



The Beautiful Stories of Life: Six Greek Myths, Retold

Cynthia Rylant , Carson Ellis (Illustrator)

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Newbery Medal-winner Cynthia Rylant retells her favorite stories from Greek mythology, breathing fresh life into the tales of Pandora, Persephone, Orpheus, Pygmalion, Narcissus, and Psyche. The writing is lyrical and understated, a perfect tone for stories that introduce young readers to themes of love and loss, pride and forgiveness. Carson Ellis's elegant black-and-white illustrations lend an aura of beauty and mystery.

The Beautiful Stories of Life: Six Greek Myths, Retold Details

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Author : Cynthia Rylant , Carson Ellis (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review The Beautiful Stories of Life: Six Greek Myths, Retold for online ebook

Emma says

These stories never get old.

Julianna says

Reviewed for THC Reviews

Because of an adult fiction series I've been reading that is based on Greek mythology, I've recently rediscovered an interest in these myths, so when I saw *The Beautiful Stories of Life* on the featured shelf at the library, I decided to pick it up. It turned out to be a nice way to refresh my memory on the stories of Pandora, Persephone, Narcissus and Psyche, and I believe, get my first introduction to Orpheus and Pygmalion, as I recognized their names but don't recall reading their tales before. I'm far from being any kind of expert on Greek mythology, so I can't really address the accuracy of the re-tellings, but they seemed to mesh well with my vague childhood memories of the myths I was familiar with. All of the stories are about life and love, and all contain some type of romantic element which was another part of what drew me to the book. As such, they would probably be of interest to children who enjoy fairy tales and fables. There are some good life lessons to be learned from the stories, but they are probably a bit too sophisticated for younger children to fully appreciate. I have my doubts that this book would hold the interest of the average youngster, which is why I would recommend it for the 9-12 age range. By that age, children should have developed the ability to think in more complex terms and understand stories that contain deeper meaning. For them, *The Beautiful Stories of Life* could become a nice little introduction to these Greek myths.

I was surprised to discover that the illustrations are all done in black and white in a more classical style. The style suited the subject matter of the book well, but I was hoping for something more colorful, perhaps like the pale pastels of the cover illustration. As is, they just didn't really stand out to me. Instead, they just blended in with the text, and there were too few in my opinion. Each story had only one or two pictures with several pages of solid text in between, which is another reason that I think this book would be more suitable for older children. Overall, I enjoyed reading *The Beautiful Stories of Life* and found it to be a fun way to reconnect with a few romantic Greek myths, but for a children's picture book, I felt that the illustrations left a little something to be desired.

Note: One illustration depicts a statue of a nude woman, which some parents may find inappropriate.

Maeleah says

The Beautiful Stories of Life: Six Greek Myths Retold by Cynthia Rylant. Illus. by Carson Ellis. Harcourt, 2009. 71 pp. ISBN:978-0-15-206184-5 \$16.00 5th-8th grade

Rylant, a prolific, award winning writer, has succeeded once again in creating a work of art. In this collection she retells six Greek myths: Pandora, Persephone, Orpheus, Pygmalion, Narcissus and Psyche. Although they could be read separately, reading the stories in order feels like a gentle, flowing river. No prior

knowledge of Greek myths is necessary to enjoy this classical retelling. Rylant writes poetically utilizing numerous literary devices such as similes, metaphors and personification. Never didactic, each story gently gives a life lesson—about hope, patience, love, trust, pride, and greed. Her poetic prose brings the Greek characters to life. The cover art, in soft colored pencil tones of green, mauves, peach and brown, illustrates symbols from each of the stories, for example, a box, a pomegranate, a chisel and a lyre. Complementing the prose, are occasional, gentle, two-tone, penciled illustrations of period, Greco style figures. The Beautiful Stories could be read aloud or read by those looking for some introspective stories. Some adults might feel offended by the masculine pronouns: “Zeus found man’s greatest weakness by first finding man’s greatest strength: It was love.” However, I personally think this fits the context and setting of the Greek myths. Upon completion of the final story about love, one finds a beautifully, sketched rose. For a collection with background information, a glossary and other explanatory material on Greek myths, try Mary Pope Osborne’s Favorite Greek Myths. Rylant’s The Beautiful Stories of Life has a different purpose—it is truly a gem for the soul.

Kristen says

This retelling of six Greek myths is a mixed bag. On the one hand, you have quotes that outright offended me, such as, "And beautiful Pandora loved Epimetheus in return. Of course she would. She was the essence of femininity, and she instinctively gave her heart and soul to her husband. With her beauty, she pleased him. With her intelligence, she understood him. With her cleverness, she delighted him." On the other hand, some of the writing is gorgeous in its simplicity: "Life loves the truth. Important things that are kept in the darkness will not remain there comfortably." I would recommend this to members of cultures who don't have a problem with the idea that women basically exist for the benefit of their husbands.

Dayna says

Beautifully and simply told. A delightful quick read and nice review of those classic tales on a PG scale.

Heidi Burkhart says

Six Greek myths retold in a simple and straightforward manner. Perfect for upper elementary students.

Sam Grace says

The thing is, this is the kind of book I usually really get into. The illustrations add very little, being scattered through the book (one per story), but they are nice and detailed pencil drawings. The short 9-20 page retellings of six carefully chosen stories is a great way to introduce people to the myths. They are told in a way that (I think) acknowledges both the history behind the story AND the person of the new storyteller. Rylant has her own very Rylant-y angle to these myths (although she doesn't tell the reader that it's her angle, not an ancient Greek one), and I don't think that's a bad thing.

Here's what I DO think is a bad thing:

1) the essence of femininity is, apparently, joy in submission in heterosexual relationships. I wish it were just the Pandora story that had that, but it's also Persephone. And Pygmalion. And Narcissus. And, to a lesser degree (thank godddess) Psyche. And even though the ancient Greeks WERE patriarchal, what Rylant presents is much more in line with conservative American gender roles.

2) She gets the "details" wrong. (Like Prometheus is a "man" not a god, and "Persephone was a mortal, but her mother, Demeter, was a goddess." Oh really? I doubt the huge chunk of the population that followed the Mysteries at various times would have been happy to hear that.)

Of course, not everyone cares about that. If you don't, and you want a retelling that uses contemporary language and storytelling style, then maybe you should check this out.

Dolly says

This is a short collection of six Greek myths by Cynthia Rylant. We have been enchanted by Greek mythology recently, reading everything we can get our hands on. Our girls are particularly fascinated by the Goddess Girls and the Myth-O-Mania series right now and we are reading through these books quickly.

We were fascinated with these tales, which are more traditional (though not entirely accurate) renditions of the classic stories. What never ceases to amaze me are the coincidences in my reading choices. We also read East O' the Sun and West O' the Moon recently, which is a retelling of the tale of *Psyche and Eros*, a tale which is contained within this book. It was fun to compare them and to see how stories are changed throughout time and vary by location.

Betsy says

i listened to this book on tape. Alyssa Bresnahan read the Greek myths- her voice is excellent- and the stories are engaging. i thought the stories did a variety of things- they introduced stories that my wee ones don't normally read, they were entertaining to hear, they also offered a moral or lesson that wasn't overwhelming- they were simple and sincere. a good read.

Emily Davenport says

Nice stories, pretty pictures (but I wish they'd been in color)

Armatstorage says

I loved the cover. I don't find all these stories beautiful however. I wasn't able to read all of them word for word but skimmed through all of them except Pygmalion which I read word for word. I think the Greeks

were a little confused sometimes, but there are principles to be learned for each story I believe.

71 pages

Darlene says

Book 49 Bibliographic Citation:

Rylant, C. (2009). *The beautiful stories of life: Six Greek myths, retold*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Age/Grade Level: (Ages 10–14, Grades 5—8)

Summary:

What happens when Pandora opens the mysterious box? When Persephone is kidnapped? And when Pygmalion falls in love with a statue? Six classic myths offering life stories of love, pride, courage, and hope are shared in this retelling by award-winning author Cynthia Rylant.

Awards/Reviewing Sources:

Horn Book starred (July, 2009)

Kirkus Reviews (April 1, 2009)

Publishers Weekly (May 11, 2009)

School Library Journal (November 1, 2011)

Christian Library Journal 02/01/11

Curriculum Content/Standard for 21st Century Learner:

This text would be a great introduction for a 5th-8th grade class studying mythology as it offers six classic tales written in easy-to-understand language.

AASL Standards

1.1.6 Read, view, and listen for information presented in any format (e.g., textual, visual, media, digital) in order to make inferences and gather meaning.

Recommendation for student's personal literature selection:

Middle grades students who enjoy reading mythological stories would appreciate the recommendation for this book as it offers six of the most famous stories from early Greek times.

Genre:

Mythology (Greek)

Jessie says

This is a visually pretty and literally straightforward interpretation of 6 Greek Myths. I appreciated those two features the most. IMO, these stories are better without too many rambling details attached. The author craftily lays out the modern day meaning of the stories without being obvious. I would recommend as a

palate cleanser for time in between books.

Nora S says

I really liked this book because I am interesting in things like Greek Gods. This book told six different Greek. Some of them have meanings, for example; why we have different seasons. However, some of them didn't really mean anything and didn't have much value to me. I liked all six of them anyway. This book would be good for anyone In 4th/5th grade and up. I would recommend this to people who are interested in Greek Gods and Myths. This book is a little shorter than most books that I've read but I like it anyway.

Jean Menzies says

If the goodreads' translation of 2 stars is 'this is OK' then I cannot give this collection any higher a rating. It is worth pointing out this is a children's book where the author puts in her own words 6 Ancient Greek myths - these are not retellings or adaptations. I am entirely on board with this concept, I love mythology and it was children's books that got me into it in the first place (I am now a PhD student conducting research in this field). I think accessibility and enjoyability is really important and I cannot complain that Rylant's writing itself is particularly poor. The addition of illustrations is also a nice touch, they are pleasant drawings although number relatively few. This collection, however, is riddled with silly mistakes and absent of important facts (nothing that would offend children). If all the author has to offer in these cases is her writing, no original stories, then the least they could do is proper research. The mistakes could have been so simply corrected as they are well established facts that not including them/getting them wrong can only read to me as lazy research. It felt like the author just remembered the myths off the top of her head and wrote them down with no further effort exerted. I don't think reading this for an introduction to Greek mythology will be a displeasurable experience in itself, for readers unfamiliar with the originals, but I cannot see why on earth you would want to read what is a pretty average collection when there are better, more accurate, versions out there. If you are familiar with Greek mythology this book will probably just irritate you as it did me.
