Maple Street Mysteries · Book 1
The Case of the Vanishing Mascot

A branching-choice mystery for independent readers –
classroom ideas, discussion prompts and four worksheets

ZOE'S CLUE NOTEBOOK RULE
A CLUE IS NOT A VERDICT

Zoe keeps a Clue Notebook and counts things when she's nervous. Every path through this book rewards the same habit: follow the evidence, but don't accuse anyone until the evidence actually says so. There is no villain in this story – only a mix-up.

Written by Lena Bertenstein · App: Lesepfadfinder (Android and iOS) · Book 1 is a one-time purchase (price shown in your app store), complete with 7 endings · no ads, no account, no data collection, reads fully offline.
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1 · At a Glance

Story	A branching-choice school mystery. Three decision points lead through several search paths to seven different endings.
Age / Grade	Ages 7–11; independent readers from around grade 2–4, with read-aloud support for younger readers
Length	About 29 sections, 7 endings, roughly 500–800 words per ending. A single path makes for one or two comfortable reading sessions.
Setting	Maple Street Elementary, the day of the Fall Fling Game – the school's biggest event of the year
Characters	**Zoe Park** (9) – keeps a Clue Notebook, counts things when nervous · **Davey Ortiz** – her best friend, knows every rumor in the building · **Ms. Patel** – the school custodian, who also happens to sew · **Tyler Brooks** – lost last year's "Best Costume" vote to Barnaby, looks suspicious but isn't · **Coach Reynolds**, **Mr. Kim**, **Principal Okafor** – witnesses along the way
Themes	Following evidence instead of suspicion · not accusing someone just because they look guilty · asking for help is never the wrong choice, even when it turns out not to be needed
Technology	Available for Android and iOS. Stories are included in the app; an internet connection is only needed for purchases.

2 · What Happens

Barnaby, the beaver mascot costume of Maple Street Elementary, is missing from the trophy case on the morning of the Fall Fling Game. Zoe and Davey have one lunch period and a few afternoon hours to find him before the whole school notices he's gone.

Depending on the reader's choices, Zoe checks the gym supply closet or asks the cafeteria staff first, then follows one of several leads – the band room storage, the bake-sale table, the late bus loop, or a tempting but false rumor about a raccoon in the vents. Every real lead eventually points toward the nurse's office.

FOR TEACHERS ONLY – HOW THE MYSTERY ACTUALLY WORKS

There is **no theft and no villain.** The day before, custodian **Ms. Patel** noticed a torn seam on the mascot costume while cleaning and quietly took it home to fix it as a surprise before the game – without announcing it. She's running late because she stopped to bandage a child's scraped knee along the way. Every clue (muddy footprints, an unsigned note, sewing sounds from the nurse's office) points to this one true explanation; there's no second version of the solution, only different orders in which to discover it.

Tyler Brooks is a deliberate red herring: he lost last year's costume vote to Barnaby's design, so he looks like he might have a motive. He doesn't. When the story clears him, it does so warmly – he's never made to feel humiliated for having been suspected. None of the seven endings punishes a choice harshly: even the one "miss" ending (chasing the raccoon rumor through the vents, a tempting but false lead) still lets the game happen with a good-natured substitute cheer, and Ms. Patel shows everyone the repaired Barnaby afterwards.

3 · Why a Branching Mystery Helps Reading

- **Comprehension as a prerequisite:** choosing well at a fork requires having understood the section that came before – the decision tests comprehension without feeling like a test.
- **Rereading by choice:** with seven different endings, there's a genuine reason to read the book again and deliberately choose differently. Repeated reading is one of the best-evidenced routes to reading fluency.
- **A calm screen:** one section per page, no animations, no mini-games, no points. Research on children's e-books shows that extra effects embedded in the text can distract from comprehension.
- **A natural talking point:** two readers, two different paths. "Did you suspect Tyler too?" is an easy way into a conversation about evidence and assumptions.

4 · Classroom Skills

This book supports several commonly taught reading and reasoning skills for upper-elementary readers:

- distinguishing a clue from a conclusion; evaluating evidence before deciding
- tracking multiple characters and settings across a branching narrative
- recognizing a red herring and explaining why it misled the reader
- discussing character motivation and empathy (Tyler, Ms. Patel) without assigning blame

5 · A Suggested Lesson Sequence (3–4 sessions)

1 · Hook	Barnaby is missing, and the Fall Fling Game is this afternoon. Read or listen together up to the first choice: "Where should Zoe check first?"

2 · First Clues	Students predict in pairs, then read independently to the second decision point. Discuss: is a muddy footprint proof, or just a clue?
3 · Following a Lead	Independent reading to an ending. Students who finish log their ending on the class Ending Map (**Worksheet 3**) and start a second path.
4 · Comparing Paths	Which lead did you follow? Did everyone end up suspecting Tyler at some point? Why did the story make that choice tempting?

Organization tip: Reading in pairs on one device works well – take turns reading a section aloud, and agree together before choosing. The back button lets a pair undo a choice without losing earlier progress.

Differentiating with the app's settings

- **Read-aloud support:** the app reads each sentence aloud and highlights the spoken word.
- **Two reading levels, font choice, colour themes:** as in all Lesepfadfinder books.

Privacy in the classroom

The app requires no account, no sign-in, shows no ads and uses no analytics or tracking. Reading works fully offline. Book 1 is a one-time purchase, available only from the parents' area; no price or purchase prompt ever appears on the children's bookshelf.

6 · Discussion Prompts at Each Decision

Ask these either *before* a choice (prediction) or *after* (justification). Section headings appear above the text in the app.

> "Where should Zoe check first?" · the gym closet or the cafeteria staff?
> What made Zoe think of these two places first? Which lead would you have checked first, and why?

> "Where should they search next?" (four options, including the raccoon rumor)
> The raccoon rumor is exciting but turns out to be a dead end. Why do you think the story makes it so tempting to follow?

> Tyler at the bake-sale table
> Tyler looked suspicious because he had a reason to be upset with Barnaby. Why isn't "having a reason to be upset" the same as "having done it"?

> "How should Zoe and Davey handle this?" · knock, peek, or get Principal Okafor?
> All three choices lead to a good ending. What does that tell you about asking for help, even when it later turns out you didn't strictly need it?

7 · Talking About the Endings

None of the endings is labelled a "win" or a "loss". These lines work well on the board:

> "Ready With Seconds to Spare"
> "Just Barely"
> "The Raccoon Wasn't It"

- Which ending did you get, and which one sounds the most satisfying to you? Is that the same thing?
- Is there an ending where the mystery is solved and someone still feels a little silly? How does the book handle that?
- Which choice would you make differently on a second read, and why?
- By the end, is Tyler someone you'd still suspect of anything? What changed your mind?

Follow-up ideas

- **Clue vs. conclusion:** collect three harmless "mysteries" from everyday classroom life and sort real evidence from assumptions.
- **Design a mascot:** sketch your own school mascot and explain one clue someone might find if it went missing.
- **Red herring hunt:** find another favourite mystery book or show and name its red herring.
- **Thank-you note:** write a short note to Ms. Patel from Zoe and Davey's point of view.

Lesepfadfinder is an app by Wunderkammer (Michael Andres, Dorsten, Germany). Classroom feedback is very welcome. Contact: kontakt@wunderkammer-apps.de · More about the app: lesepfadfinder.wunderkammer-apps.de · Privacy policy: wunderkammer-apps.de/lesepfadfinder/ · This material's licence: CC BY-SA 4.0

Worksheet 1 · Clue or Conclusion?

Name: _____

A clue points in a direction. A conclusion means you're sure it's true. They are not the same thing.

Fill in what pointed toward Tyler, what pointed away from him, and what turned out to be true.

POINTED TO TYLER What Zoe noticed	POINTED AWAY What argued against it	WHAT WAS REALLY TRUE The real explanation

Tip: write at least two notes in each column.

Worksheet 2 · My Decision

Name: _____

1. Where in the story did you have to choose? (the heading of that section)

2. What were the choices? Tick the one you picked.

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

3. I chose this because …

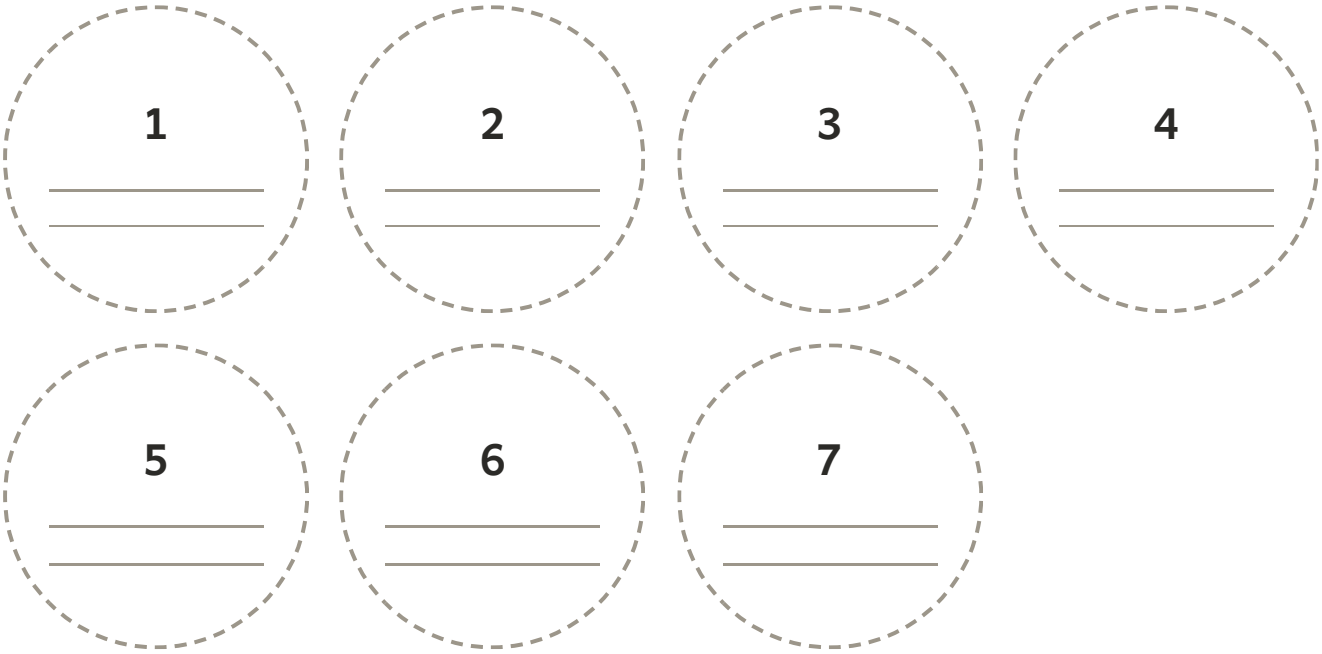
4. What happened next? Was it what you expected?

5. What do you think would have happened if you'd chosen differently?

Worksheet 3 · Our Ending Map

Class: _____

This book has **seven** endings. Anyone who finds an ending writes its name in the circle and signs below it. How many endings can your class find together?



The ending's number is shown on its card in the app.

Class discussion: which ending felt the most satisfying? Why?

Worksheet 4 · My Own Mystery

Name: _____

Zoe solves mysteries by looking closely and not jumping to conclusions.

Something is missing:

The real clue I almost missed:

My first (wrong) guess:

What actually happened:

Write your own short "eighth ending" for the Fall Fling Game day – something else that could have happened at Maple Street that morning.

My ending is called: