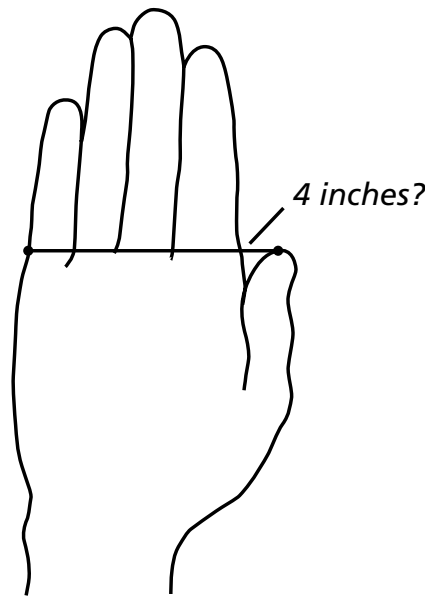


Measuring Length by the Handful

The English units that we use in the United States developed over a long period of time. For example, the hand was devised in ancient times as a unit of length. It was defined as the length of a person's hand from the little finger to the thumb. Today the height of horses is still measured in hands, but the definition of a *hand* is standardized at 4 inches or 10.16 centimeters.



1. Why did the hand produce unreliable measurements before it was standardized?
2. Measure the height of your desk in hands. Compare your results with other classmates. How do the results vary?

ANSWERS

1. The width of a hand varies from person to person; therefore, measurements using hands will vary.
2. Because of the variety of hand sizes among the people measuring, students will find that it's possible for the same distance to be described by a wide range of measurements in hands.