




## **NCSS Notable Trade Book**

### **Lesson Plan:**

### ***Small Steps* by Louis Sachar**

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 ***Small Steps*** by Louis Sachar. (2006). New York, NY: Delacorte Books for Young Readers.


### ***Abstract***

*Small Steps* is a powerful book about doing the right thing, even under less than desirable circumstances. The accompanying novel lesson plan has been developed to help teachers guide students through the book by engaging them in meaningful reading, writing, and critical thinking activities. Students will be instructed using such essential learning strategies as DR-TA, QAR, and Story Impressions in order to fully appreciate the social implications explored within the text. The text and novel lesson plan can be used with intermediate and middle school level students as a part of their language arts and social studies curricula.

**NCSS Notable Trade Book Lesson Plan**  
*Small Steps* by Louis Sachar

**Lesson Plan Author: Diane Brantley, Ph.D.**

**Suggested Grades: 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>**

<b>NCSS Notable Trade Book Title:</b>	<i>Small Steps</i> (2006) by Louis Sachar New York, NY: Delacorte Books for Young Readers.
<b>Book Summary:</b>	<i>Small Steps</i> is a sequel to the New York Times #1 bestseller <i>Holes</i> . This book takes place two years after the main character, Armpit, was released from the Camp Green Lake juvenile detention work camp. The story picks up with Armpit working to complete his high school diploma while also trying to navigate the world around him that still views him as a criminal. <i>Small Steps</i> addresses such issues as discrimination, labeling, socioeconomics, and difficult life choices. Louis Sachar weaves a powerful tale with realistic characters that will capture the reader’s heart. His overall theme is that “doing the right thing is never a wrong choice—but always a small step in the right direction.”
<b>NCSS Standards:</b>	Standards I-VI are addressed in this text.  I. Culture: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity. II. Time, Continuity, and Change: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time. III. People, Places, and Environments: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments. IV. Individual Identity and Development: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity. V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions. VI. Power, Authority, and Governance: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance (taken from: <i>Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies</i> ).

<b>Materials:</b>	Copy of the book <i>Small Steps</i> Handouts for the Story Impressions Strategy (Appendix A) DR-TA Strategy (Appendix B) QAR Strategy (Appendix C) Cloze Assessment (Appendix D) Story Retelling Analysis Sheet (Appendix E)
<b>Objectives:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The students will be able to summarize the text by chapter and as a whole piece of writing.</li> <li>• The students will develop an understanding of the impact of <i>labeling</i> on a person’s present and future life.</li> <li>• The students will be able to sequence story events, discerning the most important events within the text.</li> <li>• The students will be able to compare and contrast character attributes.</li> <li>• The students will be able to write and respond to both literal and inferential questions.</li> <li>• The students will be able to compose a five-paragraph essay.</li> <li>• The students will be able to write a research paper using multiple print and electronic resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Procedures:</b> <b>A. Exploration &amp; Introduction (Pre-reading activities):</b>	<p>1) <u>Quick Write</u>: Students respond to the following prompt: “What does it mean to take <i>small steps</i> when you are trying to accomplish a task? Have you ever taken small steps in order to finish something? If so, describe the process you took to finish the task.”</p> <p>2) <u>Story Impressions Strategy</u>: Select 10-15 clues about the book and put them into order using the directions found in Appendix A.</p> <p>3) <u>Book Preview</u>: Have the students look at the cover of the text and read the front flap of the book. Based on this information, have them complete the first box of the DR-TA handout (See Appendix B). Also spend time discussing the vocabulary they can expect to see in the text. Write this vocabulary in the box designated for it on the handout.</p>
<b>B. Development (During-reading activities):</b>	<p>1) <u>Summarizing</u>: Continue using the DR-TA handout found in Appendix B. Stop at predetermined places in the first chapter and have the students summarize what they’ve read so far. Using the six boxes in the handout, ask them to draw what has happened or write a few sentences, summarizing the chapter at that stopping point. Later, these boxes will be used to help the students to create an oral or written summary of the chapter. This form can also be used with subsequent chapters as well.</p> <p>2) <u>Questioning</u>: Using the QAR strategy, teach the students to create questions for each chapter. This should take place after the teacher has modeled the</p>

	<p>strategy for 3-5 chapters first. The question types are as follows:          (a) Right-there questions, (b) Think-and-search questions, (c) Author-and-me questions, and (d) On-my own-questions (See Appendix C). Have them use sticky notes to place the questions at the appropriate place in the text so they will know where to stop and ask the questions.</p> <p>3) Engage students in a <u>character analysis</u> of the three main characters in the text: Ginny, Armpit, and X-Ray. How are they alike? How are they different? What are some of the challenges they face in their lives? How does each character go about coping with these challenges? Do they select positive or negative coping mechanisms or a combination of the two? Ask students to select a character and find alternative solutions to some of the problems they have faced in the book.</p>
<p><b>3. Expansion (Post-reading activities):</b></p>	<p>1) <u>Writing</u>: Have the students write a prologue for the text. Read aloud a few prologues from several texts as a means of modeling for them what a prologue looks like and sounds like. What happens to Armpit, Ginny, and X-Ray after this book?</p> <p>2) <u>Discussion</u>: What is the purpose of the juvenile justice system? Once an adolescent enters the system, what are some of the life-long repercussions of their incarceration?</p> <p>3) <u>Essay</u>: After completing the text, have students analyze the title of the text, <i>Small Steps</i>. Why did the author choose this as the title of the book? What are some examples of small steps taken by characters in the book? If you could rename the text, what would you call it and why? Support your response by quoting passages from the text.</p> <p>4) <u>Exploration</u>: Have your students explore the text to find examples of discrimination. These may relate to race, gender, health issues, and socioeconomics, just to name a few. Have them cite the sections of the book that provide such examples and discuss how the characters are discriminated against. Ask the students to find ways the characters could address these issues.</p>
<p><b>Assessment:</b></p>	<p>1) <u>Ongoing assessment</u> takes place using the questioning techniques found in the QAR Strategy and the DR-TA Strategy. These assessments take the form of written and oral responses to the questions and written chapter and whole text summaries, as well as their modifications to their original story predictions.</p> <p>2) <u>Cloze Assessment</u>: Develop a cloze assessment passage to be used after every three to four chapters. This will provide the teacher with additional insight into the students' vocabulary development and reading comprehension (See Appendix D for a copy of a cloze for chapter 4 of the text).</p>

	<p>3) <u>Literature Logs</u>: Have students keep a literature log as they read through the text. Ask them to write down their personal responses to the text after each reading. Students can then use these logs to engage in a literature circle or discussion with a peer. This will provide the teacher with an ongoing assessment of the students' thoughts and feelings about this powerful text.</p> <p>4) <u>Story Retelling Analysis</u>: Using the attached story retelling analysis form (Appendix E), have the students retell the entire text. This form can also be used as a teaching tool as well.</p>
<b>Suggested Extension Activities:</b>	<p>1) <u>Research</u>: Using the Internet and other print resources, have students research the juvenile justice system in their hometown, county, and state. Find statistics reflecting how many minors are housed in the system and the specific crimes they have committed. Additionally, find out if alternative placements or programs exist? If so, what are they, and if not, why not?</p>
<b>Websites:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="http://www.louissachar.com/">http://www.louissachar.com/</a></li> <li>2. <a href="http://www.juvenilejusticefyi.com/">http://www.juvenilejusticefyi.com/</a></li> <li>3. <a href="http://www.ceanational.org/">www.ceanational.org/</a></li> <li>4. <a href="http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/">http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/</a></li> <li>5. <a href="http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=227">http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=227</a></li> </ol>
<b>Additional Books Written by Louis Sachar:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Holes</i></li> <li>2. <i>Stanley Yelnats' Survival Guide to Camp Green Lake</i></li> <li>3. <i>Dogs Don't Tell Jokes</i></li> <li>4. <i>The Boy Who Lost His Face</i></li> <li>5. <i>There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom</i></li> <li>6. <i>Sideways Stories from the Wayside School</i></li> <li>7. <i>Wayside School is Falling Down</i></li> <li>8. <i>Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger</i></li> <li>9. <i>Sideways Arithmetic From Wayside School</i></li> <li>10. <i>More Sideways Arithmetic From Wayside School.</i></li> </ol>

### References

- Brantley, D. K. (2007). *Instructional assessment of English language learners in the K-8 classroom*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gredler, M. E., & Johnson, R. L. (2004). *Assessment in the literacy classroom*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- McGinley, W. J., & Denner, P. R. (1987). Story impressions: A prereading/writing activity. *Journal of Reading*, 31(3), 248-253.
- Raphael, T. E. (1984). Teaching learners about sources of information for answering comprehension questions. *Journal of reading*, 27, 303-311.
- Sachar, L. (2006). *Small steps*. New York: Random House Children's Press.
- Stauffer, R. (1970). *The language experience approach to the teaching of reading*. New York: Harper & Row.

## Appendix A

### Story Impressions Lesson Handout Strategy

(Based on the work of McGinley & Denner, 1987)

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Step 1: Develop a set of story impressions based on a story you would like to introduce to your students. First, read the entire story and take note of the characters, setting, and key elements of the plot. Try to use some of the exact story vocabulary. Select 10-15 clues and put them in sequence, based on the story.

Step 2: Review the story impressions with the students and explain that the words and/or phrases were taken from a story. Point to the title of the story and explain that students will be using the story vocabulary to write their own version of the story.

Step 3: Read the clues with the students and discuss any unfamiliar vocabulary. Ask them to make predictions about what might happen in the story.

Step 4: After discussing the story clues, have the student/s create their own version of the story based on the clues. Students should be encouraged to add words, phrases, and sentences to make the story more meaningful. After writing a first draft of the story, ask the students to reread what they have written and make revisions prior to reading the original text.

Step 5: Read the original story aloud, silently or collaboratively. Ask the students to compare and contrast their version to the original story version.

Step 6: Spend time discussing the original version of the story to develop comprehension. As students become more familiar with this strategy, they will be able to create story impression stories in small groups and individually.

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## Appendix B

### Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA) Handout

(Adapted from the Work of Stauffer, 1970)

<b>Prediction #1</b> (made after reviewing book flap and cover):	<b>Prediction #2</b> (made after reading chapter one):	<b>Words I Expect</b> (students brainstorm a list of words they expect to see in this text based on the cover, flap, and first chapter):
1. Stop at 6 pre-selected points in the chapter and have the student summarize what they've read so far. They can write summary statements here or draw a picture.	2. These can then be used to write a summary of the entire chapter at the end of each chapter.	3.
4.	5.	6.

## Appendix C

## Question-Answer-Relationships (QAR) Strategy Handout

(Based on the work of Raphael, 1986)

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**Question types****Characteristics**

Right-There	<p>The answers to these questions can be found right in the book. These are the (a) who, (b) what, (c) where, and (d) when type questions. These questions are at a literal level and <b>do not</b> require the reader to make inferences.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> <b>What is the name of the company Armpit works for in the book?</b></p>
Think-and-Search	<p>Think-and-search questions are also found in the book, but they require the reader to be more thoughtful. The information may be spread across several paragraphs, pages, or even chapters, but the information is in the book.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> <b>Why doesn't Armpit like to be called by this nickname?</b></p>
Author-and-Me	<p>Author-and-me questions are found by combining information from the text with the reader's background knowledge. Here the reader interacts with the author to find the answer.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> <b>Why do you think that Armpit was nervous about agreeing to spend his savings to purchase the concert tickets?</b> <b>What do you think could have gone wrong?</b></p>
On-My-Own	<p>On-my-own questions require the reader to move beyond the content of the book and think critically. They must be able to think beyond the text and relate it to their own lives.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> <b>Why is it that people who are considered by the <i>mainstream population</i> to be different are often ridiculed and mistreated?</b> <b>Has this ever happened to you or someone you know? Describe the incident or incidents.</b></p>

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**Appendix D****Cloze Passage for Chapter Four (Brantley, 2007)****Cloze Activities (Gredler & Johnson, 2004)**

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He had been sent to \_\_\_\_\_ Green Lake because of a \_\_\_\_\_ of popcorn. He had been trying to \_\_\_\_\_ his way along a row \_\_\_\_\_ seats at the \_\_\_\_\_. He was only fourteen at the time, and was making \_\_\_\_\_ his way past a \_\_\_\_\_ of high school seniors when \_\_\_\_\_ of them stuck out his \_\_\_\_\_ (Sachar, 2006, p. 3).

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## Appendix E

## Narrative Story Retelling Analysis Assessment

(Brantley, 2007)

<u>Narrative Story Retelling Assessment</u>			
<b>Child's Name:</b> _____	<b>Age:</b> _____		
<b>Name of Story:</b> _____			
<b>Date:</b> _____			
<b>How Story Was Read:</b>	<b>Orally</b>	<b>Silently</b>	<b>Read to Student</b>
(circle one)			
<b>Directions:</b> Score each story element based on the child's retelling. Point values are included next to each element. The student will receive more points if the student directly states the answer within their retelling without being prompted .			
<b>P= Prompted Response</b>		<b>UP= Unprompted Response</b>	
<p><b>A. Names main character [2 points unprompted (UP); 1 point prompted (P)]:</b></p> <p><b>B. Names other important characters [2 points UP; 1 point P] :</b></p> <p><b>C. Names setting [ 2 points UP; 1 point P] :</b></p> <p><b>D. Includes important events in the story (All = 4 UP, Most = 3 UP, Few = 2 UP; 1= P):</b></p> <p><b>E. Problem is stated [2 points UP; 1 point P] :</b></p> <p><b>F. Resolution is stated [2 points UP; 1 point P] :</b></p> <p><b>G. Story is told in sequence [Yes = 3 UP, Partially = 2 UP; 1 point P]</b></p> <p><b>H. Concludes story [2 points UP; 1 point P] :</b></p> <p><b>I. States story theme or moral [1 point P]</b></p>			
<b>Highest Score Possible:</b> 20		<b>Child's Score:</b> _____	
<b>Comments:</b>			
(Brantley, 2007)			