

*The Adventures of*  
**Zoe Flynn & Alex Everhart**  
The Disappearing River



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The Disappearing River

A MakeThinkers. Product

*by*

*David Mittan and Gail Mittan*

**[www.makethinkers.com](http://www.makethinkers.com)**

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ISBN: 1-946125-00-8

ISBN-13: 978-1-946125-00-2

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To precious Lea and Kayla, keep your imaginations  
wild, your minds strong, and your hearts open.  
Strive for greatness. Nothing is impossible.

# Acknowledgements

Thanks to our family for all their time, patience and help as we brought our first story to the world. We love you more than words can ever describe.

Thank you CC for spending hours listening to us read and reread the same sentences; your advice was golden! Thank you for believing in what we are trying to achieve. Thank you for being the kindest, most caring mother and the most supportive partner imaginable. You are truly a gem!

Thank you Jarrod, a wonderful brother & son, for being the first person to purchase the eBook and for letting our wild imagination entertain and educate your wonderful children.

Thanks Arielle for always answering our never-ending questions. You are the kind of teacher this world needs.

Thanks to Evan for always letting us ramble on whether by phone, text, email or gchat. More importantly, thanks for being a wonderful friend and one of the best, and smartest, people we know. Thanks to Fernando for the constant positive feedback – *muito obrigado*. Thanks to Duke for being Irish and for loving the Talented Mr. Ripley. Thanks to Brian for spelling his name ‘Bryan’ and for the totally honest feedback.

Thanks to all of our friends and family who provided thoughts, ideas, feedback or any type of positive support.

A special thanks to everyone who bought the eBook when it first launched, and to everyone who buys this book. Our world needs people like you, who care enough to make strong, creative and critical thinking children.

Thanks to all the great men and women who serve our country and keep us safe. Thanks to the educators who take the time to teach our children more than just how to beat tests. Last, but not least, thanks to all our editors for the hard work.

Creativity is contagious, pass it on.

~Albert Einstein~



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## Why We Love What We Do

MakeThinkers. grew out of my need to spend more quality time with my children in an impactful way. Using bedtime storytelling we were off to a good start. Its benefits were well known and widely published. Yet, it lacked that extra something. I'm sure you know about that eventual boredom that sets in. Couldn't we use this time better? I set out to design and build a better experience.

During my time as a fellow at MIT, I began blending original storytelling with imaginative mental challenges. The goal was to combine creativity with critical thinking while forming a strong bond with my children. And, of course, short enough for me to complete in less than fifteen minutes.

I constantly experimented and tried so many variations. I even asked some of my professors and friends around the world to try it out with their children. Finally, it happened! I hit the right combination. My wife and I noticed that all of us loved this new type of storytelling! The children were always asking for more and they were so excited to solve the challenges at the end of each story! I also saw how they were beginning to mix creative thinking with logical reasoning. The way they solved problems blew my mind. On top of it all, I could also see them gaining confidence, patience, and

focus. Naturally, I was having a blast watching them and our bond became stronger while having fun!

Seeing this success, I had to share it with everyone. So, I started working with my mom to make this happen. She is a caring, passionate and highly accomplished elementary school educator. I grew up watching her teach and witnessing the smart ways she encouraged students to think. (Not to mention me - thanks mom!) She was a perfect fit to build out this vision.

Together we are taking storytelling to a whole different level. We have made this entire activity easy for anyone to do. The mission is simple: every parent should experience this type of exciting and educational storytelling with their children.

Through 'The Adventures of Zoe Flynn and Alex Everhart', we are here to make it happen.

We are thrilled to have you join us on this exciting journey. Get ready for a fantastic ride!

Remember, Great Parents Make Thinkers.

Cheers,

David Jonathan Mittan

# **The MakeThinkers. Method**

Our stories use five steps to help your children unlock their natural creativity & critical thinking skills.

## **Step 1:**

### **Read the story**

We don't use any illustrations so when you read the story to your children they will make full use of their imagination.

## **Step 2:**

### **Explore the challenges**

Your children will use critical thinking skills to try and solve the two challenges at the end of each adventure.

## **Step 3:**

### **Find different answers**

We designed the challenges to encourage your children to think creatively and to suggest many alternative answers.

## **Step 4:**

### **Analyze the solutions**

Our follow-on questions and clues guide your children to use different approaches to build better answers.

## **Step 5:**

### **Repeat the process**

With your help your children will complete all ten adventures & unlock their natural, powerful thinking skills.



Out of the questions of students come most of the  
creative ideas and discoveries.

~Ellen Langer~

# Adventure One

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## The Wooden Box



Zoe opened the curtains in the attic and a reflection from the corner of the room caught her eye.

“Alex, what's that?” she asked.

She pointed to a pile of dusty old maps. Alex carefully moved the maps aside and picked up a golden colored wooden box. It was no bigger than a shoebox. There were bright blue shapes all over it — triangles, diamonds, big squares and one little circle. They had never seen anything like it before. It was magnificent!

## MakeThinkers.

Zoe Flynn and Alex Everhart were best friends. They both lived on Harriet Street, in a quiet, small town near New York City, where you could always find them exploring — this included many adventures in the parks, the beaches and even their own backyards. They also shared a secret that no one else in the world knew.

During the summer vacation something fantastic had happened; something that had changed their lives forever; something that had led them to spectacular new adventures.

Zoe tried to open the wooden box. Nothing happened. Alex thought maybe he could twist it open. Still nothing! It just wouldn't budge.

“What's wrong with this box? I can't find any place to open it!” said Zoe in frustration.

They looked all over the box for a keyhole or an opening and found absolutely nothing! This was very strange. Alex and Zoe handled the wooden box carefully. They didn't want to damage it, or break whatever might be inside. *Could you imagine figuring out how to open the golden colored wooden box, only to find what's inside completely ruined?*

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The box reminded Zoe of an old family tale. She asked Alex if he knew the story about their great-grandmothers, Alice and Olivia, who were also best friends. Many, many years ago they had found an unusual box in the woods just a few blocks from the house.

“Yes, I’ve heard that one. Wasn’t it a make believe story?” asked Alex curiously.

“I’m not sure,” said Zoe, “but I think there was something magical in the box.”

“Didn’t they lose the box?” asked Alex.

“I really don’t know, but I remember my mom showing me an old photograph of Alice and Olivia holding a strange looking box,” said Zoe.

They stood staring at it and thinking....

Is this the missing box? What’s inside of it? How can we open it?

Alex and Zoe were in for quite the surprise if they managed to open the golden colored wooden box. They had no idea, nor could they, that inside the box were Sweaks made by the Sprites of Yellowfield. They

also didn't know that the Sweaks had disappeared from the world almost 100 years ago!

All of a sudden, the window opened. Zoe and Alex stepped back completely startled. As the wind blew through the trees outside, it sounded like mysterious voices singing. They were both puzzled by the sound.

Were they hearing things? They closed their eyes and listened again. This time, paying close attention to what they heard. Yes, they were right!

The voices sang the same words over and over again:

*"Gently push me down; half of me is a smile, the other half a frown."*

Zoe looked at Alex. "Did you hear that?"

"I did, but what does it mean?"

After thinking for a little bit, Zoe jumped up smiling. "The singing voices are trying to tell us how to open the box!"

"You're right!" said Alex, and he gave Zoe a high five.

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## Adventure One Challenge One

**Solve the riddle!**

*“Gently push me down; half of me is a smile, the other half a frown.”*

**Use as many clues as you need until it's solved:**

Can you list the shapes that were on the wooden box?

What does a smile look like? What does a frown look like?

Can you put a smile and a frown together?

## **Adventure One Challenge Two**

Zoe and Alex were lucky to find a clue to open the wooden box.

How would you open the wooden box if you weren't given any clues?

### **Follow on questions:**

What different types of tools, devices or household items could you use to open the box?

Would they damage the box?

What questions would you ask if you found this box and wanted to open it?

### **Let us know how you solved this challenge!**

[www.facebook.com/makethinkers](http://www.facebook.com/makethinkers)

Curiosity about life in all of its aspects, I think, is still  
the secret of great creative people.

~Leo Burnett~

## Adventure Two

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### The Sprites of Yellowfield



“It’s the little circle! Push it!” yelled Alex.

Zoe put her finger on the blue circle and gently pushed it in. They heard a clicking sound and the top of the box popped up. Zoe carefully took off the top and both of them stared inside speechless.

Alex reached for what looked like two pairs of eyeglasses — one silver and the other gold. As Alex touched them, a warm, tingling feeling made the hairs

on his arm stand up. He gave one pair to Zoe and took the other for himself

“That’s weird,” said Zoe. “Why put glasses in such a beautiful box?”

Alex shrugged his shoulders.

Zoe and Alex didn’t know that these weren’t ordinary glasses. These were Sweaks. Wearing them let you see all the magical creatures living in hidden lands right here in our world. They were also the exact same magical glasses their great-grandmothers had found in the wooden box all those years ago.

They put on the glasses. At first everything seemed dark and blurry. Slowly, the dark faded away until they could see all around them. But, something was different. When they looked towards the open window, they now saw three fluttering figures. Alex and Zoe were amazed!

The most incredible little flying people floated in front of the window. They were about the size of a grown-up’s hand and whizzed around like shooting stars. They wore shiny yellow pants and green t-shirts, with a small turquoise bag around their waist. Two of

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them had a bow and arrow under their wings, while the other one had a long sword. They turned and zoomed towards Alex and Zoe.

The little flying people stopped about a foot in front of their faces.

“My name is Felissa,” said a little voice, “and this is my twin sister Belissa and our brother Drip. We are Sprites from Yellowfield.”

Drip nodded his head and Belissa waved excitedly.

“We were friends of your great-grandmothers. We've been watching you for the past five days and singing secret —”

“Because you can't see us!” said Belissa, interrupting her sister.

Felissa gave Belissa a serious look for cutting her off. “— We've been singing secret messages to lead you to the Sweaks, the enchanted silver and gold glasses of Yellowfield. You'll need them to help us solve a serious problem that's troubling the Sprites in Yellowfield.”

Alex and Zoe pinched each other to make sure this wasn't a dream.

Belissa hovered forward wearing her beaming smile.

“Hi, I’m Belissa. Did you notice a tingly feeling when you touched the glasses?”

Alex and Zoe nodded.

“Well, that’s because you woke up the Sweaks and they haven’t eaten in nearly 100 years! You need to feed them a Sprite leaf, or their magic will stop working and you won’t be able to see us anymore!”

Felissa saw that Zoe and Alex looked confused.

“The glasses are alive,” she said, “the Sprites created the Sweaks in the woods of Yellowfield using magical caterpillars, special tree branches, volcanic soil and Sprite Dew. You can feel their mouths moving behind your left ear. That’s where you feed them. You must feed them immediately before they start nibbling on your ears!”

Drip felt inside his bottomless bag. He pulled out a long, thin glass vase containing one glowing Sprite Leaf.

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“Ahem...This vase is under a spell to stop anyone from taking the leaf,” said Drip. “You must remove the leaf without touching the vase, or the leaf, with your fingers. Or else, the leaf will turn to dust.”

## Adventure Two Challenge One

How many different ways can Zoe and Alex get the leaf without touching the vase?

### **Follow on questions:**

What can they use to take out the leaf?

If the opening of the vase was very small what would you do?

What other details about the vase and leaf do you think are important to find out?

## Adventure Two Challenge Two

If you had a bottomless bag, how would you find anything in it?

### **Follow on questions:**

Which idea below is the best way to organize things in a bottomless bag? Why?

### **Different Ideas:**

You can use long pieces of string tied to balloons.

Use Velcro to stick to the side of the bag.

Pour water into it and put everything in floating bags or containers.

**Let us know how you solved this challenge!**

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The people who are crazy enough to think they can  
change the world are the ones who do.

~Steve Jobs~

# How Kids Benefit From Our Books

## Critical Thinking

We design our challenges to compel your children to find structured solutions. We help guide them through this method with follow-on questions to encourage reasoning by first principles. This skill will transform your children into the big problem solvers of the future!

## Bottom Line

Structured Thinking = Better Decisions

## Why must we reason by 1st principles?

“I think it’s important to reason from first principles rather than by analogy. The normal way we conduct our lives is we reason by analogy. We are doing this because it’s like something else that was done, or it is like what other people are doing. With first principles you boil things down to the most fundamental truths...and then reason up from there.”

(Elon Musk: cofounder & CEO PayPal; CEO Tesla,  
CEO SpaceX; Chairman SolarCity)

## **Creative Thinking**

The stories use exciting characters and settings to stretch the wildest imagination. Creativity is also heightened because there are no illustrations. Your children will create their own perspectives! Watch them think outside the box and enjoy trying to solve our open-ended creative challenges.

### **Bottom Line**

Outside the Box Ideas = Better Solutions

### **What motivates creativity?**

“The real driver of creativity is an appetite for discovery and a passion for the work itself. When students are motivated to learn, they naturally acquire the skills they need to get the work done. Their mastery of them grows as their creative ambitions expand. You’ll find evidence of this process in great teaching in every discipline from football to chemistry.”

(Sir Ken Robinson: International education advisor and author of ‘Out of Our Minds: Learning to Be Creative’)

## **Grit: Passion & Perseverance**

Watch your children unlock the priceless skill of perseverance as they try solving the challenges. We also introduce them to characters who never give up. You'll be amazed at how they unlock a passion for reading, solving problems and highly imaginative creativity!

### **Bottom Line:**

Fun & Effort = Better Results

### **How can parents foster grit?**

“The parenting style that is good for grit is also the parenting style good for most other things: Be really, really demanding, and be very, very supportive. By this I don't mean material things; I mean emotional support. If parents are warm and loving, the kids tend to feel loved. Respect, or what the parenting literature calls “autonomy support,” is also essential. That's when parents allow their kids to make their own decisions just as soon as they are capable.”

(Angela Duckworth: MacArthur Genius Fellowship winner and Author of ‘Grit: The Power of Passion & Perseverance’)

We would love to hear from you!

Keep in touch with us by email;  
[readtome@makethinkers.com](mailto:readtome@makethinkers.com)

Through our website;  
[www.makethinkers.com](http://www.makethinkers.com)

On our Facebook page;  
[www.facebook.com/makethinkers](http://www.facebook.com/makethinkers)

Stay posted about other wonderful books and products by the MakeThinkers. team that help your children unlock their natural creativity and powerful critical thinking skills.



# The MakeThinkers. Team

## David Jonathan Mittan

David is a native South African and an avid cross-training fan. He is a voracious reader, loves learning new languages and playing chess. David holds three degrees, including an MS from UT Austin and an MBA from MIT. He is a lifelong learner with interests in finance, human health, robotics and the future of education. He's also a highly experienced investor who enjoys solving complex problems. When he isn't busy sharing MakeThinkers. with parents and educators across the world, David can be found spending time with his family, playing with his two lively daughters or strumming the guitar.

## Gail Mittan

Gail is a superb elementary school educator with over 40 years of dedicated experience. She uses this extensive background to ensure that all the content is designed to maximize our goal — to help children unlock their natural creativity and powerful critical thinking skills while having fun. When she isn't busy creating delightful content with David at MakeThinkers., Gail enjoys spending time with her six grandchildren in New Jersey and continues to teach. She is also passionate about competing in walking races, crossword puzzles and gourmet cooking.