Introduction

Welcome to the Fall 2026 edition of the *Journal of Children in Popular Culture*. In this edition our contributors explore various representations of children's health in literary and screen texts. We begin with Hayley Smith's study of Thomas Anstey Guthrie, which reveals how the Victorian writer used storytelling to promote child welfare and encourage public support for charities serving vulnerable children.

Turning to young adult literature, James Harris reconsiders Alice Childress' *A Hero Ain't Nothin but a Sandwich* as a landmark work of Black young adult fiction, highlighting its honest engagement with race, identity, poverty, family, and adolescence.

In her analysis of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, Morgan Shiver explores the series' enduring popularity, arguing that its portrayal of meaningful connections between children and adults helps explain its appeal across generations.

Monika Raesch then examines *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit,* showing how children frequently occupy central narrative spaces while remaining secondary to the adult characters whose stories drive the series.

Finally, Sarah Annunziato investigates storytelling as a response to trauma in *Stand by Me, Io Non Ho Paura,* and *The Midnight Club*, demonstrating how narrative can help young people make sense of loss, fear, and uncertainty.

As this edition demonstrates, representations of children's health extend far beyond questions of physical wellbeing to encompass the social, cultural, emotional and psychological conditions that shape young lives. The stories we tell about children, and the ways in which we choose to represent their experiences, play an important role in how childhood is understood, valued and protected. We hope the contributions in this edition will challenge familiar assumptions, stimulate new ways of thinking, and encourage readers to consider the complex relationships between childhood, health and popular culture. We invite you to engage with the ideas presented here, and hope you find these essays as thought-provoking, insightful and rewarding as we have.