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The Lightning Thief

By Rick Riordan

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Summary



Percy Jackson is a good kid, but he can't seem to focus on his schoolwork or control his temper. And lately, being away at boarding school is only getting worse -- Percy could have sworn his pre-algebra teacher turned into a monster and tried to kill him. When Percy's mom finds out, she knows it's time that he knew the truth about where he came from, and that he go to the one place he'll be safe. She sends Percy to Camp Half Blood, a summer camp for demigods (on Long Island), where he learns that the father he never knew is Poseidon, God of the Sea. Soon a mystery unfolds and together with his friends -- one a satyr and the other the demigod daughter of Athena -- Percy sets out on a quest across the United States to reach the gates of the Underworld (located in a recording studio in Hollywood) and prevent a catastrophic war between the gods. But to succeed on his quest, Percy will have to unravel a treachery more powerful than the gods themselves.

Rick Riordan is the author of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, as well as the hugely popular Tres Navarre mysteries, winner of the top three awards in the mystery genre. For the past fifteen years, Rick has taught in middle schools in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Texas. He lives in San Antonio with his wife and two sons.

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/The-Lightning-Thief/Rick-Riordan/e/9780786838653/?itm=1>



About the Author



Rick Riordan is the multi-award-winning author of the Tres Navarre mystery series for adults and the #1 New York Times bestselling *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series for children.

For fifteen years, Rick taught English and history at public and private middle schools in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Texas. In 2002, Saint Mary's Hall honored him with the school's first Master Teacher Award.

His adult fiction has won the top three national awards in the mystery genre – the Edgar, the Anthony and the Shamus. He has presented workshops for such organizations as the International Reading Association, the California Association of Independent Schools, the National Council for Teachers of English, the Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute and the Texas Library Association. His short fiction has appeared in Mary Higgins Clark Mystery Magazine and Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. In 2003, he was inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters.

His *Percy Jackson* series features a twelve-year-old dyslexic boy who discovers he is the modern-day son of a Greek god. The novels draw on Riordan's experience teaching Greek mythology and his interaction with students who have learning differences. **The Lightning Thief** was a New York Times Notable Book for 2005. Film rights have been purchased by Twentieth Century Fox and a feature film is in development. **The Sea of Monsters** was a Child Magazine Best Book for Children for 2006 and a Publishers Weekly and BookSense national bestseller. The most recent title is **The Titan's Curse**, a #1 New York Times children's series bestseller.

Rick Riordan now writes full-time. He lives in San Antonio with his wife and two sons.

<http://www.rickriordan.com/author.htm>



Book Review

School Library Journal

Gr 5-9-An adventure-quest with a hip edge. At first glance, Perseus Jackson seems like a loser (readers meet him at a boarding school for troubled youth), but he's really the son of Poseidon and a mortal woman. As he discovers his heritage, he also loses that mother and falls into mortal danger. The gods (still very active in the 21st-century world) are about to go to war over a lost thunderbolt, so Percy and sidekicks Grover (a young satyr) and Annabeth (daughter of Athena) set out to retrieve it. Many close calls and monster-attacks later, they enter Hades's realm (via L.A.). A virtuoso description of the Underworld is matched by a later account of Olympus (hovering 600 floors above Manhattan). There's lots of zippy review of Greek myth and legend, and characters like Medusa, Procrustes, Charon, and the Eumenides get updates. Some of the Labors of Heracles or Odysseus's adventures are recycled, but nothing seems stale, and the breakneck pace keeps the action from being too predictable. Percy is an ADHD, wise-cracking, first-person narrator. Naturally, his real quest is for his own identity. Along the way, such topics as family, trust, war, the environment, dreams, and perceptions are raised. There is subtle social critique for sophisticated readers who can see it. Although the novel ends with a satisfying conclusion (and at least one surprise), it is clear that the story isn't over. The 12-year-old has matured and is ready for another quest, and the villain is at large. Readers will be eager to follow the young protagonist's next move.-Patricia D. Lothrop, St. George's School, Newport, RI Copyright 2005 Reed Business Information.

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Discussion Questions

Warning! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

1. Percy has been diagnosed with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). The main traits of ADHD are inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. The ADHD child often has trouble keeping his mind on one thing and organizing a task. He feels restless and fidgety. He may blurt out comments or act without thinking. Does this profile fit Percy? Discuss how Percy does/does not seem like an ADHD child.
2. Why do you think Percy's mother married Gabe? Do you think she's a strong character? A good mother?
3. Percy's first encounter with an Olympian god is Mr. D, Dionysus. Initially, Percy has a hard time believing Mr. D is immortal. What is your reaction to the way Dionysus is portrayed in the book? The Greek gods have very human traits—would this make them easier or harder to believe in?
4. Throughout the book, humor is used to counterbalance the serious situations Percy faces. For instance, the Minotaur wears white Fruit-of-the-Loom underwear, and Percy wants to tell the mummified Oracle, “thanks, wrong door, just looking for the bathroom.” What's your reaction to the book's humor? Does it seem appropriate for a sixth grade narrator? Does it change your perception of the mythology?
5. Chiron describes Western Civilization as “a living force. A collective consciousness that has burned bright for thousands of years.” He says the Greek gods are part of this, and move around as different nations become the central power of Western Civilization—Greece, Rome, Germany, France, England, the United States. What do you think of this idea?
6. After Percy learns he is a half-blood, he wonders who his own father is. How would you feel if you were in Percy's place? Would it be easier

to believe your father was dead, or to know that he was alive but not communicating with you?

7. When Percy finally learns the truth that he is the son of Poseidon, are you surprised? What hints are dropped before the revelation? How does Percy's personality fit/not fit the god Poseidon?
8. When describing the effects of Mist, Chiron says, "Remarkable, really, the lengths humans will go to fit things into their version of reality." How is this true in the novel? In Greek mythology? In real life?
9. Percy's trip to the Underworld does not turn out as he suspected. What do you think of Percy's decision to leave his mother behind? What does the scene in the throne room tell you about the three friends – Annabeth, Grover and Percy?
10. How does the last line of the prophecy—you shall fail to save what matters most in the end—come true? What do you think of this ending? Did Percy make the right choice? What would you have done in his place? `

<http://www.multcolib.org/talk/guides-lightning.html>



Author Interview

You were a teacher for a long time. Why did you leave the classroom?

That was a hard decision. I love teaching. I love working with kids. For many years, I taught full-time and wrote a book a year in the Tres Navarre mystery series.

When I sold the **Percy Jackson** books to Miramax, I realized that I'd now have to write two books a year to keep up with my deadlines -- one adult book, and one children's book. I just didn't think I'd be able to keep up that pace and do a good job in the classroom, so I made the reluctant decision to leave teaching.

Maybe some day I'll go back to the classroom. I'm not ready to say it'll never happen. But for now, the books are keeping me very busy. The good part is, I still get to work with kids as a children's author. Hopefully, I'll be able to get more kids interested in reading Greek mythology with **Percy Jackson** than I ever did as a teacher.

Where did you get the idea for Percy Jackson?

My son Haley was studying the Greek myths in second grade when he asked me to tell him some bedtime stories about the gods and heroes. I had taught Greek myths for many years at the middle school level, so I was glad to comply. When I ran out of myths, he was disappointed and asked me if I could make up something new with the same characters.

I thought about it for a few minutes. Then I remembered a creative writing project I used to do with my sixth graders -- I would let them create their own demigod hero, the son or daughter of any god they wanted, and have them describe a Greek-style quest for that hero. Off the top of my head, I made up Percy Jackson and told Haley all about his quest to recover Zeus' lightning bolt in modern day America. It took about three nights to tell the whole story, and when I was done, Haley told me I should write it out as a book.

I had a lot to do already, but I somehow found the time to write the first Percy Jackson book over the next year. I just really enjoyed writing it. The story was such fun, and so different from my adult fiction, that I found myself spending a lot of time on it. Now, I'm sure glad I did!

Any advice for young people who might want to be writers?

I started writing seriously when I was in eighth grade. I had an English teacher who encouraged me to submit my work for publication.

I became a middle school English teacher largely because of the impact Mrs. Pabst had on me twenty-three years ago, and I love having the chance to encourage kids to write the way I was encouraged. That's one of the reasons I was not anxious to leave the classroom to pursue full-time writing.

The first thing a young writer needs is a mentor who believes in his or her talent. So don't be afraid to ask for help! Find a teacher you respect. Correspond with authors. You will find that a polite email will almost always get a response.

Secondly, read a lot! Read everything you can get your hands on. You will learn the craft of writing by immersing yourself in the voices, styles, and structures of writers who have gone before you.

Thirdly, write every day! Keep a journal. Jot down interesting stories you heard. Write descriptions of people you see. It doesn't really matter what you write, but you must keep up practice. Writing is like a sport -- you only get better if you practice. If you don't keep at it, the writing muscles atrophy.

Finally, don't get discouraged! Rejection is a part of writing, and it hurts. The trick is to keep at it. Wallpaper your room with rejection notes, if you want, but don't give up.

Why did you choose to make Percy Jackson have ADHD and dyslexia?

When I was writing **Percy Jackson**, my own son was in the process of being tested for learning differences. He was having trouble reading, and some trouble focusing in the classroom. The teachers were wondering about ADHD and dyslexia. He was frustrated about learning to read, and we had to explain to him that the testing was designed to help the teachers help him, not to make him feel bad.

As a teacher, I've worked with lots of kids who have learning differences. I've participated in testing evaluations and made modifications in my

classroom. But somehow, it's different when your child is going through the process. Eventually, my son was enrolled in the Scottish Rite program, which caters to children with reading difficulties like dyslexia. He's doing much better now, but it wasn't an easy process.

While this was happening, I did a lot of reading about dyslexia and ADHD. I especially liked the books Getting a Head in School and Driven to Distraction. I was surprised to learn that ADHD and dyslexia frequently go together. The books also confirmed something I already knew: that dyslexic/ADHD kids are creative, "outside-the-box" thinkers. They have to be, because they don't see or solve problems the same way other kids do. In school, unfortunately, they are sometimes written off as lazy, unmotivated, rude, or even stupid. They aren't. If they can get through their rough school years, they often go on to become very successful adults. Employers love them, because they come up with original, fresh ideas. Making Percy ADHD/dyslexic was my way of honoring the potential of all the kids I've known who have those conditions. It's not a bad thing to be different. Sometimes, it's the mark of being very, very talented. That's what Percy discovers about himself in **The Lightning Thief**.

More interview questions at:
<http://www.rickriordan.com/onlineinterview.htm>



Further Reading

If you liked *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, you might like to read the following books, too!

Rick Riordan's Reading Recommendations

The Underland Chronicles, by Suzanne Collins. The first in the series is *Gregor the Overlander*. A boy falls into a fantastical world under New York. For grades 4th-6th, roughly.

Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher, by Bruce Coville. And many other titles in his Magic Shop series. These are easier reads, ideal for 2nd-4th grade.

The Time Warp Trio series, by John Scieszka. Again, for younger readers, 2nd-4th grade, but very funny and fast-paced.

The Thief Lord, by Cornelia Funke. My favorite by this author. It's a fast-paced read with a great premise and interesting characters.

The Alex Rider series, by Anthony Horowitz. A teen thriller series very much like James Bond. Good action and no-nonsense prose. Grades 6th-8th.

Airborn and **Skybreaker**, by Kenneth Oppel. Adventure novels in the tradition of *Treasure Island* and Jules Verne, but with a modern sense of storytelling. These take place in a world where airplanes were never invented, and dirigible airships rule the skies. Grades 6th-8th.

Artemis Fowl, by Eoin Colfer. Lots of fantasy and humor, perfect for middle grade sensibilities. Grades 4th-7th.

Skulduggery Pleasant, by Derek Landy. A funny fantasy/mystery featuring a detective who just happens to be a fire-throwing skeleton. Grades 4th-7th.

The Bartimaeus Trilogy, by Jonathan Stroud. The first title is *The Amulet of Samarkand*. A more challenging series, but brilliant stuff. A young London

magician summons an ancient djinn to help him with his problems. Grades 6th-8th.

Everlost, Downsiders, Dark Fusion series, by Neal Shusterman. All great adventures, very accessible. Grades 6th-8th.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid, by Jeff Kinney. I've never heard my son laugh so much while reading a book. This cartoon novel is a real crowd-pleaser, especially for middle grade boys. I loved it too. Just be warned, it's a quick read. Grades 4-8.

Warriors, by Erin Hunter. Clans of cats battle for supremacy. Grades 4-7.

http://www.rickriordan.com/reading_recommendations.htm