

## **“SEE[ING] THROUGH THE MURK”: WATER AS A MENTAL FOCUSING AGENT FOR RICK RIORDAN’S PERCY JACKSON**

In 2006, Rick Riordan’s *The Lightning Thief* introduced a generation of readers to Percy Jackson, the academically-challenged boy whose ADHD and dyslexia were actually symptoms of his identity as a demi-god, the child of a human and a god of Greek mythology. Readers quickly learn that Percy is unique, even amongst the demi-gods, because his godly parent is Poseidon, god of the Sea and one of the “Big Three.” Because of this, Percy is gifted with abilities that impact his relationship with water.

In this presentation, I will examine the evolution of these abilities and how they impact Percy’s identity, both as the only demi-god with these abilities and as a person with ADHD. Using *The Lightning Thief* and the series’ subsequent books and spin-offs, I plan to analyze how the language Riordan uses to describe water’s effect on Percy mimics that used to describe the effect prescription stimulants such as Ritalin and Adderall have on children with ADHD, and whether those effects, particularly mental focus, are discussed by any other characters.

This presentation, part of a larger study, will apply an intersectional lens to explore how Riordan’s diverse cast of characters embody this identity. I question whether this gift is an unexamined privilege given to Percy, a White, straight, cisgender boy. Drawing from studies on children’s literature, disability studies, and identity development, I will contextualize this analysis in past, present, and potential media depictions of people with ADHD and how Riordan’s characters fit within that conversation.