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Arthur comes alive

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) A boy aardvark named **Arthur** nervously awaits his first visit from the Tooth Fairy. D.W., his conniving sister, hatches a plot to visit the Tooth Fairy first so she can corral the cash. **Arthur**'s fans cheer him on and boo Tooth Decay, a character with dark wings and a tarnished, ghoulish face.

Of course, the kids are worked up. They are used to seeing **Arthur** as the sweet, little cartoon aardvark in Marc Brown's best-selling children's books and as the star of his own animated TV series on PBS.

Arthur, the spectacled aardvark with lovable, human qualities, **comes** Thursday to Crystal Lake's Raue Center for the Arts in "**Arthur** Live! **Arthur** Tricks the Tooth Fairy."

Tom Zaizar, the musical production's performance director, said the show is faithful to Brown's heartfelt narrative. "The kids scream at the characters because they feel they are among friends," Zaizar said. "They know the characters from watching them on TV."

"**Arthur**," in its 11th season, remains the No. 1 TV show for 6- to 9-year-old viewers. But this is the first time **Arthur** and hit the stage to hang out with his pals, Buster and Brain, and to sing and dance his way through tooth loss, friendship lessons and sibling rivalry.

"The kids know how these characters sound, how they walk," he said. "We had a huge responsibility to stay true to these characters. You have to be a good actor to take on a character that has been so predetermined. You have to be able to move and dance in a big costume. That is not easy to do when your vision and oxygen are limited."

Zaizar said the show has a magical, storybook feeling, inviting sets and fun characters.

"It's such a great family show we have translated from book and cartoon to the theater," he said. "It's written on two levels. The parents want to give their children a live theater experience, but they end up feeling entertained themselves. The stage looks like a big, pop-up storybook, and the characters seem to step right off the pages. We brought in set pieces to give it more of a 3-D look.

"Bringing the story to the stage almost makes it more believable. We didn't overproduce the show or try to dumb it down. We simply focused on the story."

Children fall in love with **Arthur** because, no matter what happens to him, the good-natured aardvark takes his life in stride.

"The kids go on a journey with **Arthur** in this show," Zaizar said. "They're in on his secrets. They cheer **Arthur** on. **Arthur** goes through the same issues kids go through today.

"He's just a normal aardvark kid. He just happens to have his own books and a TV show."

"Arthur Live! Arthur Tricks the Tooth Fairy"

WHEN: 6:30 p.m. Thursday

WHERE: Raue Center for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake

TICKETS: \$21-\$26

INFORMATION: 815- 459-2985 or www.arthurtour.com

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