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Juvenile Fiction

Robert Takes a Stand
Barbara Seuling
Cricket Books
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Third-grader Robert Dorfman starts a demonstration for animal rights and learns that the issue is not as simple as it seems. In his zeal to “protect the earth and all its creatures” he plans a protest in front of his local fur dealer, only to find out that his beloved grandmother wears a fur coat. Robert’s efforts to keep the fur in question a secret from his classmates while simultaneously shielding his grandmother from his snowballing anti-fur campaign consume his every waking moment. Exhausted by his double life, he comes clean to both his grandmother and his third-grade class. The experience paves the way for the launch of his political career as the campaign manager for his friend Paul, candidate for class president.

This versatile and prolific author has written and illustrated more than fifty children’s books in a variety of genres. In this latest addition to her series featuring Robert Dorfman, Seuling’s expertise as an author of transitional chapter books shines. In both content and style, this easy chapter book is perfectly suited to its audience of readers who are making the leap from beginner books to more traditional children’s novels. At 168 pages, this is a long offering for young readers, but the episodic plot is easy to follow.

Compelling issues like animal rights, smoking, and bullies are raised through Robert’s exploits, and are guaranteed to hold the interest of the reader. The types of situations that Seuling depicts—family relationships, classroom politics, friendship issues, and the like—are familiar to children, making the book even more accessible.

Seuling's writing style is well suited to her audience. The vocabulary is simple, the sentences are uncomplicated, and although the book has twenty-six chapters, the average chapter length is six to eight pages. Readers will revel in her wordplay, as when Robert and Paul literally construct a wooden platform to stand on when they are asked for Paul's presidential platform, or when Robert makes a protest sign that reads "Stop killing animals to make fur coats."

Funny line drawings add interest to this humorous and readable chapter book. Fans of Marvin Redpost and Ann Cameron's "Julian" series will enjoy this slice of Robert Dorfman's life. In both content and style, this series is perfectly suited for the transitional reader.

Carolyn Bailey