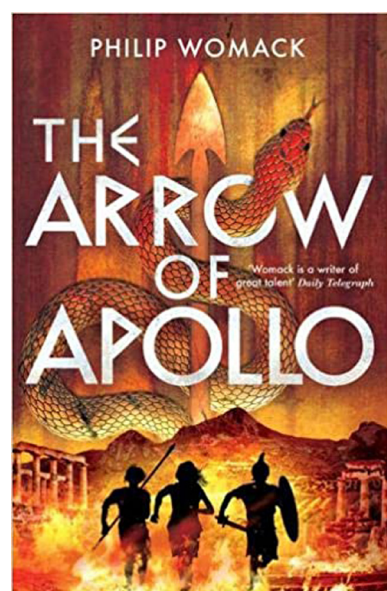


The Arrow of Apollo.

Womack (P.) Pp 354, map. London: Unbound Books, 2020. Paper, £8.99. ISBN: 978-1-78352-867-7. <https://unbound.com/books/the-arrow-of-apollo/>

Hilary Meyrick-Long

St. Andrew's Episcopal School, Austin, TX, USA
hmeyrick-long@sasaustin.org



My 6th-8th grade Latin students often ask me to recommend novels with a mythological theme. It is my pleasure to add *The Arrow of Apollo* to my list of recommended books suitable for middle school-aged readers.

The Arrow of Apollo tells the story of 'children of enemies seeking to make a greater peace' (p. 250). Silvius, son of Aeneas and Lavinia, Tisamenos, son of Orestes and Hermione and Elissa, daughter of Anna Perenna, niece of Dido, are the protagonists of this story. Silvius and Elissa take on

the mission to reunite the arrowhead with which Apollo killed Python originally with the shaft that held that arrowhead. Tisamenos assumes the mission to find out who killed his mother, Hermione. The children's paths cross in Achaea and they join their missions to rid the world of Python's evil, along the way ridding the House of Atreus of its curse.

As a teacher and mature reader, I found the interaction of characters traditionally from enemy families to be an interesting

concept and a suitable theme at a time in world history when it has never been more important for teachers to encourage understanding and empathy between people with different points of view. It was intriguing to get a glimpse into the lives of mythological characters beyond their most famous mythological episodes - for example, seeing Orestes and his sister, Electra, as middle-aged people, Aeneas as a concerned parent, Chryses as a priest of Apollo in the ruins of post-war Troy.

However, this is a book written for younger readers, so what do I think middle school-aged children would find compelling? Adventure and excitement are obvious attractions for younger readers, particularly in a time of pandemic, but the camaraderie between the protagonists as well as the slight hint of romance between Elissa and Tisamenos would also be a draw. The story was nicely accessible to the reader with no background in classical mythology but at the same time would appeal to readers who already had a basic knowledge of the Greek myths. Moreover, for those students already versed in Greek myth, I think they would be intrigued both by Womack's interweaving of the Roman, Greek and Carthaginian viewpoints as well as the glimpses they get of well-known characters beyond the stories for which they were most famous. For example, Orestes, arguably most famous for killing his mother, becomes an interesting conundrum - alternately a flabby drunk fooling others into not seeing him as a threat but also capable of concealing a fury in the palace dungeons and then leading an army against the forces of Python.

In conclusion, I found this book to be a good read, imaginatively and quirkily written and very suitable for its intended audience. This reader, and I suspect students such as the ones I teach, would like a sequel in which Elissa's background is more fully explored (and in which Ruffler the wolf-cub gets more of a starring role!) It is to be hoped that Womack deliberately left the book on a cliffhanger so that we can expect such a sequel.

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