

thinkLaw's Coaching Guide





NEWBIES

1-5 rigorous, grade level critical thinking lessons taught, when time allows.

Questioning

Asks Level III and Level IV questions as they appear in the lessons materials.

Supporting Students

Grapples with the change from being a classroom leader to a facilitator of discussion where students do most of the talking.

Sharing Out

Shares experience teaching a critical thinking strategy with 0-1 colleagues.

Community & Belonging

Identifies as a teacher who is interested in using critical thinking in their teaching practice.



CASUAL USERS

6-10 lessons taught. Finds time during weird blocks, holidays, end of units to incorporate real-life examples of controversy that easily tie to standards.

Asks Level III & IV questions as they appear in the lessons material. Asks follow-up questions to help students dig deeper, when applicable.

Identifies as a facilitator of discussion. Understands the psychological safety of meeting students at "who" and "how" they are.

Talks about critical thinking every once in a while during staff meetings, PLCs, or other collaborative spaces.

Believes that critical thinking is powerful and sees it as a requirement in K-12 education.



ADOPTERS

15- 20 lessons taught. When planning an upcoming unit, seeks out opportunities to include critical thinking strategies in their existing plans.

Asks Level III & IV questions regularly in thinkLaw lessons and incorporates them into their content area to beef up existing lessons.

Is bought-in on how powerful, asset-based resources lead to all students feeling like they belong in challenging work.

Regularly communicates & shares reflections on critical thinking lessons, encourages others to try them & makes it easy by sharing the resources.

Seeks connection with other like-minded educators. May seek this out by joining online groups, like the thinkLaw community.



POWER USERS

25+ lessons taught. Makes critical thinking a habit. Students have multiple opportunities a week to have controversial discussions across contexts.

Develops engaging, culturally responsive, & rigorous Level III or IV questions based on relevant content standards across courses.

Creates a culture where challenging grade level work happens at the same time as laughing and learning. Students enjoy being challenged.

Leads some level of professional development for colleagues on critical thinking strategies.

Is outraged by the injustice & inequity around who has access to engaging, rigorous learning materials, and uses their power to make changes where they have authority.



AMBASSADORS

Lost count of lessons taught! Sees issues in real time & applies strategies off the cuff. Students are required to use critical thinking all the time.

Regularly develops engaging, culturally responsive, & rigorous Level III or IV questions based on relevant content standards in under five minutes of prep time.

Uses critical thinking all the time, across contexts & outside of school. Students initiate their own critical thinking discussions & are advocates for their own learning.

Co-teaches with a colleague or opens their classrooms to a colleague to model/showcase best practices in critical thinking instruction.

Actively supports the critical thinking movement by encouraging others to join them. Shares interests with those with influence in spreading the movement.

Critical Thinking Discussion “Look Fors”

The teacher will be able to...



Moderate Lively & Tough Discussions

- Keep the discussion civil during controversy
- Ensure the discussion stays on topic and aligned to standards
- Mediate appropriately if students start to criticize the person instead of the idea
- Provide real-time coaching for students as they develop their own arguing skills



Spark High Level of Engagement

- Hook students in with an issue that has drama, shock, and awe factors
- Present a real life conflict that allows students to consider what they think is a fair and just outcome
- Create opportunities that require nuanced thinking by analyzing multiple perspectives, ranking options, and/or considering “what if” scenarios
- Create opportunities for students to shift from their gut reaction to an informed opinion



Create Psychological Safety

- Release control and empower students in productive struggle by having the students do the heavy lifting
- Facilitate discussions focused on answering open-ended questions
- Anticipate likely mistakes and misconceptions and respond to them in real time with coaching



Leverage Student Identity

- Choose topics & questions that invite students to show up “who” and “how” they are by requiring them to draw on previous experiences, likes, dislikes, and opinions
- Start the discussion at the challenge level and scaffold/extend from there
- Provide topics that don’t need much background information for all students to engage
- Cultivate a space where students feel like they belong in the discussion and that they can do this challenging work



Foster Active Citizenship

- Nurture a culture of curiosity in the classroom, by shifting the focus from asking “what” and “how” questions to “why” and “what if”
- Help students become more self-aware and develop more empathy for others within their community and the world around them
- Present real-life events that allow students to make connections to their world while gaining a better understanding of real global issues



Prioritize the Learning Goal

- Explicitly make a connection for why this lesson will help students reach the learning goal
- Demonstrate evidence of learning at a high level through formative and summative assessments
- Ask follow up questions when a student is stuck explaining their ideas clearly to peers
- Give students the opportunity to write out their argument and supporting evidence after the discussion to show what they learned

Leadership Coaching Moves

How to support educator growth and development:



Moderate Lively & Tough Discussions

- It's about balance: For every 3-5 minutes of popcorn-style questioning, spend 3-5 minutes where students are working or talking amongst themselves
- If many students raise their hand, instead of picking 3-5 students to share, use think-pair-share so they all have the opportunity to be involved in group-think, not just a few
- Instead of asking lots of questions, prioritize the questions to keep to the time limits
- If one student dominates the conversation, give them a role: have them be a play-by-play recapper after 3-4 students share out



Spark High Level of Engagement

- Find a hook that has little or no background information required and allow all students to respond
- Have students use nuanced thinking by analyzing multiple perspectives, ranking options, and/or considering "what if" scenarios
- If students all agree with one side, ask someone to represent the other side and ask them to describe the #1 argument for the other side
- Use the breadcrumb method when discussing an issue and allow students to process and explain their thinking as new information is shared



Create Psychological Safety

- Create group work opportunities where everyone has played a significant role in the outcome
- Provide sufficient wait time when asking a thought-provoking, open-ended question
- Ask more questions that have open-ended answers, questions with no right or wrong answers, and questions where all answers are welcome when they have evidence to support them
- When it's unclear where a student is going with the idea they shared with the group, ask follow up questions to dig deeper
- Start at the challenge level with higher order thinking skills to set the bar high for all students so we are setting them up to extend beyond their current capabilities



Leverage Student Identity

- Choose topics and questions that welcome students' previous experiences, likes, dislikes, and opinions
- Start the discussion at the challenge level and scaffold/extend from there
- Provide topics that don't need much background information for all students to engage
- Cultivate a space where students feel like they belong in the discussion and that they can do this challenging work



Foster Active Citizenship

- Nurture a culture of curiosity in the classroom, by shifting the focus from asking "what" and "how" questions to "why" and "what if"
- Create opportunities for students to demonstrate empathy for others within their community and the world around them
- Present real-life events that allow students to make connections to their world while gaining a better understanding of real global issues
- When asking students to share the best argument for both sides, include "What would the world look like if this happened?" as a follow up question



Prioritize the Learning Goal

- Name the rigorous learning goal for the lesson and then decide how you will gather evidence of student learning that matches the goal
- Ask evaluative, divergent, and speculative higher-order probing questions throughout the lesson
- Ask follow up questions when a student is stuck explaining their ideas clearly to peers
- Give students the opportunity to write out their argument and supporting evidence after the discussion to show what they learned

