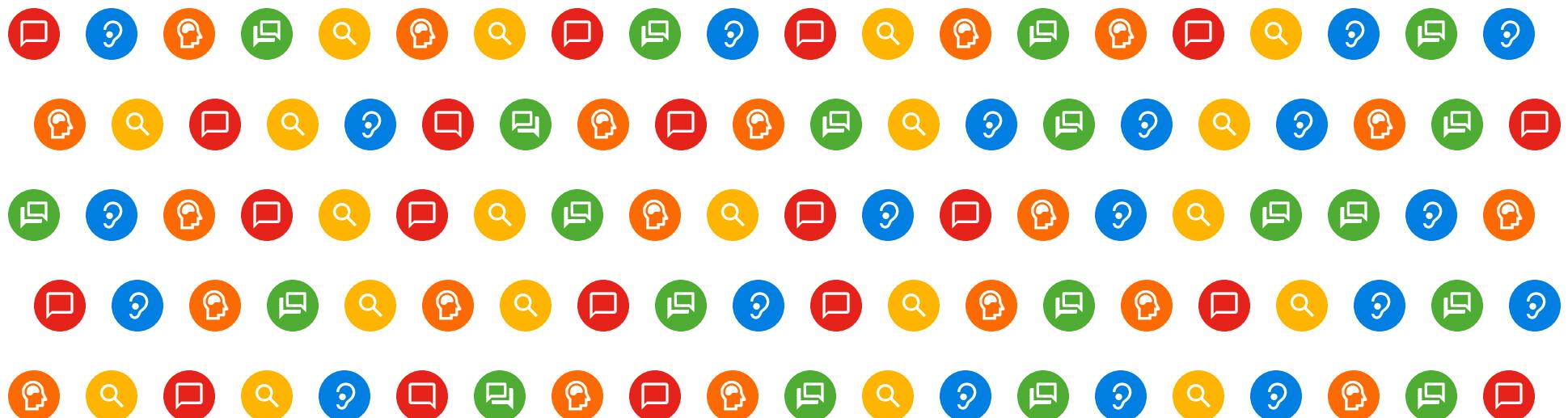
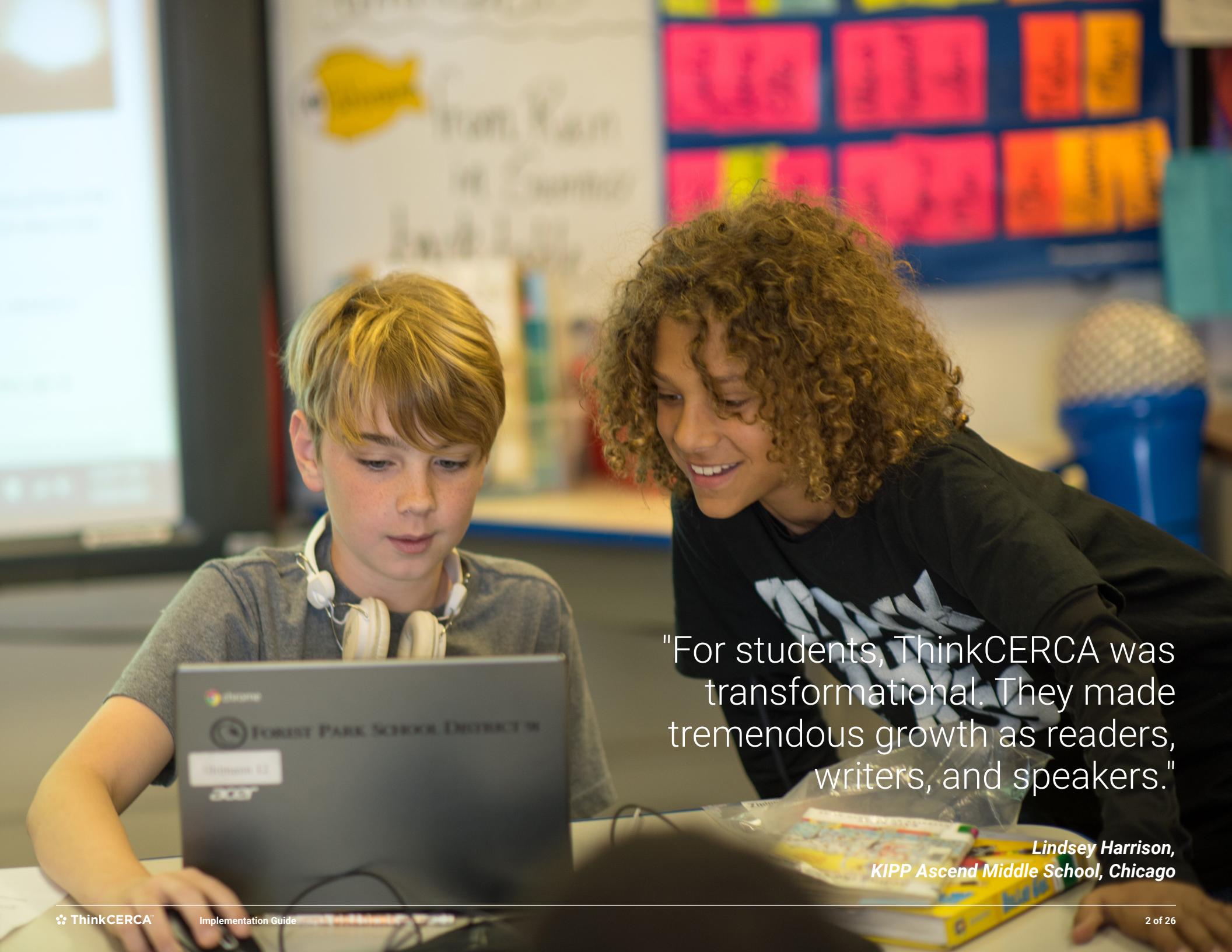


Implementation Guide





"For students, ThinkCERCA was transformational. They made tremendous growth as readers, writers, and speakers."

*Lindsey Harrison,
KIPP Ascend Middle School, Chicago*

Table of Contents

KEY TAKEAWAYS & WHAT TO EXPECT

This implementation guide will help you:

- Understand ThinkCERCA's research-based literacy framework and lessons
- Plan for a successful implementation
- Get started on the platform
- Discover additional resources to support implementation

OVERVIEW

- 5 What Is ThinkCERCA?**
Introduction to the CERCA Framework
- 6 How Does ThinkCERCA Work?**
Lesson Types, Explained
- 7 How Do I Use ThinkCERCA Lessons?**
Understanding CERCA Sets
- 8 How Do I Know ThinkCERCA Works?**
Results from the Classroom

GETTING STARTED

- 10 Your Implementation Roadmap**
Step-by-step Timeline & Guide
- 11 Setting Up Your Account**
Creating & Upgrading Your Account
- 12 Benchmark Assessments**
Leveling & Assessments
- 13 Direct Instruction**
Introducing Key Skills & Concepts
- 14 Applied Reading & Writing Lessons**
Practicing Close Reading & Academic Writing
- 15 Additional Reading Practice**
Building Background Knowledge

IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES

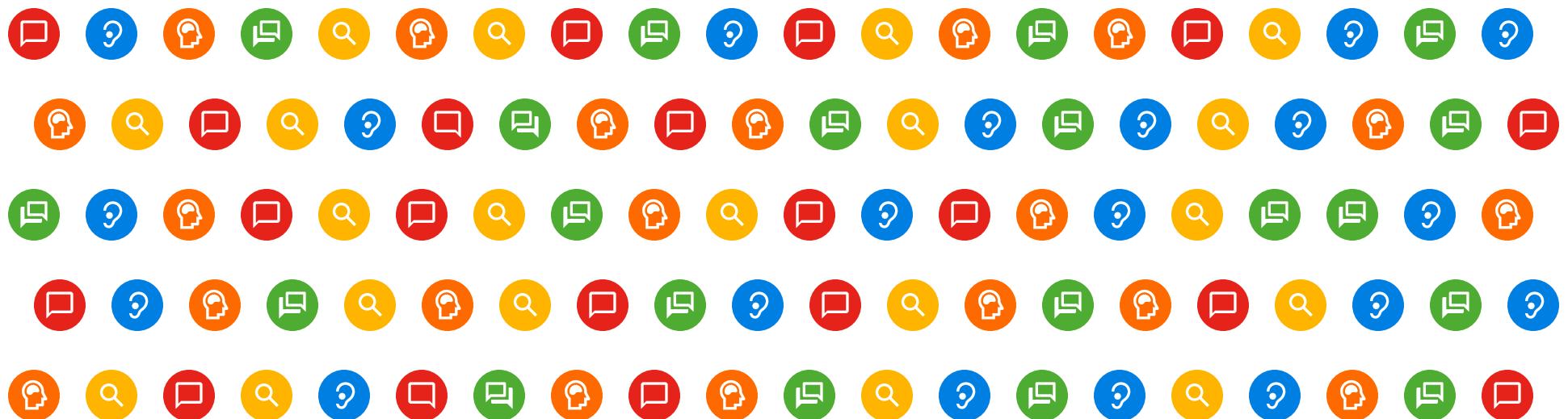
- 18 Ways to Apply ThinkCERCA**
Example Implementation Calendar
- 20 Going Offline**
Paper-based Applied Reading & Writing Lesson
- 24 Additional Resources**
Links to Online Resources

CONTACT US

Have any questions or concerns?
Please contact our Success Team!

- support@thinkcerca.com
- **708-79-CERCA (708-792-3722)**

Overview



What Is ThinkCERCA?

Introduction to the CERCA Framework

ThinkCERCA's personalized literacy platform helps teachers nurture students' critical thinking skills. Through standards-aligned close reading and academic writing lessons, our schoolwide approach to literacy instruction prepares students for post-secondary life by building up their analytical skills in every subject.

Research suggests that discipline-specific close reading and writing practice improves literacy skills while preparing students for 21st century success. ThinkCERCA's evidence-based, argumentation framework—**CERCA**—helps students develop strong critical literacy skills across subjects by teaching them how to make **Claims**, support their claims with **Evidence**, explain their **Reasoning**, identify **Counterarguments**, and use **Audience**-appropriate language for a given academic, professional, or personal situation.

ThinkCERCA also empowers whole school teams with a shared language, a common set of practices, assessments, and actionable insights to drive sustainable academic growth. Our common language and easily accessible data make it simple for teachers and parents to ask the right questions at the right time, such as: "What evidence can you find to support your claim?" and "Can you explain your reasoning to me?"

While ThinkCERCA's technology and lessons support students in developing critical literacy skills, only through the expert guidance of teachers and actively engaged peers can we truly help students achieve success.

THE CERCA FRAMEWORK



ThinkCERCA™

THINKCERCA
How to bring it all together
into a compelling argument.

FRAMEWORK APPLICATION

Grades
• 4-12

Subjects
• English Language Arts
• Science
• Social Studies
• Math

How Does ThinkCERCA Work?

Lesson Types, Explained



APPLIED READING & WRITING

Practice close reading and academic writing.

ThinkCERCA's Applied Reading & Writing lessons are centered around debatable topics that get students thinking critically about real-world issues. Using the CERCA Framework and our built-in graphic organizer, these lessons walk students through the process of reading a text closely to construct cohesive argumentative, informational, or narrative writings. Highlighting and annotating tools, in-text vocabulary support, and audio and visuals guide students through the text to ensure overall comprehension. Students can also collaborate with one another through teacher-facilitated debates and discussions to practice their speaking and listening skills.



DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Introduce key skills and concepts.

ThinkCERCA's Direct Instruction lessons feature short, expert introductions to standards-aligned skills and concepts that students can strengthen over time. These skills include concepts and vocabulary related to the CERCA Framework, such as how to make claims, find evidence, and explain one's reasoning, in addition to other basic literacy skills. A flipbook-style format, built-in audio, supportive visuals, and real-time feedback are among the many features included within our direct instruction lessons to keep students engaged.



ADDITIONAL READING PRACTICE

Assign leveled texts and automated assessments.

Our Additional Reading Practice lessons contain high-interest, authentic informational texts—featuring videos, graphs, charts, and other visual sources—that build up students' discipline-specific background knowledge. At the end of each lesson, students answer five multiple choice questions to gauge comprehension and get them accustomed to the kinds of questioning found in growth assessments, PARCC, Smarter Balanced, and ACT Aspire. Additionally, in-text vocabulary and voice-over tools provide students with additional comprehension and support. All Additional Reading Practice lessons are aligned to the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading.



SKILL & CONCEPT

Practice literacy skills through interactive instruction and assessments..

ThinkCERCA's Skill & Concept lessons, differentiated for grades 3-12, are interactive lessons that provide discrete instruction and practice in critical literacy skills. Interactive questions are interspersed throughout each lesson, providing scaffolded checks for understanding as well as graded assessments. Skill & Concept lessons can be used as both an introduction to new material or as a platform to practice and sharpen skills that have been previously taught. Assign them in tandem with Applied Reading & Writing lessons based on each student's personal growth focus.

How Do I Use ThinkCERCA Lessons?

Understanding CERCA Sets

ABOUT CERCA SETS

We recommend assigning ThinkCERCA lessons using our curated CERCA Sets, which feature differentiated texts and lessons organized by theme, debatable topics, and key questions. CERCA Sets are comprised of Direct Instruction lessons, Applied Reading & Writing lessons, and Additional Reading Practice lessons.

Each element of a CERCA Set supports students in responding to the key question, which is open-ended and perfect for discussion or debate. Key questions range from "How do world cultures express their values through traditional tales?" to "Should people be concerned about everyday radiation exposure?"

CERCA Sets feature 10 different levels of lessons to fuel engaging discussions among students of varying readiness levels.

Assign Direct Instruction lessons first to introduce a key skill or concept before assigning students the appropriate Applied Reading & Writing lessons. Follow up with Additional Reading Practice to extend learning.

ASSIGNING CERCA SETS

THE ROLE OF MACHINES

"What are the positive and negative effects of technology?"



DIRECT INSTRUCTION

- "Counterargument" (Reading levels: 3-5)
- "Counterargument" (Reading levels: 6-12)



APPLIED READING & WRITING

"Grandmother's Robot"
Reading level: 3

"The Amish"
Reading level: 4

"Robot Revolution Already Happened"
Reading level: 5

"The Automation of the Factory"
Reading level: 6

"Watson a Game-Changer"
Reading level: 7

"Can Machines Learn Morality?"
Reading level: 8

"Facing a Robo-Grader?"
Reading level: 9

"Grading Software Offers a Break"
Reading level: 10

"The Moral Case for Drones"
Reading level: 11

"Moral Machines"
Reading level: 12



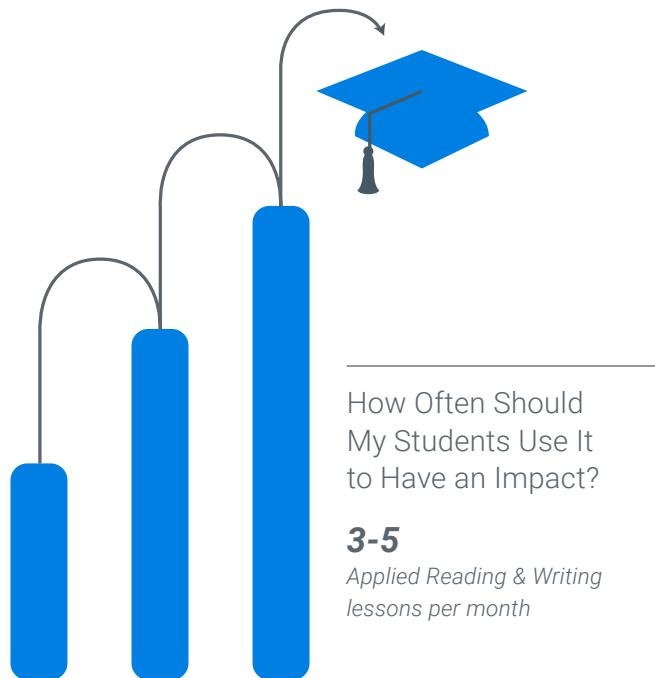
ADDITIONAL READING PRACTICE

- "From Reapers to Robots" (Reading levels: 3-5)
- "Self-driving Cars Inch Closer to Mainstream Availability" (Reading levels: 6-8)
- "Science Fiction Inspires Innovation in Real World" (Reading levels: 9-10)
- "TED Talk: Government Surveillance" (Reading levels: 11-12)

How Do I Know ThinkCERCA Works?

Results from the Classroom

ThinkCERCA is built upon an ever-growing body of research from institutions like the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, which confirms that reading, writing, and argumentation three to five times per month across subjects helps students become career- and college-ready.



ACCELERATED GROWTH

*Atlantic Research Partners
Third-Party Study*

Students in grade levels with significant use of ThinkCERCA outperformed their peers nationally on NWEA growth at different attainment levels in the 2014-2015 academic school year. Read the full study at go.thinkcerca.com/arpstudy

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

LEAP Innovations Controlled Study

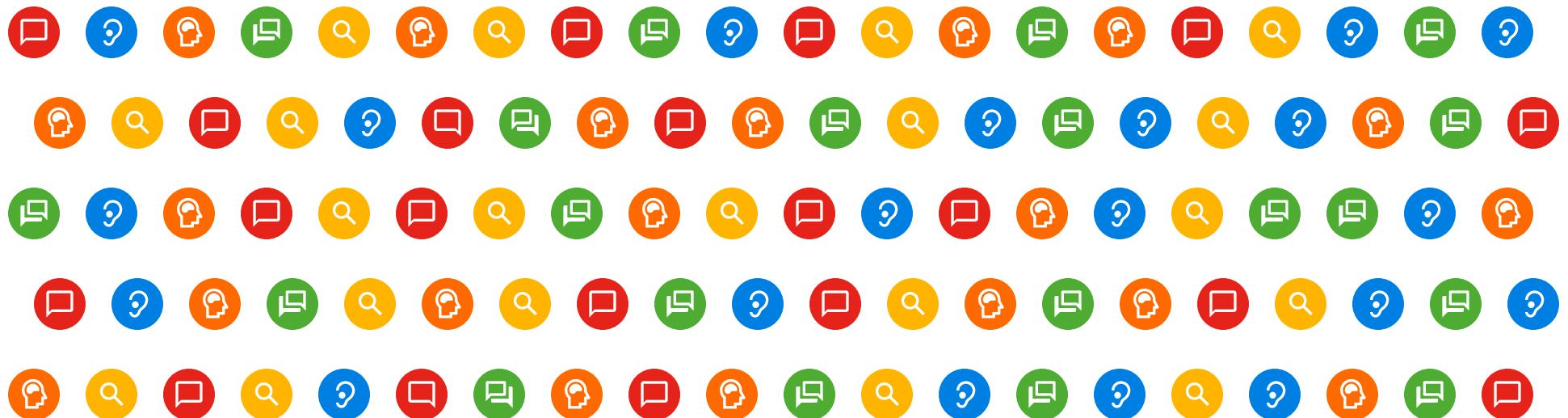
On average, students using ThinkCERCA gained an extra year's worth of academic growth. This is equivalent to closing the achievement gap by 264 percent for low-income students, 456 percent for black students, and 749 percent for Latino students. Read the full study at go.thinkcerca.com/leapstudy

WRITING IMPROVEMENT

SRI Education Controlled Study

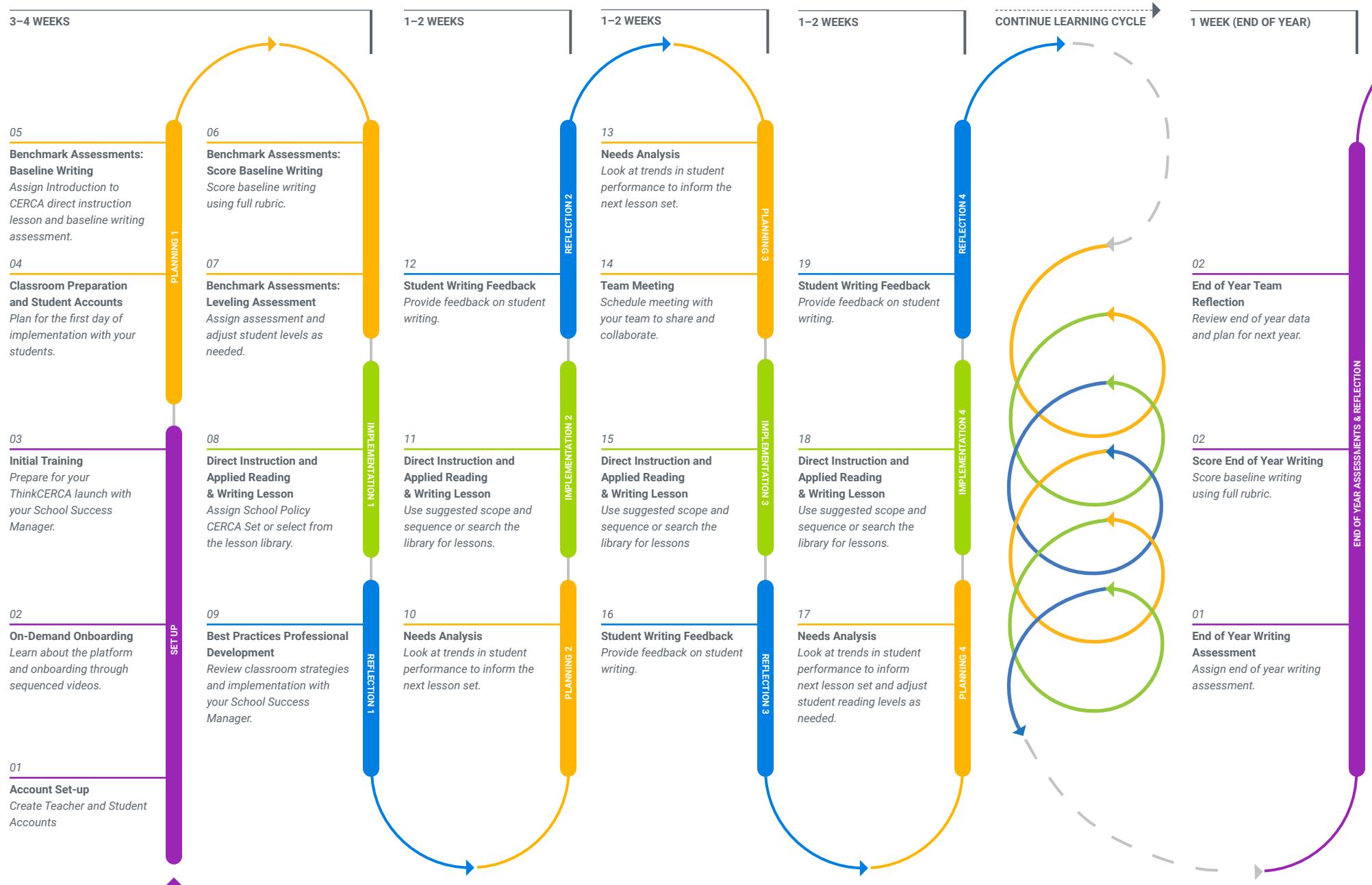
Gains in student writing scores in the elementary grades were positive across all writing aspects and statistically significant for five of the six aspects. Read the full study at go.thinkcerca.com/sristudy

Getting Started



Your Implementation Roadmap

Step-by-step Timeline & Guide



Setting Up Your Account

Creating and Upgrading Your Account

Visit our Support Center for additional step-by-step instructions on how to enroll students in a class, assign lessons, reset student passwords, and much more.

thinkcerca.com/support

CREATING AN ACCOUNT

STEP 1: Install and open  chrome

STEP 2: Visit thinkcerca.com/signup

STEP 3: Select your account type

- Student, teacher, school leader, district leader

STEP 4: Fill in your information

UPGRADING YOUR ACCOUNT

STEP 1: Visit thinkcerca.com/activate

STEP 2: Type in your school's 12-digit code

STEP 3: Select Upgrade

ADDING A CLASS

STEP 1: Select "Classes" from the navigation menu

STEP 2: Select Add a Class

Benchmark Assessments

Leveling & Assessment Resources

ThinkCERCA's Benchmark Assessments are designed to give you insights into students' reading and writing achievement to inform personalized instruction throughout the year. These resources include multiple sessions that assess students on the key literacy skills of the CERCA Framework through standards-aligned multiple choice items and written responses.

BEGINNING OF THE YEAR	THROUGHOUT THE YEAR	END OF YEAR
<p>Baseline Writing & Reading Leveling Assessments</p> <p>At the beginning of the year, we strongly recommend having your students complete the Baseline Writing assessment at grade level. After you grade this writing, you can then set their personalized Growth Focus. Then, if you would like additional data about your students' reading levels, you can also assign them the Reading Leveling assessment before setting students' reading groups.</p>	<p>Mid-Year Assessments</p> <p>We also suggest assigning Mid-Year Assessments to your students periodically throughout the year to measure student growth and re-level students as appropriate. Use Mid-Year Assessments as necessary to supplement the insights you're already gathering about your students through ThinkCERCA lessons and other assessments.</p>	<p>Reading & Writing Assessment</p> <p>At the end of the year, you can assign the End of Year Assessment to measure student growth. This assessment includes both a multiple choice reading assessment and a written response. Both are useful in understanding your students' achievement.</p>



Direct Instruction

Introducing Key Skills & Concepts

OVERVIEW

Instructional Purpose

- Introduce key skills and concepts.

Ideas

- Introduce lesson to a whole group.
- Provide flipped classroom resources and collect formative assessment data.
- Assign lessons to individual students and small groups based on needs.

Considerations

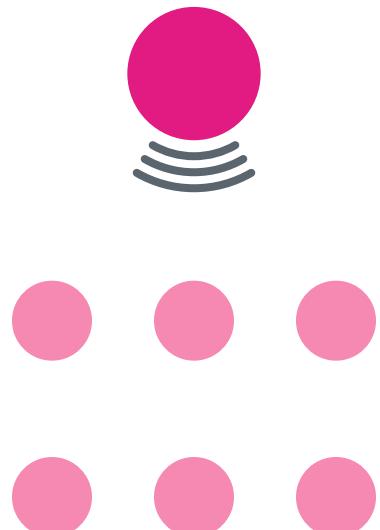
- Model how to make the most of tools, pacing, and assessments.
- Students will need headphones if they are watching individually.
- Choose best practices to increase student engagement and retention of skills and concepts.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION IMPLEMENTATION MODELS

Teacher-Led

Timing

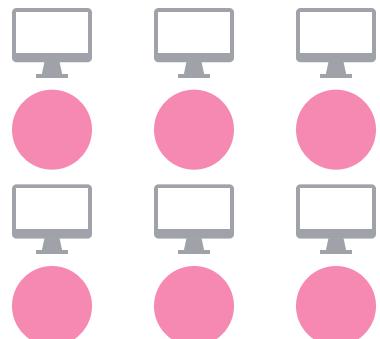
⌚ 8–15 minutes



Self-Paced

Timing

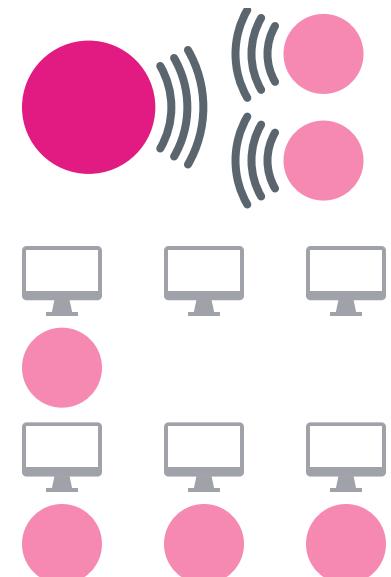
⌚ 8–20 minutes



Small-Group

Timing

⌚ 5–10 minutes





Applied Reading & Writing Lessons

Practicing Close Reading & Academic Writing

OVERVIEW

Instructional Purpose

- Practice close reading and academic writing.

Skills Practiced

- Language
- Speaking
- Listening
- Reading
- Writing

1. CONNECT



Timing

3–5 minutes

Skills Practiced

-
-
-
-
-

Ideas

- Use as a conversation starter with a partner or small-group discussion and integrate content-specific vocabulary.
- Use an anecdote as an attention-getter or example throughout the argument.

Considerations

- Find ways to spark interest while enhancing skill development.
- Students should be given parameters for this component based on teacher preferences, but no more than five sentences.

2. READ & CHECK COMPREHENSION



Timing

15–20 minutes

Skills Practiced

-
-
-
-

Ideas

- Differentiate reading level of text so students experience a complex text at their readiness level.
- Use comprehension check as a formative tool to track progress or for adjusting individual reading levels.

Considerations

- Full audio support and in-text vocabulary definitions assist students to access higher levels of text.
- Students who struggle with reading may need more time, additional supports, or their individual reading level lowered.

4. ENGAGE WITH THE TEXT



Timing:

10–15 minutes

Skills Practiced:

-
-
-

Ideas

- Use ThinkCERCA's built-in instructions to guide close reading, to find and highlight evidence, and to annotate with further reasoning.
- Use highlighted text as evidence to support claims and counterclaims.

Considerations

- Highlights will save automatically into the Resources toolbar on the left side of the screen for future use.
- Students should be guided through highlighting expectations and how to document quotes come from a text.



Applied Reading & Writing Lessons, Continued

Practicing Close Reading & Academic Writing

5. SUMMARIZE



Timing:

⌚ 5–8 minutes

Skills Practiced:



Ideas

- Use this step as a formative assessment to gauge students' reading comprehension.
- Include the summary as part of introduction in formal written essay.

Considerations

- Students can use sentence stems to support academic language development and to understand how to use content-specific vocabulary.
- Discuss grade-level expectations for length of summary.

6. BUILD AN ARGUMENT



Timing:

⌚ 15–20 minutes

Skills Practiced:



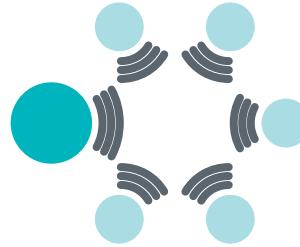
Ideas

- Draft writing using interactive graphic organizer.
- Have students assess their claims, evidence, and reasoning with peers through small- or whole-group debate.

Considerations

- All components of the Argument Builder tool automatically save to the Resource toolbar and can be used as guidance for the formal written essay.
- Allow time for collaborative discussion, which will result in stronger writing and content knowledge acquisition.

7. GENERATE OFFLINE DISCUSSION



Timing:

⌚ 10-20 minutes

Skills Practiced:



Ideas

- Have students who read the same text discuss their CERCA question.
- Pose the larger key question from the CERCA Set to encourage a whole group discussion and bring in multiple perspectives.
- Use activities from our Classroom Routines Resource for ideas.

Considerations

- Establish expectations for speaking and listening opportunities.
- Change activities every few lessons for variety.

8. CREATE A CERCA



Timing:

⌚ 20–30 minutes

Skills Practiced:



Ideas

- Start with the end in mind. Students will demonstrate knowledge and competence in every subject by expressing their critical thinking in writing.
- Use all components of the lesson in the formal, written essay.

Considerations

- Depending on keyboarding proficiency, expect that the quantity of writing will grow over time.
- Students can copy and paste saved highlights and writing from the Argument Builder tool from the Your Work section of the Resources toolbar. Adjust writing as necessary to make a cohesive argument.



Additional Reading Practice

Building Background Knowledge

OVERVIEW

Instructional Purpose

- Build background knowledge through leveled texts and automated assessments.

Ideas

- Practice multiple-choice questions linked with the CERCA Framework.
- Supplement CERCA Sets or existing curriculum with high-interest texts.
- Use the key question as a classroom debate or discussion starter.

Considerations

- Model how to use audio and vocabulary supports from the text.
- Pair an Additional Reading Practice lesson with an Applied Reading & Writing lesson for students to engage with two texts on a similar topic.

ADDITIONAL READING PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION MODELS

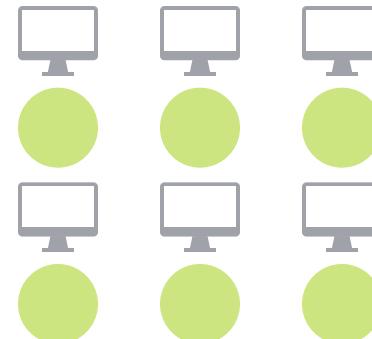
Background Knowledge Builder

Timing:
 8-15 minutes



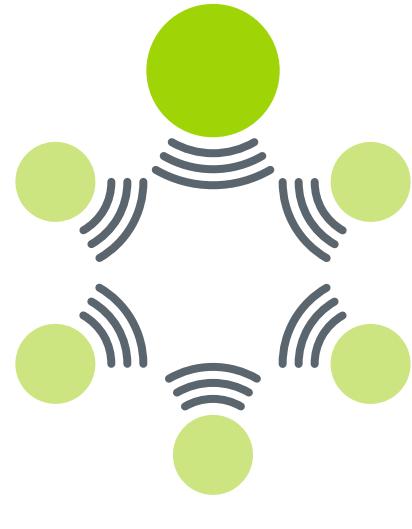
Independent Reading Practice

Timing:
 8-20 minutes



Leveled Collaborative Discussion

Timing:
 5-10 minutes

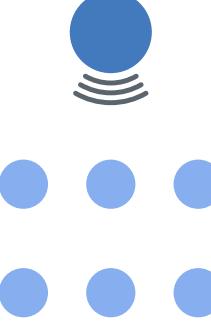
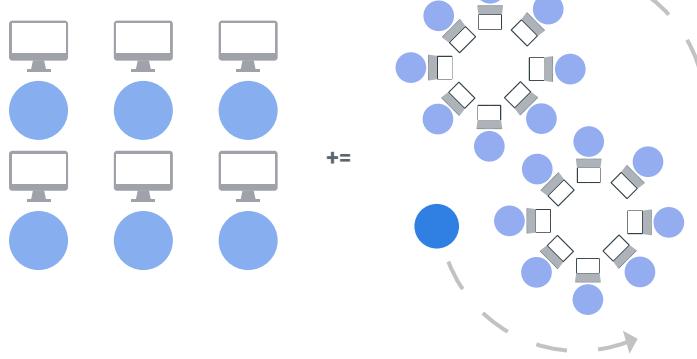
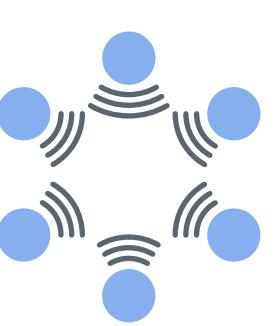
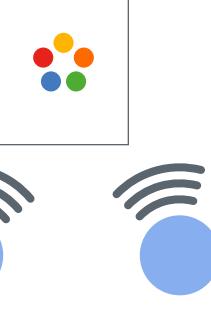
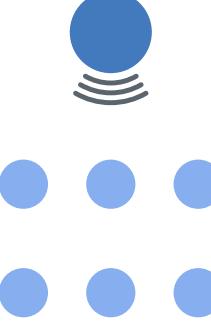
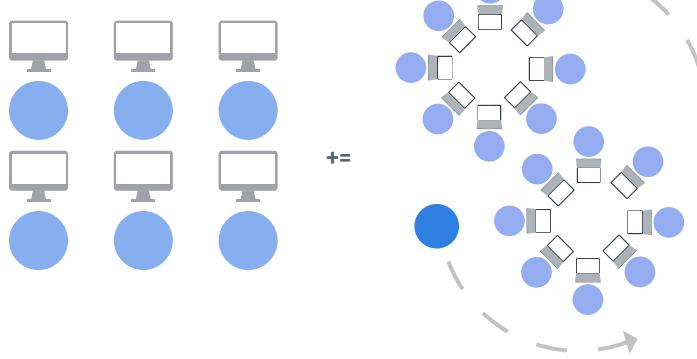
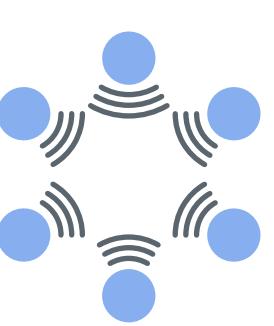


Implementation Resources



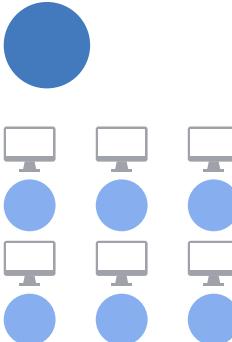
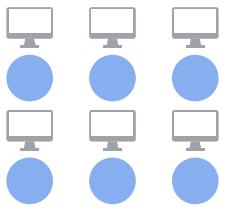
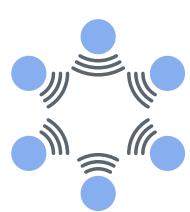
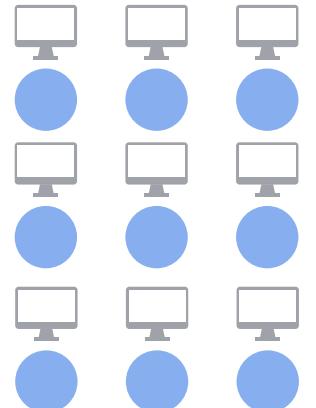
Ways to Apply ThinkCERCA

Example Implementation Calendars

2-3 DAYS ONLINE WITH OFFLINE EXTENSIONS				
SESSION 1 (OFFLINE)	SESSION 2 (ONLINE)	SESSION 3 (ONLINE)	SESSION 4 (OFFLINE)	SESSION 5 (ON/OFFLINE)
<p>Direct Instruction Lesson Character (RL.6.3) • "How do characters respond to change?"</p> <p>Conceptual Vocabulary • confrontation • consequence • justified</p> 	<p>Applied Reading & Writing Lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Aliens? Or Just Wired to Be Weird?" - <i>Odyssey</i>• "The Teenage Brain" - <i>Science News for Students</i>• "Nik Wallenda Gives Us a Rarity" - <i>Washington Post</i> 		<p>Socratic Discussion with Key Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "How do you know if a risk is worth taking?" 	<p>Formal Writing with Peer Review</p> 
<p>Teacher leads direct instruction of key skill or concept</p> 	<p>Students work independently or in small groups while the teacher rotates to facilitate learning</p> 		<p>Students engage in speaking and listening</p> 	<p>Students finish drafts and conference with their peers before submitting for feedback</p> 
<p>Additional Learning Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make thematic connections with novels for volume reading			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assign Additional Reading Practice lessons for independent practice	

Ways to Apply ThinkCERCA

Example Implementation Calendars

INTEGRATED LITERACY WITH BLENDED ROTATIONAL MODEL		
SESSION 1 (OFFLINE)	SESSION 2-4 (ROTATIONAL MODEL WITH ONLINE/OFFLINE)	SESSION 5 (ON/OFFLINE)
<p>Direct Instruction Lesson Character (RL.6.3) • "How do characters respond to change?"</p> <p>Conceptual Vocabulary • confrontation • consequence • justified</p> 	<p>Applied Reading & Writing Lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Aliens? Or Just Wired to Be Weird?" - <i>Odyssey</i>• "The Teenage Brain" - <i>Science News for Students</i>• "Nik Wallenda Gives Us a Rarity" - <i>Washington Post</i>     <p>Applied Reading & Writing Practice</p> <p>Teacher-Led Skills Review</p> <p>Socratic Discussion</p> <p>Vocabulary</p> <p>Students rotate through four stations to focus on: close reading and writing, teacher-led skills review, socratic discussion, and vocabulary practice</p>	<p>Formal Writing with Peer Review</p>  <p>Students complete their formal writing</p>

Additional Learning Opportunities

- Make thematic connections with novels for volume reading
- Assign Additional Reading Practice lessons for independent practice

Going Offline

Paper-based Applied Reading & Writing Lesson

QUESTION AND BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Write down the CERCA question and what you already know about the topic.

1. CONNECT

Respond to the personal connection prompt using your personal experiences to explain your thinking.



2. READ

Read the text and answer the multiple choice questions using evidence from the text:



1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Going Offline

Paper-based Applied Reading & Writing Lesson

3. ENGAGE WITH THE TEXT

As you analyze the text, you will be gathering evidence that will help you develop a response to the key question. Select evidence according to the instructions online and write it next to the appropriate color.



● **Aqua:**

● **Pink:**

4. SUMMARIZE

Summarize the selection in a few sentences. The sentence frames can help you.



Going Offline

Paper-based Applied Reading & Writing Lesson

5. BUILD YOUR ARGUMENT

Your claim should clearly respond – based on what you learned from the reading – to the question posted.

Do not begin your claim with "I think" or "I believe." Readers will know these are your thoughts and beliefs, since you are the author.



CLAIM: Write an opinion or position in response to the question.



REASON: Provide reasons why you believe your claim.



Provide **EVIDENCE** from the text to support your claim.



REASONING: Explain how your evidence connects back to your claim.



COUNTERARGUMENT: Include at least one good reason why others might disagree with your claim or provide a different point of view.

Going Offline

Paper-based Applied Reading & Writing Lesson

6. CREATE YOUR CERCA

- Remember to use audience-appropriate language when writing for your final CERCA.



Additional Resources

RESOURCES FOR THE CLASSROOM

Interactive Scheduler
(thinkcerca.com/scheduler)

Curriculum Integration Guides
(thinkcerca.com/guides)

General Lesson Plan for ThinkCERCA
(thinkcerca.com/lessonplan)

Teaching Strategies
(thinkcerca.com/strategies)

Exemplars
(thinkcerca.com/exemplars)

Printable Rubrics
(thinkcerca.com/rubrics)

Implementation Checklist
(thinkcerca.com/checklist)

English Language Learners (ELL)
Resources
(thinkcerca.com/ell)

MORE HELP

Online Training
(thinkcerca.com/training)

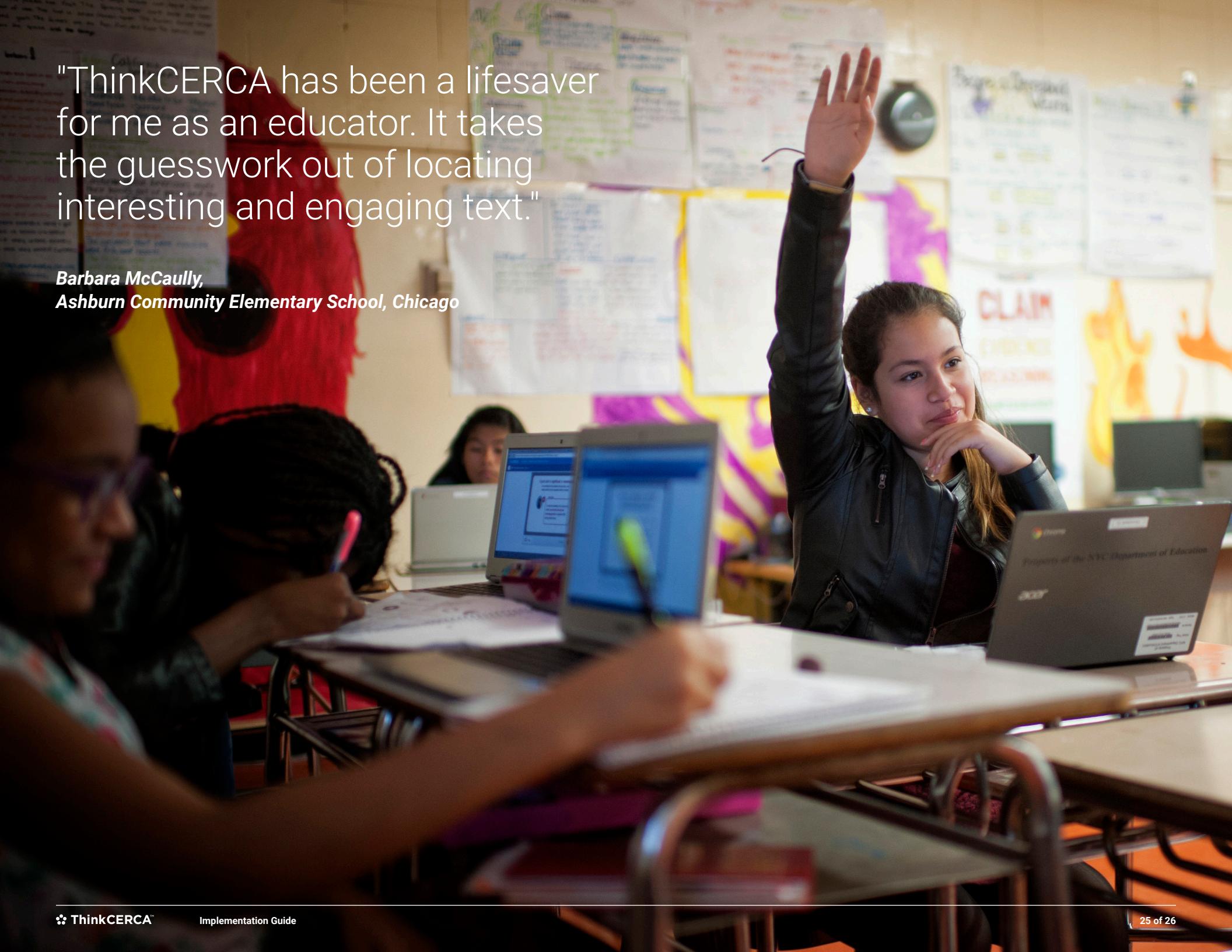
Platform Support
(thinkcerca.com/support)

On-Demand Webinars
(thinkcerca.com/webinars)

ThinkCERCA Videos
(thinkcerca.com/videos)

"ThinkCERCA has been a lifesaver for me as an educator. It takes the guesswork out of locating interesting and engaging text."

Barbara McCaully,
Ashburn Community Elementary School, Chicago





ThinkCERCA™

THINKCERCA
How to bring it all together into a compelling argument.