



# Public Health, Polio, and Pandemics: Fear and Anxiety about Health in Children's Literature

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## Abstract

In this article, we begin by discussing approximately thirty picture books dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic published digitally in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other English-speaking countries in the first six months of 2020. The worldwide impact of COVID-19 resulted in the rapid global digital publication of numerous English-language children's picture books aimed at informing child readers about public health concerns and how children could contribute to improving health outcomes. This exploration of contemporary picture books is intertwined with examinations of two other public health crises that appeared in literature for children: the discussion of British children's health in the Junior Red Cross Magazine in the 1920s and the American polio outbreak discussed in educational materials and fiction in the 1940s and 1950s. These comparisons not only enable us to situate the COVID-19 pandemic within a history of transnational responses to concerns about children's health but also to expand our understanding of how children are positioned to take individual responsibility for community public health issues. This wide range of Anglophone texts published in the United Kingdom, the United States, and around the world demonstrates the extent to which adults attempt

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**Keywords** Children's health · COVID-19 · Polio · Public health · Health education · Junior Red Cross

The speed with which a slew of picture books were produced in early 2020 in response to the COVID-19 global public health crisis is remarkable. These publications indicate the degree to which adults recognised the important role that children's books could play in the battle to halt the spread of the disease. In these books, children are not only addressed as individual subjects at risk of infection, but also as individuals who could make a collective contribution to community health and wellbeing. Although children's health is a perennial concern, it is often during public health crises that adult assumptions about children are brought to the fore as they seek to educate, empower, and control children through texts produced to address health concerns. This article examines how children's health is positioned in texts for young people by exploring the global pandemic of COVID-19 alongside the emergence of child health as an important focus in Britain following the First World War and in the United States during the 1950s polio outbreak. We argue that English-language literary responses to COVID-19 are consistent with approaches to public health appearing in British children's texts in the 1920s and American texts in the 1950s since they contain similar depictions of children's education and agency in times of public health crises.

Children's health has been an important symbol of national prosperity and development throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The healthy child has been an indicator of a nation's wellbeing, beginning during the First World War when prospective British soldiers were rejected as unfit because of childhood illnesses and neglect. The early decades of the twentieth century also saw significant changes in public health knowledge and infrastructure, which meant that children underwent increased medical inspection in schools to examine their bodies in relation to physical norms for health, weight, eyesight, and hearing, and with the aim of reducing the spread of communicable diseases. This focus on children's health was accompanied by examples of children's literature that introduced ideas about health and guided children towards specific behaviours to improve their health and to consider the implications of ill health for others. Children's literature has, of course, always been ideological (Hollindale, 1988; Nodelman and Reimer, 2003). The texts we examine in this article are similar in their focus on the ideologies of health, in which children can and should be healthy. The terms of this engagement with health vary according to when they were published and the contemporary cultural resonances of public health at a particular time and place. The literature that is published during public health crises is an important mechanism by which children are taught about these crises, informed of their responsibilities, and instructed about how they should respond.

In this article, we begin by discussing approximately thirty picture books dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic published digitally in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other English-speaking countries in the first six months of 2020. The worldwide impact of COVID-19 resulted in the rapid global digital publication of numerous English-language children's picture books aimed at informing child readers about the public health concerns and how children could contribute to improving health outcomes. This exploration of contemporary picture books is intertwined with examinations of two other public health crises that appeared in literature for children: the discussion of British children's health in the *Junior Red Cross Magazine* in the 1920s and the American polio outbreak discussed in educational materials and fiction in the 1940s and 1950s. These comparisons not only enable us to situate the COVID-19 pandemic within a history of transnational responses to concerns about children's health but also to expand our understanding of how children are positioned to take individual responsibility for community public health concerns. This wide range of Anglophone texts published in the United Kingdom, the United States, and around the world demonstrates the extent to which adults attempt to guide children towards specific behaviours to promote individual health. They also reflect a common understanding of childhood in which children have an obligation to contribute to societal wellbeing through their individual actions.

## Disease and the Child Body

Children have always been subject to infection, disease, and death. Where COVID-19 is concerned, there is no doubt that children are at risk of infection and, in rare cases, death, although initial public health information suggested that children were less likely to die from or be severely impaired by the coronavirus than older adults. Nonetheless, children were identified as vectors of transmission within families, schools, and communities. Children's picture books about COVID-19 have responded by pointing out that children are better than adults in terms of their ability to fight the disease. For example, in *Community Heroes*, young readers are told that "kids are actually stronger than adults!" and that they have a "special immune system army" that is better at fighting the coronavirus than adults (Lyons and Lyons, 2020, p. 6). In *Staying Home*, readers are reassured that even if they get infected, "Children mostly just get a little bit sick" (Nicholls and Schwartz, 2020).

Despite the tendency to downplay the child as the subject of disease in COVID-19 picture books, earlier forms of children's literature make the connection between children, childhood, and illness more explicit. As a result, the diseased child body is more readily positioned as a catalyst for the promotion of healthy "habits" that might prevent childhood illness occurring. The Junior Red Cross (JRC), an international organisation officially launched in 1922, promoted healthy living through the practice of good habits. The JRC published magazines for its child readers to encourage children to join their local branch and to instruct them in the healthy habits they needed to adopt. The ideas about children's health, and the habits to be developed, were presented in the monthly magazines published by the organisation. Each country published its own version of the *Junior Red Cross Magazine*, sharing ideas and

information that supported its goals about health and service. In the first issue of the British *Junior Red Cross Journal*, published in June 1924, the editor explains that the seven “Health Laws” “have been chosen... because they are simple and practicable” (H.B.B., 1924, p. 2). They include washing your hands before meals, brushing your teeth and hair twice a day, keeping the windows open, playing outside, breathing through your nose, getting ten hours of sleep, and washing regularly.

The tone of the health laws in the magazine is generally optimistic since the rules are presented as positive articulations of how children should behave. The health laws are written as actions children should take, rather than things they should not do, and these activities are promoted for the common good and for the “right training of future citizens” (Griffin, 1925, p. 86). The aim was to encourage children to engage in “simple health practices which...become part of the child’s unconscious self” (“Health Education,” 1924, p. 18). Children in the JRC are understood to be future adults who must learn the appropriate behaviours as children to “develop a consideration for the helpless and infirm” (Griffin, 1925, p. 86) and thereby contribute to their individual character formation. A future adult is not only individually healthy but is also concerned about the health of others.

Scenes of sick children lying in bed are commonly found in the American health education videos of the mid-twentieth century. In one scene from the health education film *Preventing the Spread of Disease* (1940), when the camera pans on a boy lying in bed with a doctor and his mother by his side, the viewers hear “It is the duty of anyone who is suffering from a contagious disease to remain at home until the doctor feels it is safe for him to go out among other people.” Sick children must remain at home until the medical authority deems it appropriate for the child to leave the house. The child’s body in the videos is subject to constant monitoring by adults. For example, in the educational film *Sniffles and Sneezes*, (1955) “A Health Behavior Record” a card flashes across the screen as the voiceover states “mother and teacher check Joan’s health habits.” These texts suggest that children are more vulnerable than adults and need adult supervision to remain healthy or recover from illness.

Where the polio epidemic of the 1950s was concerned, children were prime candidates to become infected and suffer because of it, so much so that the disease was commonly referred to as “infantile paralysis.” In response, public health education aimed at children focused on preventing fecal-oral infection by encouraging hygiene, handwashing, and avoiding environments where the risk of infection was high, such as public swimming pools. When vaccination became available, young people were encouraged to be inoculated against the disease.

Children’s literature came in behind these forms of direct public health messaging. The stories concerning children and polio include biographies, narratives about the discovery of the vaccine, junior fiction, and young adult novels. Foertsch notes that stories about polio almost invariably focus on children and childhood: “Because polio was so frequently a disease affecting children, even polio novels aimed at an adult readership often feature child protagonists coming of age, thanks in part to or in spite of polio onset” (2007, p. 25). The focus on the relationship between children, childhood, and disease is common across the materials under discussion in this article. Unlike in the JRC and polio literature, where children were seen as the

primary subjects of disease, the COVID-19 picture books do not generally position children as potential victims of the virus. Nonetheless, across all three periods children are called upon to respond to the dangers of becoming ill and to take action to prevent the spread of disease.

## Children as “Health Change Agents”

In our survey of the pandemic picture books, we found that many of them represent children as active participants in promoting healthiness around them. The children in these picture books are “good citizens” who not only listen to advice but also help to spread health information (Chen et al., 2020). They are positioned as “health change agents” who are not only passive recipients of care but also active agents (Montreuil and Carnevale, 2016, p. 507). In *Jasper and Tabitha Play a Trick on the Coronas*, for example, two children tell others about the coronavirus, which has a global impact: “The whole world was so thankful that Jasper and Tabitha taught them how to get rid of the Coronas” (Purvis, 2020, p. 34). Similarly, the child narrator of *The Virus Stopping Champion* says, “I just need to stay at home as much as possible, and so do you, and so do your friends and family.... If we all do this, we can stop the virus from traveling” (NABU, 2020, p. 8). These examples suggest that children are the initiators who encourage the whole community to follow health directives. Without the cooperation of others, the coronavirus cannot be stopped, so the texts imply that all children have a duty to tell others how to protect themselves and others from the virus.

The narratives also indicate that the child can influence others’ choices regarding their health behaviours. In *My Hero is You! How Kids can Fight COVID-19*, Sara and her dragon friend Ario fly around the world to tell children about the coronavirus and teach them how to keep their family and neighbours safe. Sara, the daughter of a scientist, is knowledgeable about the virus and its impact. She tells the children: “Go, tell your families, we are safer inside! We can take care of each other best by staying home!” (Patuck, 2020). Likewise, the narrator of *Be a Coronavirus Fighter* exhorts the young reader, “Be careful, be smart, you can make a difference and be a virus fighter too!” (Daemicke and Wu, 2020). Children are positioned as caring, wise, and active heroes who not only can take care of themselves, but others as well.

Children in several pandemic picture books have strong voices that can help others make good decisions about their health, which includes saving lives by staying indoors and being passive. These books imply that children are naturally inclined to desire the outdoors and that staying home requires self-control and self-sacrifice. They present a particular form of passive action in which children can and should stay at home, avoid grandparents, and remain isolated from the wider community. In *The Princess in Black and the Case of the Coronavirus*, a young girl is shown crossing off planned playdates on her calendar, turning instead to a pet pig called Sir Hogswell for stay-at-home companionship. Several books, such as *The Inside Book* (Griffiths, 2020), *Stuck Inside* (Allman and Allman, 2020), and *Piggy & Bunny and the Stay-At-Home Plan* (Belgium, 2020), specifically address what children can do

while staying at home and explain why it is crucial for the child to remain indoors. In *Staying Home*, the mother tells her children, “we’re saving lives too” (Nicholls and Schwartz, 2020). By staying put, children can save lives.

Nonetheless, in all these examples, children are expected to follow the rules, whatever those rules might be for a particular public health scenario. In the *Junior Red Cross Journal* magazine, children are reminded that they must follow the instructions they are given when they are ill:

People are not nearly as careful as they ought to be about quarantine. When the doctor puts you in quarantine he means you should stay there. When he says you are not to go to school, he does not mean you may go to treats or parties, or to the Cinema, or even to Church. He means that you are to keep away from people...This may often mean disappointment or tedium, but never mind, it is our DUTY: it is something we have to do ‘for the good of the Community’. (“Don’t Kiss the Baby”, 1924, p. 51)

In addition to following the health rules identified by doctors and scientists, children are also encouraged to assist others to be healthy. In the *Junior Red Cross Journal*, children’s activities promoting health are shared from around the world. British readers learn about how children in New South Wales, Australia are supporting a home for the “delicate children of tubercular soldiers,” supplying free milk to 500 babies, maintaining five cots in various hospitals and homes in Sydney, and supporting a bush nurse (“Junior News,” 1925, p. 58). These reports about local children’s activities are interspersed with stories and quotations designed to inspire child readers towards specific actions aligned with the JRC health objectives. In “Making a Sportsman of Him,” a mother asks the headmaster of her son’s school to make her son into a sportsman like his father. According to the narrator, “the mother’s ambition was that the lad should grow up...to be a fearless hearty man, ready to take the rough with the smooth, to work hard and play hard, to be fair and just, resolute and enterprising” (“Making a Sportsman of Him,” 1925, p. 65). When the boy later becomes the best boxer the school has ever had, the headmaster tells the mother that his success is owing to the healthy habits she helped to instill in her son, including exposure to fresh air, early bedtimes, and cleanliness: “it was she who taught him the healthy habits out of which grew the strong body-servant of a wholesome mind” (“Making a Sportsman of Him,” 1925, p. 65). Unlike in the pandemic picture books and in the polio education materials, in which illness is unrelated to moral fortitude, the healthy habits of the JRC also contribute to the development of a wholesome character, with a clear link between morality and health.

In contrast to the JRC literature, in polio stories about young sufferers the child’s wholesome character and moral fortitude is forged through illness rather than by managing to avoid it. Shame was often associated with a family member contracting polio, resulting in children with polio often being isolated from schools, friends, and siblings for protracted periods of time (Foertsch, 2007). And yet, children’s polio stories showcase the trials and triumphs of recovery—where physical prowess is an indicator of psychological willpower and a drive to succeed and reintegrate into society. The protagonists, who have had polio, must overcome their feelings of self-pity, self-doubt, awkwardness, and loneliness to lead a fulfilling life. The children

learn to stop seeing themselves as victims of the disease and accomplish something. In *Green Door to the Sea*, Letty's eventual reintegration into the world outside her sick room encourages the idea of polio as a temporary aberration, and that the child has a duty to do everything in their power to swiftly overcome its effects and return to society. She knows that "morning exercise was essential if she were ever to get well" (Betty, 1955, p. 24), and she gains confidence through swimming regularly. For Arleigh in *Snow Slopes*, it means realizing that her "handicap" would only "trouble" her "as much as she would allow it to" (Thompson, 1957, p. 158). In both cases, the onus is on the child to take responsibility for their physical and mental health. Physical activities are often used as a catalyst for recovery from polio. In *Sink It, Rusty*, the eponymous protagonist desperately wants to play basketball "as well as the boys did" (Christopher, 1963, p. 6). His coach Alec encourages him to "keep shooting," reminding him that the "best thing in the world is exercise" (p. 29), and although Rusty tells himself that he is "slow and awkward" (p. 114), he eventually gains confidence and helps his team win a game.

Recent pandemic picture books do not explicitly connect morality with children's responses to the threat or experience of disease. However, the interpellation of children as combatants and gatekeepers—even "superheroes"—who protect those around them implies that COVID-19 presents an opportunity to instill in children an ethics around community health and their role within it.

## Science and Children's Health

Acquiring and sharing knowledge is a key part of the health messaging contained in pandemic picture books. Scientific expertise is privileged as a trustworthy source of knowledge and advice for children on how to respond to the health crisis. For example, on the cover page of *Coronavirus, A Book for Children* (Jenner et al., 2020) we learn that the book was written in consultation with a professor of infectious disease modelling. The book includes illustrations of a scientist using a microscope, a doctor and a nurse, and two medical scientists working on a vaccine. While *Dr. Li and the Crown Wearing Virus* (Cavallo, 2020) acknowledges the Chinese health professional's death from COVID-19, the inference is that others would do well to heed the advice Dr. Li tried to share in the early days of the virus spreading and emulate his commitment to helping others. Authors evoke science to inform the young reader that "The scientists also found that children's immune systems are stronger than adults' to defend against this new virus!" (Yen, 2020). The child readers are reassured that scientists, doctors, and nurses are working hard to develop a vaccine and encouraged to rely on medical authorities for health advice, as evidenced by the credentials listed next to many of the authors' names.

Similarly, child audiences in the mid-twentieth century were expected to place their trust in scientists. A series of short public health educational films released in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s warned children about the spread of communicable diseases, ranging from the common cold to polio. The videos typically feature men in laboratory coats looking through a microscope to signify that the public health messages were given the imprimatur of scientific expertise. Produced



by companies such as McGraw-Hill, noted publisher of educational materials, the videos were often shown in classrooms across the US, suggesting the highly pedagogical nature of the films. Written texts for young people also indicated that scientific innovation was a further antidote to the spread of disease. For example, *The Polio Man* (Rowland, 1961) is a short biography of Dr Jonas Salk, who created one of the first polio vaccines. Written in simple language rather than scientific jargon, the book not only recounts Salk's journey to the discovery of the vaccine, but also communicates advice about good hygiene and the importance of vaccination.

Although the science of health was more limited in the early decades of the twentieth century, the idea of germs was also shared in the *Junior Red Cross Journal*. In a poem entitled "The Microbe," for instance, the reader is warned about the "danger" posed by the Microbe, who "gives us cold and measles/And whooping-cough and 'flu./Tubercular diseases/And impetigo too" (M.B.C., 1924, p. 49). Through a direct address, the readerly "you" is informed that the microbe has "certain enemies" like "Fresh air and light and cleanliness" that are weapons to be used in the fight against disease. The idea of germs was also shared in short stories like "Outside and Inside," where the good germs—"the friend of all children"—are unable to get in through the closed window to displace the "germs of cough, and cold, and, worse than that, of tuberculosis ... inside the stuffy room" (1925, p. 67).

Another JRC article provides specific and explicit advice. "Don't Kiss the Baby" informs child readers that "You should never kiss a baby (or anyone else for the matter of that) if you have a cold, or a sore mouth, or are not quite well" (1924, p. 51). Much like the advice provided in the pandemic picture books, this article advises children to not "go close to people when you have a cold,—or when they have...if we keep a fair distance between us and the germs they die or become harmless before they reach us" ("Don't Kiss the Baby", 1924, p. 51). The children were responsible for their own behaviour and for making sure that others did not fall ill.

## Illustrations and Children's Health

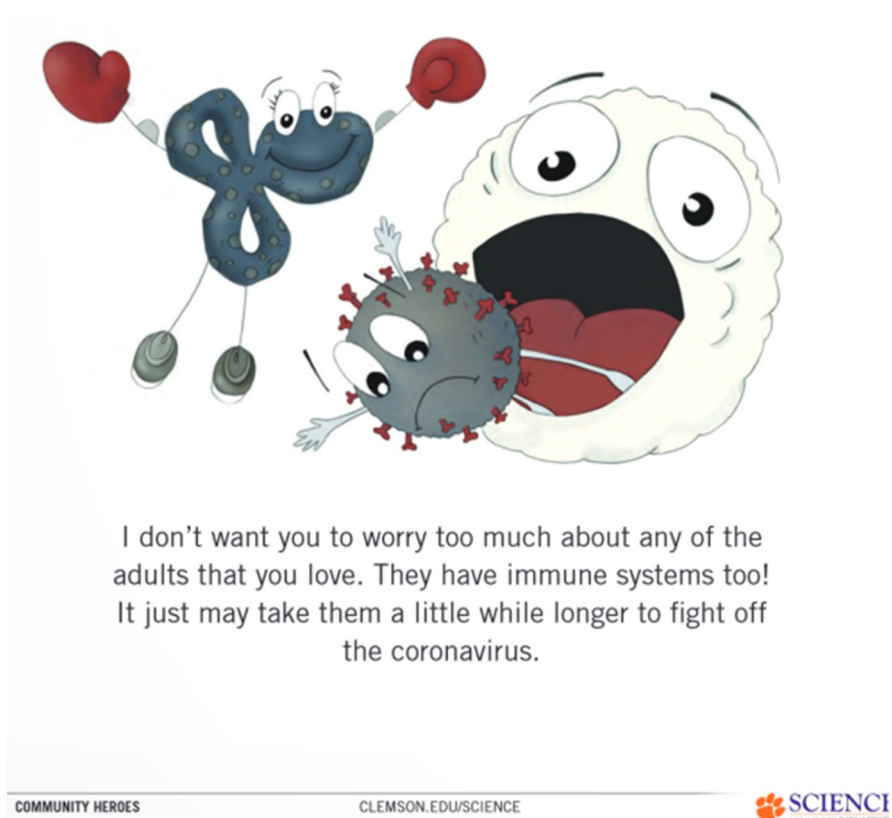
Many of the texts discussed in this article contain illustrations, which are often an important feature of children's literature. In these public health texts, the illustrations include anthropomorphism and humour to reassure children about their ability to fight disease, stay healthy, and return to health.

One of the narrative strategies employed in the texts to help allay children's fears about COVID-19 is the use of anthropomorphism, which is particularly evident in the picture book illustrations. By anthropomorphizing the virus, the threat of illness is downplayed. Research has shown that anthropomorphizing diseases in health communication material increased people's motivations to follow health recommendations (Wang et al., 2019, Wang et al., 2020). In children's literature, "the unfamiliar is anthropomorphized to make it familiar, comprehensible, and less worrisome" (Cox, 2017, p. 22). In pandemic picture books, the coronavirus is anthropomorphized to reassure young readers that they do not need to be afraid of it. By drawing eyes and mouths on images of the coronavirus, illustrators try to make it less threatening, assuring child readers that it can be defeated. For example, in *Community*



*Heroes*, the coronavirus is depicted looking sad (see Fig. 1). The big eyes and frown make it seem like an easily vanquished cartoon character, thus downplaying the threat of the virus. The antibodies are wearing boxing gloves and smiling as they observe the white blood cell fighting the virus. By helping children visualize the disease as a small object, these picture books aim to empower the young reader to envision themselves as “heroes.” While most of the picture books that anthropomorphize the virus do not render it speaking, *A Message from Corona* is narrated by the virus. It introduces itself as “COVID-19” and is personified as a child-like creature who just wants to explore and “travel the world.” Again, because of the way the virus is illustrated (see Fig. 2) with a smile and round shape, it is presented as a friendly, fun-loving character rather than an enemy to be feared. COVID-19 thanks the child reader for preventing it “from doing more harm” (Tedder and Noyes, 2020).

Children’s mental health is addressed in several pandemic picture books such as *Caroline Conquers Her Corona Fears* (Camelford et al., 2020), *Dave the Dog is Worried about Coronavirus* (Watts, 2020), *Everybody Worries* (Burgerman, 2002) and *My Hero is You! How Kids can Fight COVID-19*, in line with the recent increase



**Fig. 1** *Community Heroes: A Guide to Being Brave in the Face of the Coronavirus* (Lyons and Lyons, 2020)



Fig. 2 A Message from Corona (Tedder and Noyes, 2020)

in books in this area (Webb, 2017). One of the strategies that children can use to cope with their anxieties and fears includes drawing pictures. For example, *The Oyster and The Butterfly: The Corona Virus and Me* by psychotherapist Ana M. Gomez teaches children to draw out their feelings and informs the reader that “when our feelings get too big, or too hot or too cold, we can do things to cool them down or warm them up” (Gomez, 2020). Other coping tips include breathing deeply, staying calm, talking to oneself, and visualising a safe place in one’s mind. Children are told that they do not need to worry because adults will take good care of them. The use of the words “whenever you feel sad or afraid” (Patuck, 2020) suggests that the strategies must be deployed regularly to maintain mental health.

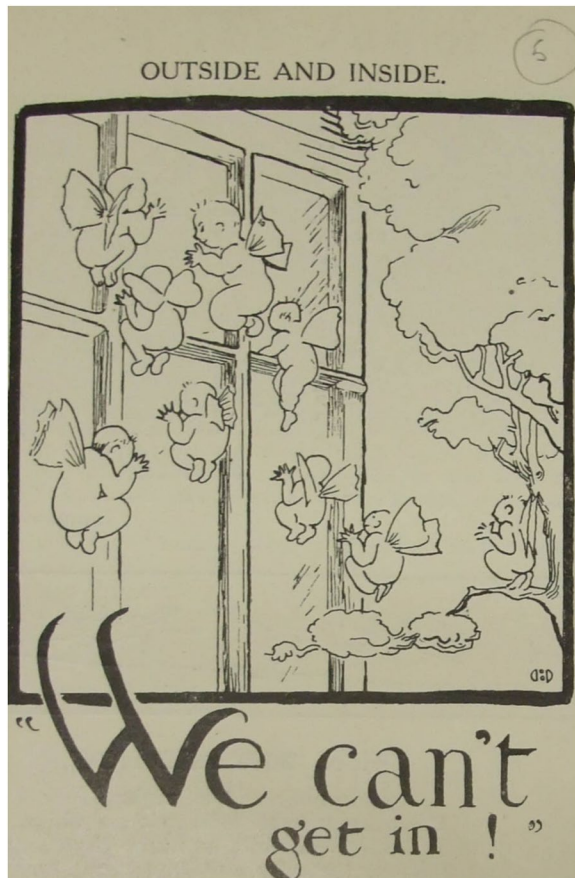
Children’s mental health concerns are addressed through the infusion of humour to help children dispel their fear of the virus since “humour can serve to release excess emotion and/or nervous energy that is vented through laughter to beneficial effect” (Cross, 2008, p. 59). Elena Xeni similarly argues that humour in children’s literature functions “to alleviate childhood’s anxieties, worries and fears” (2020, p. 157). In *The Princess in Black and the Case of the Coronavirus* (Hale et al., 2020), there are illustrations of masked horses washing their hooves, funny sea creatures washing their tentacles, and squirrels washing their paws. To help children remember to keep their distance, *The Spooky Shallow Cough* includes an illustration of a boy dancing with his dog with images of green farts around them: “Walking’s cool and dancing’s great/Just stay 6 feet apart/ Get all your silly willys out/ Far enough you can’t smell farts” (Rabb and Cyk, 2020). These examples aim to diffuse children’s anxiety about the virus.

The novels about polio do not feature anthropomorphism, and the few illustrations that are included are realistic line drawings devoid of humour, but one of the educational public health videos, *Soapy the Germ Fighter* (Avis Films, 1951), features a man dressed as a bar of soap. Soapy teaches Billy Martin to “be a germ

fighter with me [and] learn good hand habits” since “being clean in every way is an important part of being healthy, and being healthy is an important part of being happy” (1951). Billy is a boy who loves playing outdoors and hates being clean because he associates it with “sissy” habits. His aversion to cleanliness seems to stem from the stereotype of boys playing in the dirt and their fear of being “domesticated.” By exhorting Billy to join in the fight against germs, Soapy evokes the imagery of battle and urges Billy to think of himself as a warrior, which reassures him that being clean does not emasculate him.

Although the JRC examples are not as explicitly humorous as those found in the pandemic picture books, the anthropomorphism is similar. “Outside and Inside” includes an illustration (see Fig. 3) of the “good” little creatures waiting outside the window, hoping to enter the stuffy room. Depicted like cherubic angels, complete with small wings keeping them aloft, these creatures are intended to assuage children’s fears through their benign appearance and because they are able to vanquish the “bad” creatures inside the room.

**Fig. 3** *Junior Red Cross Journal* (1925), vol. 1, no. 4, p. 67

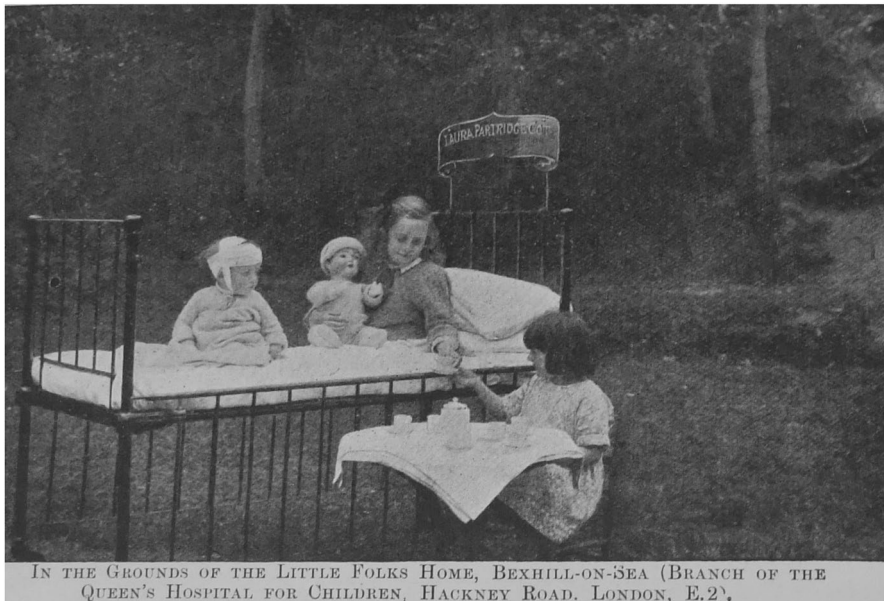


Illustrations and photographs are also used throughout the JRC magazines to depict children who are returning to health or who are helping others to be healthy. A photograph of a girl having a tea party in a hospital bed (see Fig. 4) is evidence of how children are depicted in specific ways to demonstrate how even ill health is relatively fun and enjoyable. These children, while obviously ill or injured, are nonetheless able to participate in a tea party.

Together these texts include images designed to reassure child readers about their agency and resilience in times of public health crisis. They encourage children's positive actions and contributions to restoring health to the individual and the community by following the rules and vanquishing the germs that cause illness while also employing humorous and anthropomorphized figures to reduce anxiety among child readers.

## Conclusion

Many of the messages surrounding children and public health have remained consistent as children are encouraged to discipline their bodies by engaging in regular exercise, eating a well-balanced diet, and developing good hygiene habits. They share the positioning of the implied child reader to take their own health seriously, in response to changes in societal ideas and attitudes about the inspection and interrogation of the child's body. Across different countries and at different times, writers for children have been concerned about children's health and the potential implications of unhealthy bodies.



**Fig. 4** *Junior Red Cross Journal* (1926), vol. 1, no. 9, p. 144

In general, the texts discussed here demonstrate that children are consistently asked to take responsibility for their own health. The JRC materials encouraged children to follow health laws, and the health messages aimed at children during the polio pandemic continued this trend, promoting both personal hygiene and the benefits of vaccination. More recently, in relation to COVID-19, picture books almost universally encourage healthy habits, hand washing, and staying at home. The adults who produced public health materials conveyed messages aimed at training children to accept their responsibility to be healthy and to help others to remain healthy.

These texts make visible a shift in the way children's roles and responsibilities are conceptualized in relation to health and health education, from the first decades of the twentieth century to the present day. In the JCR and polio materials children are subject to malnutrition, infection, and suffering, whereas in the pandemic picture books children are framed as remarkably resilient and resistant to disease. In all cases, however, the child is put into action in various ways in relation to disease. They must remain vigilant and stay home, actively go out to share health information, or pursue healthy habits.

However, these texts are also connected by the manner in which the child is positioned as an agent of change and education who contributes to a healthy environment for all. The texts place the responsibility on children to do their duty as good citizens in contributing to the community's health through their individual actions. In doing so, they contribute to the benefit of society as a whole. As the voiceover in *Preventing the Spread of Disease* (National Motion Picture Association, 1940) puts it: "Every step we take to prevent the spread of disease means increased happiness and greater living efficiency for all of us." This message is applied to both the child subject affected by ill-health as well as the child subject who is tasked with understanding and responding to public health crises happening around them. Thus, these texts form a part of the overarching role of children's literature to govern what is required of the child subject, healthy or otherwise.

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