele’s son. Never one to give up a grudge, Hera promptly drove Dionysus mad. It was at this point that he began his wanderings, accompanied by his tutor Silenus and an extremely rowdy bunch of followers who terrified nearly everyone they met. These followers include satyrs and the dreaded Maenads, possessed women who worshipped Dionysus and had a nasty habit of getting

---

\(^2\) According to the British writer Sir J. G. Frazer, there was also an ancient custom of dressing young boys as girls in order to protect them from the Evil Eye, a kind of curse.
drunk then dismembering and devouring wild animals or the occasional unfortunate human. Dionysus’ followers were also known to tear apart and eat goats and satyrs, which may be why Mr. D makes Grover so nervous.

Dionysus traveled to Egypt, India, and throughout the Aegean, bringing the vine with him and teaching wine-making. In most of these places he was welcomed and worshipped, which was clearly the safest approach to Dionysus.

Not everyone was thrilled to host such a riotous god. Dionysus returned to his birthplace, Thebes, because he’d heard that the king’s mother, Agave, was denying that Dionysus was the son of Zeus. Essentially, they were dissing him, saying Dionysus wasn’t a god. Even worse, Pentheus, the king, vowed to have Dionysus beheaded if he entered Thebes. Dionysus and his followers entered the city anyway, and Pentheus ordered them shackled. But Dionysus is, among other things, a master of illusions, and Pentheus, who was already beginning to lose his mind, wound up shackling a bull. The Maenads escaped the king’s guards and went dancing up a mountain where they tore a calf to pieces. Then Pentheus’ mother and sisters joined the Maenads. When Pentheus tried to stop them, the Maenads, led by Agave, Pentheus’ own mother, tore the king to pieces. She too was caught in the insanity of the wine god’s illusions and believed it was a lion she was killing when she was really murdering her own son. As Percy discovers, the gods have a tendency to take it very personally when they’re opposed.

Pentheus’ attempts to protect his city from the wine god’s influence were understandable but also futile. Anyone who knows anything about the Greeks gods would think he should have known better. Yet others made similar mistakes. When Dionysus, disguised

---

3 The story of Dionysus and Pentheus is told in a play by Euripides (480–406 B.C.) called The Bacchae. My summary of it is based on a re-telling by Michael Grant in Myths of the Greeks and Romans.
as a young girl, invited the three daughters of King Minyas to join his festival, they refused, choosing instead to stay at home and spin wool. Again, Dionysus summoned illusions that destroyed the mind. He drove the daughters of Minyas mad by filling their spinning room with phantom beasts and turning their threads to vines. One sister, in desperation, offered her own son as a sacrifice, and all three sisters in a wine-induced frenzy wound up tearing apart and devouring the boy.

One of the best-known stories about Dionysus, and the source of those visions Percy gets when he first meets Mr. D, tells of how a bunch of sailors mistook Dionysus for a young prince. Thinking he’d be worth quite a ransom, they kidnapped him. But once they got him aboard and tried to tie him up, the ropes fell apart. Only the helmsman realized they’d captured a god, and he pleaded with his shipmates to release the young man. Ignoring him, the captain ordered the crew to set sail. Strangely, though the sails filled with wind, the ship wouldn’t move. Instead, grapevines sprouted from the ship, winding across the rigging and sails; ivy covered the masts; the oars turned into serpents; and red wine streamed across the decks. At this point the captain realized something was wrong. He ordered the helmsman to return to shore. But it was too late. Dionysus turned himself into a lion, and the terrified sailors leapt overboard—where all but the helmsman were changed into dolphins.

You can’t read the stories of Dionysus without noticing a few distinct patterns. One is the way that ivy and grapevines tend to spring up, trapping those who have angered him. This is a device that Riordan uses in *The Titan’s Curse*, when Mr. D finally condescends to help Percy and his friends. But there are other mythic patterns, such as Dionysus’ fondness for turning himself and/or humans into wild beasts, which I think speaks to the fact that humans are animals. For all our civilization, we’re primates, and a certain primal savagery lingers beneath whatever morality and sophistication we acquire, a savagery that often surfaces in connection with intoxication. We do
our best to suppress this wildness and keep it in check—that’s why every civilization has laws—but it never entirely vanishes. It shows up in our crime rates and in our thirst for violent entertainment. Our species loves watching spectacles in which actors or animated characters routinely hurt and kill each other. The Ancient Greeks believed that such spectacles—for them, plays—purged these instincts. Watching the enactment of Dionysus’ story was supposed to be a catharsis, something that would cleanse the audience of its own violent urges.

Another pattern in Dionysus’ myths is use of mind-breaking illusions. Though the wine god is capable of creating earthquakes, thunder, and lightning—all of which he does in The Bacchae—his weapon of choice is to bend reality in the most horrific ways possible. A more minor pattern revolves around the god’s need for respect. In the myths Dionysus, the last god to join the Olympians and the only halfling among them, repeatedly insists that others recognize his divinity. This is something else that Riordan has picked up. Mr. D is always demanding proper respect from Percy, something that Percy is loath to give.

Perhaps the most dramatic and disturbing pattern in the Dionysian myths is the one in which parents go mad and tear apart and eat their young. This particular kind of insanity seems to echo the awful events of Dionysus’ own childhood: being torn apart by the Titans and then all the madness that Hera caused. In a way, this is not so far from contemporary psychology that tells us that abusive childhoods can result in damaged adults. But it’s also a very clear-eyed vision of the power of drink at its worst, when intoxication becomes simply toxic. I know quite a few people who grew up with alcoholic parents, and though the kids weren’t literally torn apart, many of them went through a kind of emotional shredder, caught in the uncontrolled madness that alcoholism brings. When the influence of Dionysus is at its worst, people lose their sanity. Even the powerful natural instincts to love and protect one’s own children dissolve in the drink.
By the time he gets to Camp Half-Blood, Percy has already had a close-up view of just how ugly and insane alcoholism can be. Smelly Gabe is a lousy human being and an abusive husband. Understandably, Percy, like those unfortunate mortals in the myths, wants nothing to do with Mr. D, and like those mortals, he underestimates him.

Fortunately, when Percy meets Dionysus, the wine god is on a kind of divine probation, not allowed to indulge in his beloved wine and doing his best not to anger Zeus again. Mr. D is a Dionysus with restraints, a highly unusual condition for the god who was also known as Lysios, the loosener. Sardonic and unhelpful as he may be, this is a kinder, gentler Dionysus than the one we see in the myths. The fact that he is trying to stay on Zeus' good side may be the only reason that Percy manages to get away with as much as he does.

Or perhaps there’s an unacknowledged kinship between them. Dionysus and Percy’s adventures have something in common. The stories of Dionysus might even have been an inspiration for part of what Percy undergoes. Like Percy, Dionysus made the long, difficult journey to the underworld to rescue his mother. And like Percy, he bargained with Hades. Dionysus agreed to send Hades that which he himself loved best in Semele’s place. What Dionysus most loved were ivy, grapevines, and myrtle, and he wound up giving Hades myrtle in exchange for his mother’s life. He then brought his mother out of the underworld and up to Mount Olympus. There he changed her name to Thyone, which allowed her to somehow remain among the immortals without Hera attacking her again.

The reason this myth is important is because it’s tied into another one of Dionysus’ many aspects. He’s a god of death and rebirth. That story about him being torn apart, boiled, and reborn? Many scholars believe it’s a metaphor for the process of wine-making in which the grapes are torn from the vine, smashed, and then processed into wine. Others say it’s a metaphor for the grapevine itself, which is cut back to a bare trunk after the autumn harvest, and yet returns to life every spring, covering itself with green leaves and sweet grapes. In
either case, it’s a basic pattern found in many mythologies, a belief in the immortality of the soul: something is destroyed and from that destruction something new is born. The phoenix, for example, is a mythological creature that embodies that cycle.

CONTINUED IN *DEMIGODS AND MONSTERS*
Note to self: Do not become a parent in a fantasy novel.

Seriously, have you ever noticed how disturbingly often parents in fantasy novels are dead, kidnapped, missing, clueless, distant, or unknown? Kind of makes me want to round up all the authors, sit them on those pleather psychiatrist couches, and say, “Now, tell me about your mother . . .”

On the other hand, it works very nicely as a storytelling device: Get the parents out of the way and then something interesting can
happen. I think of it as the *Home Alone* technique. You see it in books by C. S. Lewis, Lemony Snicket, J. K. Rowling . . . and you definitely see it in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians series. All the kids at Camp Half-Blood, including the protagonist Percy, are separated from their parents.

But are the parents really gone from the story? True, they don't have much screen time, but in Rick Riordan's books, the influence of these seldom-seen parents is so profound as to be (brace yourself—there's a pun coming) mythic.

The parents in the Percy Jackson books run the gamut from very cool to extremely evil. To facilitate our discussion of them, I'd like to introduce: Sarah's Sliding Scale of Parenting Skills.

Okay, so it's not actually a sliding scale. It's more of a report card. But that just doesn't have the same ring to it. After all, what's more important: accurate use of vocabulary or catchy alliteration? Don't answer that.

**Worst Parent Award (Grade = Instant Expulsion)**

Let's begin with the worst of the worst, the absolute bottom of Sarah's Sliding Scale of Parenting Skills, the parent who is so bad that he has won the Worst Parent Award for three millennia in a row. (Several years running, he also won Worst Dressed too, when he showed up to the awards ceremony in bell bottoms and suspenders. . . . Okay, I'm just making that up. Dionysus always wins Worst Dressed for his tiger-striped Hawaiian shirts.) The recipient of this award is directly responsible for the central conflict in all three Percy Jackson novels. If he had cultivated better relationships with his children, the entire series would have been different. He is the Big Bad, the primary villain. He's also a lousy father.

I'm not talking didn't-attend-his-daughter's-piano-recital lousy, or even forgot-to-pick-the-kid-up-from-soccer-practice lousy. No, this paragon of parental virtue began his parenting career by eating
his own children.

Yes, that’s right. He ate them. Swallowed them whole. No ketchup. No marinade. No mercy. He would have gotten away with it too, except that his wife tricked him into swallowing a stone instead of the baby Zeus. Zeus then grew up to free his siblings from his father’s stomach, slice his dear papa into pieces, and toss the pieces into the deepest pit in Tartarus.

I’m talking, of course, about Kronos, the evil Titan Lord who wants to rain death, destruction, and chaos on the world. In what is perhaps the largest understatement of the series, Percy says, “Kronos didn’t care for anyone, including his own children.”

To be fair, Kronos does have other children that he did not eat. But he’s not BFF with them either. We learn in The Titan’s Curse that Chiron, the wise and kindly centaur who trains and befriends Percy, is also Kronos’s son. He wants to accompany the heroes on their quest to save Artemis and Annabeth, but he believes that if he does, his father will kill him (thus fulfilling the Oracle’s prophecy). Regardless of whether Chiron is right or not, that’s not what I’d call a healthy relationship. To quote Percy again: “I’ve met plenty of embarrassing parents, but Kronos, the evil Titan Lord who wanted to destroy Western Civilization? Not the kind of dad you invited to school for career day.”

**Failures (Grade = F)**

Moving up Sarah’s Scale of Parenting Skills, we find the failures. These charmers include Ares, Smelly Gabe, and Atlas.

Atlas is easy. Killing one’s own child = an automatic failing grade. In the climactic battle in The Titan’s Curse, Atlas’s daughter Zoë Nightshade shoots arrows at Atlas to protect Percy, and then leaps between Atlas and Artemis to protect her beloved goddess. Atlas knocks her aside without a moment’s hesitation. She dies, in part
from the dragon Ladon's poison, but mostly, Percy believes, from her father's final blow. "Atlas's fury," Percy thinks, "had broken her inside." I don't care how many archery competitions Atlas sat through or how many times he stayed up late worrying while she was out on dates with Hercules. He killed her. 'Nuf said. "She started it" is not an excuse.

Next, let's look at Smelly Gabe, Percy's stepdad. Unlike Atlas, he is actually responsible for saving Percy's life. You'd think this would boost his grade, but according to the strict rules of Sarah's Sliding Scale of Parenting Skills, intentions matter. Gabe protects him by smelling so overwhelmingly human that he masks the magical "scent" of a demigod, hiding Percy from the mythical monsters who hunt the children of gods. (I'm thinking this isn't a literal smell, but maybe I'm wrong—Percy says "the guy reeked like moldy garlic pizza wrapped in gym shorts." Yum.) This protection is in no way intentional on Gabe's part. As are most people who have not encountered deodorant, Gabe is unaware of the power of his scent, magical or otherwise.

If we look at Gabe's intentional acts, we see he emotionally abuses Percy, physically abuses Percy's mom, and gambles and drinks away the family's money. When his wife and stepson disappear in *The Lightning Thief*, he accuses Percy of foul play and milks the situation for personal gain. So while he performs a valuable service for the series (preserving the protagonist = good), as a parental figure, he fails.

Our final failure is the god Ares. Ares is the epitome of all bullies, and that translates directly into his parenting style. Look at the exchange between Ares and Clarisse in *The Sea of Monsters*. "You're pathetic," he tells her. "I should've let one of my sons take this quest." She swears she'll succeed and make him proud. He says, "You will succeed. And if you don't..." He raises his fist, and Clarisse flinches. Like Gabe, he's an abuser. Clarisse embarks on her quest in book two in large part to please and impress her dad, but
she won’t get the support and praise she needs from Ares. He’s a fail-
ure as a father. (Incidentally, he’s also a failure as a son and brother. He thinks a war between relatives is the best kind of war. “Always the bloodiest,” he says. “Nothing like watching your relatives fight, I always say.” He must be such a joy at family reunions. Just imagine what Thanksgiving is like.)

**Unsatisfactory (Grade = D)**

Only mildly better than the actively evil parents are the negligent ones. Thalia’s mom falls into this category. All we know about her is that she was an alcoholic who died when she drove drunk. But that’s more than we know about the other D-grade parents. The other near-failures are the scores of deities who fail to acknowledge their offspring as their own. Cabin eleven at Camp Half-Blood is filled with Undetermineds (kids whose parentage is clearly divine but unknown). Percy describes them in *The Lightning Thief* as “teenagers who looked sullen and depressed, as if they were waiting for a call that would never come. I’d known kids like that at Yancy Academy, shuffled off to boarding school by rich parents who didn’t have the time to deal with them. But gods should behave better.”

Because of this parental negligence, the Undetermineds are left to feel bitter and angry—and are therefore vulnerable to manipulation by Luke and Kronos. Thanks to these D-grade parents, Kronos’s army grows. And that’s just inexcusable. Maybe gods aren’t into the whole introspection thing, but you’d think that after several centuries of parenthood, they’d absorb a few tips, perhaps read a few self-help books (*Men Are From Mars, I Am Venus* . . .). I’m with Percy—the gods should know better.

**CONTINUED IN DEMIGODS AND MONSTERS**
Want a free signed copy of Rick Riordan’s *The Battle of the Labyrinth*?

Enter to win one of three signed copies of the brand new Percy Jackson book!

Just go to www.TeenLibris.com, and click on “Win Me!” to find out how.

While you’re there, check out a free preview of *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, our exclusive interview with Rick Riordan, and tons more great teen lit content: interviews, book excerpts, book reviews, and more!

www.TeenLibris.com
Step through the wardrobe and into the imaginations of these sixteen friends of Aslan as they explore Narnia, from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to *The Last Battle*, from the heart of Caspian’s kingdom to the Eastern Seas.

Deb Caletti          O. R. Melling  
Diane Duane            Lisa Papademetriou  
Sarah Beth Durst      Diana Peterfreund  
Brent Hartinger       Susan Vaught  
Susan Juby                Zu Vincent and Kiara Koenig  
Sophie Masson           Ned Vizzini  
Kelly McKlymer          Elizabeth Wein

You’ll never see Narnia the same way again.

**Exclusively in Borders stores April 2008**
A New Dawn

Your Favorite Authors on Stephanie Meyer's Twilight Series

Edited by Ellen Hopkins, author of the New York Times best-selling Crank and Glass

• Is Edward a romantic, or a (really hot) sociopath?
• How is the Twilight series just like one of Shakespeare’s tragedies?
• Who would you rather date: the guy who thirsts for your blood, or the guy who drinks out of the toilet?

Join your favorite writers as they look at the Twilight series with fresh eyes, and fall in love with Bella and Edward, and their world, all over again.

Robin Brande
Rachel Caine
Cassandra Clare
Rosemary Clement-Moore
Linda Gerber
K. A. Nuzum
Cara Lockwood

Megan McCafferty
Justine Musk
James Owen
Janette Rallison
Ellen Steiber
Anne Ursu
Susan Vaught

Exclusively in Borders stores June 2008
Ride along with your favorite authors as they dive deeper into Christopher Paolini’s epic Inheritance series, and the mysteries of the Dragon Riders.

Michael Dowling
Nancy Yi fan
Ian Irvine
Kelly McClymer
J. Fitzgerald McCurdy
Jeremy Owen
Joshua Pantalleresco
Gail Sidonie Sobat
Carol Plum-Ucci
Susan Vaught

Exclusively in Borders stores July 2008