Rick Riordan – Voice of the Demi-Gods

Betsy Damon

Plymouth State University

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the works of children’s book author Rick Riordan and highlight the impact of his work on children’s literature. Major themes of his work include exploring classical heritages through mythology, analyzing the “hero’s quest” in a modern-day stories, and providing openings for discussion of “such relevant issues as learning disabilities, the nature of family, and themes of loyalty, friendship and faith.” ([www.rickriordan.com/my-books/percy-jackson/resources/rationale.aspx](http://www.rickriordan.com/my-books/percy-jackson/resources/rationale.aspx))

Rick Riordan – Voice of the Demi-Gods

Rick Riordan has written five series of books and several standalone novels. Being a rather reluctant reader was the background in which Riordan' desire to write developed but he originally chose to produce mystery novels for adults that were far too scandalous for his own students to read. As a successful adult mystery writer, Riordan joined the teen novel market by accident when his youngest son was struggling with school and reading. Riordan began sharing tales of Greek mythology at bedtime until he was “forced to invent” Percy Jackson. His son encouraged him to write the story down and then his students insisted that he get it published. Not expecting much, he was instead swamped with interest from the publishing world and his new life began.

Born in 1964 in San Antonio, Texas, Rick attended school in San Antonio and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a double major in English and history. He received his teacher certification from UT San Antonio and did his student teaching in San Antonio schools. His first full-time teaching job was in New Braunfels, Texas.

After spending his childhood into adulthood in Texas, he and his wife moved to San Francisco where they lived for 8 years while he taught at Presidio Hill School. They moved back to San Antonio after having two sons and Rick began working at Saint Mary’s Hall School. In 2002, he received one of four Master Teacher Awards from the school. The following year, he was inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters. Teaching recognition not withstanding, a couple years later there was a decision to be made. Rick had successfully used his experience as a Social Studies and Language Arts teacher at the middle school level to create the beginning of the Percy Jackson phenomenon. That experience also helps lend credence to the subject matter and the interest level of readers, but the demands of publishing 2 books per year (1 adult and 1 children’s) exceeded his abilities if he remained a teacher so he gave up his teaching career though he says “I’ll be able to get more kids interested in reading mythology with my books that I ever did as a teacher.” ([www.rickriordan.com/about-rick/an-interview-with-rick.aspx](http://www.rickriordan.com/about-rick/an-interview-with-rick.aspx)) The entire family has since moved to Boston.

One valuable piece that Riordan provides on his website to help teachers “use” his books is a rationale page that provides a teacher’s guide, school project ideas, and a ready-made rationale that “you are welcome to share with parents, principals, curriculum gurus, etc.” ([www.rickriordan.com/my-books/percy-jackson/resources/rationale.aspx](http://www.rickriordan.com/my-books/percy-jackson/resources/rationale.aspx)) in the event that any controversy or discussion is raised. I think this aspect is one of the value-added items about Rick Riordan as a children’s literature author. He’s been there in the trenches of the classroom and knows what teachers have to go through whether it’s finding appropriate activities, inspiring students to learn the curriculum, or working with administration and parents to explain how the kids are learning by using specific texts that may be seen as “fun” rather than “educational.” Not only is he providing a service to his fellow teachers but he is helping promote the use of his materials in the classroom which in turn should keep his titles circulating very actively long after they drop off the NY Times Bestsellers List.

His Percy Jackson and the Olympians (5 books) and The Heroes of Olympus (5 books) series are based on Greek mythology while the Kane Chronicles (3 books) touches on Egyptian mythology. Assorted graphic novels and related books have been released as well. The 39 Clues Series was designed by Riordan and he wrote the first book, but the publishers opted to have other authors create the other stories in the series staying true to the series design but highlighting their own styles in order to get more books out to the public more frequently. Books usually take 2-4 months for Riordan to write and then the rest of the 12 months is devoted to comprehensive revisions, sometimes as many as 4 per book. The best news now is that by October 2015, fans will get to read about Magnus Chase as he journeys through Norse mythology in Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard’s first volume: *The Sword of Summer*. Magnus was indirectly referenced in The Blood of Olympus when it was mentioned that Annabeth Chase had an uncle and cousin that lived in Boston.

Rick Riordan does something that is amazing to see in action. He produces books that get kids excited about reading! They await the next book release with bated breath and reluctantly accept other suggestions of books to read in the meantime. His approach is not unique or even new but there is something magnetic about his main characters that touch kids and make them feel that they could be the leads themselves (or at least good friends of the heroes.) Riordan focuses on ancient histories to drive his novels and series which as a former middle school Social Studies and English Language Arts teacher gives his books an advantage in connecting to mandated curriculum. True, other series involve fantasy settings based on nonfiction research and details, but most time-traversing characters are tame compared to Percy and Annabeth and what kid doesn't dream that they're descended from gods with super talents and skills at the ready after some basic how to sessions with Grover.

**Conclusion:**

If it wasn't for his youngest son’s dyslexia and ADHD, Riordan’s creation of Percy Jackson may have never happened and many young people would never have been able to find books they enjoy as much as Riordan’s contributions to the children’s literature market. When Riordan’s son was struggling with reading, his dad asked what interested him in school. His son expressed interest in Greek mythology which fit perfectly with Riordan’s past as a Social Studies teacher, in these books, the story doesn't just happen with Percy and Annabeth standing around and watching but instead you can transform yourself into those intrepid adventurers and vicariously experience the story up close and personal.   
Putting out about 1 book every year, slows down our most voracious readers as the material is simply unavailable as quickly as they consume it. Luckily, Riordan was able to outline The 39 Clues series and write the first book of the series and then publishers recruited other authors to produce the remaining books and other related series. That decision by the publishers also allowed Riordan to add another series (and ancient mythology) to his list of works as Sons of Asgard is due to be released beginning in 2015. It will be interesting to see which ancient mythology is explored when this new series is concluded.

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Works by Rick Riordan

Percy Jackson & the Olympians

1. *The Lightning Thief* (2005)
2. *The Sea of Monsters* (2006)
3. *The Titan's Curse* (2007)
4. *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008)
5. *The Last Olympian* (2009)

#### The Heroes of Olympus

1. *The Lost Hero* (2010)
2. *The Son of Neptune* (2011)
3. *The Mark of Athena* (2012)
4. *The House of Hades* (2013)
5. *The Blood of Olympus* (2014)

#### Graphic novels

1. *2The Lightning Thief Graphic Novel* (2010)
2. *The Sea of Monsters Graphic Novel* (2013)
3. *The Titan's Curse Graphic Novel* (2013)

#### Related books

1. *The Demigod Files* (2009)
2. *The Demigod Diaries* (2012)
3. *Percy Jackson’s Book of Greek Gods* (2014)

### The Kane Chronicles

1. *The Red Pyramid*(2010)
2. *The Throne of Fire* (2011)
3. *The Serpent's Shadow* (2012)
4. *The Kane Chronicles Survival Guide* (2012)
5. *The Red Pyramid Graphic Novel* (2012)

### The 39 Clues series

1. *The Maze of Bones* (2008)
2. *Introduction to The 39 Clues: The Black Book of Buried Secrets* (2010)
3. *Vespers Rising* (2011)

### Tres Navarre series

1. *Big Red Tequila* (1997)
2. *The Widower's Two-Step* (1998)
3. *The Last King of Texas* (2001)
4. *The Devil Went Down to Austin* (2002)
5. *Southtown* (2004)
6. *Mission Road* (2005)
7. *Rebel Island* (2008)

Works by Rick Riordan (Cont’d)

### Standalone novels

1. *Cold Springs* (2004)
2. *The Son of Sobek*(2013)
3. *The Staff of Serapis* (2014)

### Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard

1. *The Sword of Summer* (2015)