

# Making A Difference MISSION SHEET

## Step 1: READ THE ARTICLE:

### **His 2-Year-Old Daughter Is Slowly Going Blind. So He Invented A Game To Help Her Learn Braille**

The majority of adults with a visual disability in the U.S. are also unemployed. The jobless rate is close to 60 percent, according to the National Federation of the Blind. Statistics like that, which shed light on the long list of challenges people with vision impairment face, were a driving force behind one father's attempt to help his young daughter adapt to a devastating diagnosis.

Jake Lacourse of Middleborough, Massachusetts, was honored Thursday at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas for creating a game he calls BecDot. It's designed to help his 2-year-old daughter, Rebecca, learn pre-braille concepts. Rebecca has Usher syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that can cause profound deafness and progressive blindness. "We knew the world was not going to adapt to her," Lacourse says.

Lacourse is a product engineer by day. By night, he worked at home developing the game for Rebecca. The playing surface, made with a 3-D printer, is about the size of a tablet. Four large braille cells run across its front. When a toy — like a cow or a pig, each embedded with an electronic tag — is placed onto the tablet, the corresponding braille dots for a cow or pig pop up. The idea is to help young children learn early braille concepts, and get them ready for the long journey of adapting to a world that's built for people who can see. Lacourse wants to market the toy and sell it for about \$100.

Usher syndrome affects just about 20,000 people in the United States and 400,000 around the world, says Nancy Corderman, co-founder of the [Usher Syndrome Society](#). "But only about 1 percent has been identified," says Corderman, whose two children were diagnosed with a type of Usher syndrome that doesn't develop until later in life. But Usher syndrome's symptoms came roaring at the Lacourse family from the start. Rebecca was profoundly deaf at birth. She wears a pink headband that keeps her cochlear implants in place. There were no immediate signs in infancy that her vision was also going. But her mother, Beth, suspected that something else was wrong with the baby. When doctors fully diagnosed Rebecca with Usher syndrome a little over a year ago, the family was heartbroken. "I was just sick for days. I didn't want to leave the house," Beth says. "All my hopes and dreams for her came crashing down."

Worst case, Rebecca will be completely blind by the time she's a teenager. Her peripheral vision is already closing in, and eventually her sight will likely be reduced to a pinhole. "Her night vision is going now," Beth says. "When she's in a dark area, she says hi constantly just to get the feedback. So we are constantly saying hi back to her so she knows we're right next to her."

Rebecca's parents won't always be at her side, and that's what drove her father to create BecDot. The game was honored at the Consumer Electronics Show with something called The Not Impossible Award, which cites BecDot for its ability to break through barriers. "Beth calls this my way of coping. It definitely is," Jake says. "The thing that really helps me is raising awareness so we can be a small part of finding the cure." Jake has to pause to gather himself. His eldest daughter, Reagan, who is 8 years old and does not have Usher syndrome, can see that her dad is about to cry. She darts across the kitchen and wraps her arms around his waist. "That's really what we want to do," he says.

Article adapted from: <http://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2018/01/12/usher-syndrome-becdot>

Step 2: CONFIRM UNDERSTANDING.

Analyze the text together to confirm understanding and determine what you believe the key points are:

Key Point 1	-
Key Point 2	-
Key Point 3	-
Key Point 4	-
Key Point 5	-

STEP 3: HIGHLIGHT KEY VOCABULARY.

Work together to choose 3 key vocabulary terms that students in your class should know.

Key Word & Location	Definition and sample sentence
driving force Paragraph 3	<b>Definition:</b> <i>The power behind something in motion</i> <b>Sentence:</b> <i>Bryan's mother was the driving force behind his success.</i>
1.	Definition: Sentence:
2.	Definition: Sentence:
3.	Definition: Sentence:

STEP 4: CREATE THREE COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

(For example: *What does John Lacourse do for a living?*)

Question 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

STEP 4: CREATE 2 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

(For example: *What else can people do to raise awareness about Usher Syndrome?*)

Question 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 2: \_\_\_\_\_