

# ComfortZone

By Betsy Groban  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**M**arc Brown is the creator of the best-selling “Arthur” books and the executive producer of the eponymous, award-winning PBS television series. Since 1976, when the first “Arthur” book was published, and 1996, when the GBH-produced TV series launched, generations of kids and families have welcomed Arthur into their homes and into their hearts. Feb. 21, a kick-off celebration of the 25th season of the “Arthur” television series will air on GBH, including four brand-new episodes.

We caught up with Brown upon the publication of his latest and possibly last Arthur book, “Believe in Yourself: What We Learned from Arthur” (out Jan. 25), and the launch of the 25th and final season of the animated series. (Digital spin-offs are already in the works.) We spoke to Brown from Martha’s Vineyard, where he’s owned a home since the mid-1980s, and asked him to reflect on the way his success with Arthur radically changed his life.

**Q.** Readers were first introduced to Arthur as an anxious but lovable aardvark having a crisis of confidence in “Arthur’s Nose” (1976). You’ve described Arthur as “an 8-year-old aardvark navigating the mud puddles of life.” Can you say a bit more about Arthur as an “everyman” or anti-hero?

**A.** Arthur feels real to kids. He has no superpowers, he makes mistakes, fights with his friends, at times, he needs help from his family and friends. But what Arthur shows kids is that you can learn from your mistakes and become a better person. Kids see Arthur as having a good heart.

**Q.** Fast-forward 45-plus years, and Arthur is a beloved book character and the star of the longest-running animated kids’ American television series in history. Could you have imagined this wild success when you first started telling stories about a young aardvark?

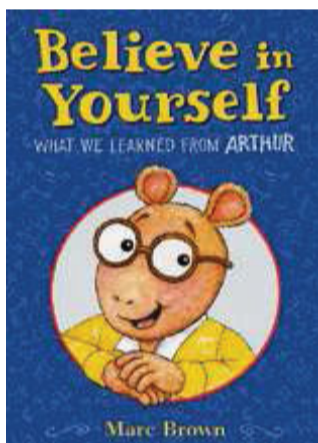
**A.** Arthur appeared one night after I had lost my teaching job and my son, Tolon, asked me to tell him a bedtime story. That story became “Arthur’s Nose.” The book’s last line is, “There’s a lot more to Arthur than his nose.” When I wrote that, I had no idea what that would really mean to me and what future adventures would unfold. I tell kids that they are my boss and I am so lucky to have the perfect job. I don’t pinch myself every morning when I go to my studio to work but I probably should.

**Q.** In addition to modeling kindness, empathy, and inclusion over the years, Arthur has tackled nuanced topics including cancer, bullying, learning disabilities, climate change,



SETH KAYE PHOTOGRAPHY LLC 2013

“This may be the closest I get to writing a memoir,” Marc Brown (above) said of his latest and possibly last Arthur book, “Believe in Yourself: What We Learned from Arthur” (below), which comes out Jan. 25.



## ‘Arthur’ creator Marc Brown reflects on the final chapter of the adventurous aardvark’s tale

and gay marriage in both the books and the television series. How did you come to realize that Arthur and his friends would be well-suited to introduce these important issues to young kids?

**A.** The mission of “Arthur” is to reflect life. And with the television show, we want to show kids the power of reading and books. He has always been part of an ensemble cast. I

think that’s what makes kids relate to Arthur. I get letters asking for the phone numbers of these characters. And when I talk to kids at schools they always want to know where these stories come from. And the answer is simple: real life. The best things happen in real life.

**Q.** In “Believe in Yourself: What We Learned from Arthur,” your latest

and last Arthur book, you’ve chosen 60 of the “greatest hits” — insights from the funniest and most meaningful moments from the TV series and books — and created vibrant new artwork to illustrate them. Was this retrospective an emotional project for you?

**A.** I probably should never say last or final, because who knows? But this book was very special and unique for

me because I got to speak to the adults who grew up reading and watching Arthur, as well as their children. This may be the closest I get to writing a memoir. Making time to review 45 years of my life was an unexpected luxury. The book grew out of a wish to celebrate the many years of writing and illustrating Arthur books and the fact that the show has become the longest-running animated children’s television show in history.

**Q.** After nearly 50 years of working on Arthur, what’s your next creative project?

“When I talk to kids at schools they always want to know where these stories come from. And the answer is simple: real life. The best things happen in real life.”

MARC BROWN

**A.** “HOP”: My son, Tolon, who’s been a producer on “Arthur” almost since the beginning, along with Peter Hirsch, our good friend and head writer for “Arthur,” are hard at work on a preschool animated series called “HOP.” After initially resisting television, I discovered the power and fun of telling kids stories that publishers might not want to publish as books. For example, with animation, we could go inside Buster’s lungs and hear him describe what it’s like to have asthma. And Muffy could explain what it’s like to have head lice.

**Q.** Since you have been in the public eye for quite a while, your fans may think they know all about you. Can you share something that people might be surprised to learn about you?

**A.** My wonderful wife, Laurie, and I collect American folk art, mostly early portraits of children. I like growing things — raspberries, blueberries, apples, and peaches — which I bake into pies. At age 12, I came home with a bag full of perfect peaches and asked my mom to make a pie. She handed me a Betty Crocker cookbook and said you can bake it yourself. She was right. She was almost always right.

*Marc Brown will appear in a free virtual “Ask the Expert” event with GBH on Jan. 21 at noon. To register, visit [wgbh.org/events/ask-the-expert-arthur-author-marc-brown-virtual](http://wgbh.org/events/ask-the-expert-arthur-author-marc-brown-virtual).*

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## Emerald Necklace parks shine green through the winter season

**T**here’s something about the twinkling lights that adorn the city around the holidays that takes a bit of the edge off of Boston’s bitterly cold winters. But as the season inches along, many of those illuminating displays come down. Several parks around the city, however, will continue to shine bright throughout winter “to inspire and light the way in challenging times.”

Boston’s Emerald Necklace, a 1,100-acre chain linked by parkways and waterways from Boston to Brookline, will be illuminated with emerald green lights from Feb. 1 through March 20. Several park bridges and trees “will be awash with emerald glow,” according to a statement from the Emerald Necklace Conservancy. The displays are part of a larger initiative encouraging individuals to explore the Emerald Necklace.

“We hope this limited-time installation will once again give folks a reason to visit the parks — and maybe even explore new areas of the Emerald Necklace for the first time,” Karen Mauney-Brodek, president of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, said in a statement.

The illuminated locations include the Charlesgate Park trees on the Commonwealth Avenue Mall, which have been illuminated since mid-December; Liff Park bridges in the Back Bay Fens; the Chapel Street and Bridle Path footbridges in Riverway Park, as well as Riverway’s Longwood Avenue bridge; the Leverett Pond and Ward’s Pond footbridges in Olmsted Park; and the Ellicott Arch in Franklin Park. Parks will be illuminated from dusk to 9 p.m., according to the statement.

The Emerald Necklace was built to



PHOTOS AND MAP COURTESY EMERALD NECKLACE CONSERVANCY



From top: Leverett Pond in Olmsted Park (left), Charlesgate Park trees illuminated green, and Ellicott Arch in Franklin Park.

connect neighbors and bridging communities, and was designed nearly 150 years ago by famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted.

“The Emerald Necklace and our shared green spaces continue to be some of the primary places of community connection amidst the ongoing pandemic,” a statement from the conservancy said. “Not only will the emerald green bridges offer fantastic picture taking moments, they will also bring some fun and light to people as they explore the Emerald Necklace while commuting, crossing the parks on daily errands, or taking a stroll or run through the parks in the evening.”

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