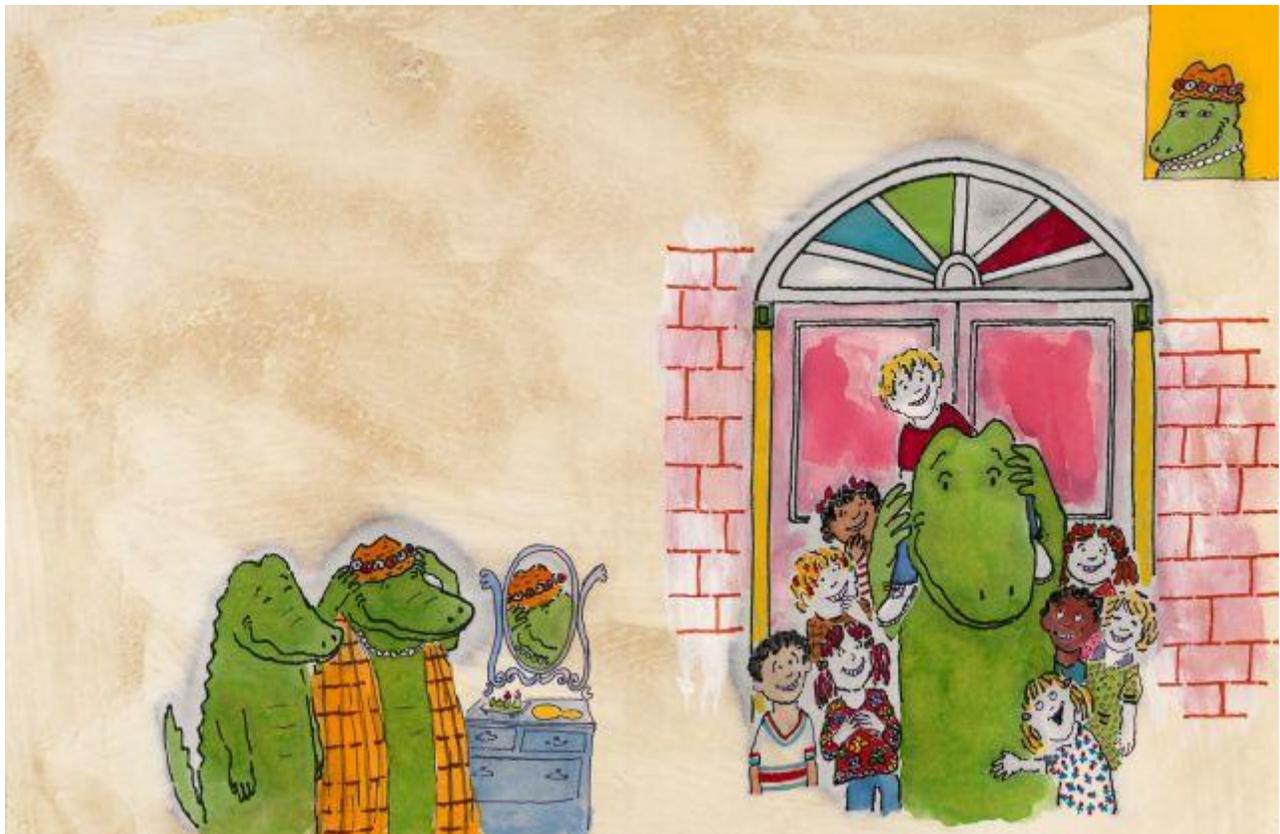




Kids' character Lyle the Crocodile on display at the NMAJH



Lyle the Crocodile and friends in an illustration by Bernard Waber.
Lyle, Illustration © 1969 by Bernard Waber

Lyle the Crocodile, like his creator Bernard Waber, is from Philly. The National Museum of American Jewish History is hosting an exhibit of Waber's works.

Here's something to sink your teeth into: Lyle the Crocodile, made famous in the illustrated books of Bernard Waber, is a Philly crocodile.

“When Waber was in school, he’d go the Philadelphia Zoo and sketch the crocodiles there,” says Shira Goldstein, exhibition coordinator of **“Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile and Friends: The Art of Bernard Waber,”** at the National Museum of American Jewish History starting Aug. 27.

Of course, Waber, a Philly native, would later add certain embellishments to Lyle.

“Lyle is very friendly and he loves Turkish caviar,” Goldstein says.

Lyle the Crocodile made his debut in the 1962 book “The House on East 88th Street.” Lyle, a big, benign green fella not unlike Barney, appeared in the bathroom of the Primm home and for the next four decades kids and their parents shared his stories.

“The common theme of most of Waber’s books are about the challenges and excitement of being a child and growing up,” Goldstein says. “It’s the lessons you learn growing up, how to value friendship and how to be a good friend.

“Each story has a deeper lesson for children and we as adults should pay attention.”

Waber, who died in 2013 at the age of 91, sold more than 1.75 million copies of his 33 books in his lifetime and Lyle is still on the forefront of the kids lit scene today. It all started in Philly, where Waber was a child of the Depression with a big imagination.

“He would talk about working at the Felton Theatre (on Rising Sun Avenue) as an usher and he would only be able to see the last 15 minutes of each movie, so he would be spend his own time creating the plot that would lead to the conclusion,” Goldstein says. “He was a very advanced story teller.”

Philly roots

Though transplanted to -- and primarily associated with -- New York City, Waber has deep roots in Philly. He attended the Philadelphia College of Art, now part of the University of the Arts, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

“Lyle, Lyle Crocodile and Friends: The Art of Bernard Waber” debuted at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Massachusetts last year. This is its second showing and it’ll have hometown appeal, including a pic of Waber in eighth grade at Belmont Elementary in West Philly.

There are more than 90 items in the exhibit, from his drawing board to original artwork.

“He often said he was a daydreamer,” Goldstestin says. “That’s evident in his books and stories.”