



# How Many Hands?

Students will be able to measure a horse in hands and determine what tasks certain breeds may be best suited for.



Engage!

Have the students do a silent line up from tallest to shortest. When the line is complete, ask the tallest and the shortest students to step forward and stand back-to-back. There sure is a lot of variation in the height of seventh graders! How do we measure our height? Inches and feet! Ask the two students if they know how tall they are in inches and feet. Describe how horses are measured in *hands* (4 inches). Demonstrate how to measure in hands along the side of one of the students. This is the unit of measurement that we'll use today!



Explore!

Explore the farm. Point out the horses and name their breeds. Explain that different breeds have different sizes and all are measured in hands. Come to the side of a barn where students can line up against the wall of the barn so you can mark their height with a washable marker or chalk (the next rain or a good hosing will get rid of the marks). Have students turn around measure their heights in hands.



Distinguishing a horse's breed is important because there are specific character traits that make them suitable for certain kinds of tasks. Two horses may be identical in color but be different sizes. Selecting the right breed for a particular discipline starts with learning how to size them up.

In the development of different breeds, size or height of a horse impacted the types of tasks a horse could perform:

- Arabian horses have more bones in their skeletal structure than other breeds.
- "Hot" horse breeds generally have higher metabolisms which can cause them to require more care.
- Gaited breeds have different movements.
- Common horse breeds include the Paint, Standardbred, Appaloosa, Thoroughbred and Quarter horse.

Have **two sets of horse breed photographs** on hand. These can be cut from horse calendars, downloaded from the Internet, or be photographs of your own horses. Glue them to one side of a large index card or small poster board. Laminate if possible. Make sure you have examples of the breeds found on your farm. Set one complete set aside for now. On the other set - attach to the backs of each breed card, a description of the breed featured on the front.

Gather the students in a hay bale (or chair) circle leaving a large interior space open. Hold up each of the breed photographs and provide a verbal description of each. Pass the photographs around the circle as you finish with each description.

Some informative descriptions can be:

Arabians are possibly the oldest breed in the world! The Arabian horse has a distinctive dished profile. They have giant, wide-set eyes on a broad forehead, small, curved ears, and large, efficient nostrils. Arabians are also known for their arched necks and short backs. **They stand 14 to 15.3 hands high.**

The American Paint Horse sports a combination of white and any other color of the equine spectrum. Markings come in any shape or size and can be located anywhere on the horse's body. The variety of colors and markings appear in three specific coat patterns: Overo, Tobiano and Tovero. **American Paint Horses average 14.2 to 16.2 hands high.**

The limbs and hocks of the Standardbred are very strong and able to withstand the constant pounding that trotting and pacing speed require. **This breed stands an average of 15.3 hands high** and comes in all solid colors. Standardbreds are a part of the racing industry.

Appaloosa horses are known for four identifiable characteristics: coat pattern, mottled skin, white sclera and striped hooves. With coat patterns, countless numbers of color and pattern combinations exist. Appaloosa coat patterns include leopard, snowflake, blanket, marbleized and frost. **Appaloosas range from 14.2 to 16 hands high.**

The **Thoroughbred stands from 15.3 to 17 hands high** and is found in all solid colors. Its long bones and graceful movement give the horse an elegant presence. The Thoroughbred's long neck and powerful haunches help propel it forward in a galloping stride that is over 20 feet long--moving at a speeds of over 30 miles an hour.

There are 16 recognized colors of the American Quarter Horse. The most prominent color is sorrel (brownish red). The American Quarter Horse is the most popular American breed and can be seen in virtually every riding discipline. **American Quarter Horses range in size from 14 to over 16 hands high.**

After students have viewed and compared all the cards, call the name of one of the breeds and ask students to recall the character traits that make this breed different from all the others. Have fun with this! Try performing a cheer, compose a poem, or make up a silly song about each breed.



Visit with an equine educator. Demonstrate how to safely move around a horse. Point out the withers of the horse and how this is the area that determines height, not the top of the horse's head! Use the equine educator for comparison during this activity.

The prehistoric ancestors of the modern horse were quite small at just two feet tall! How many hands is two feet? With two students assist, stack six hands to demonstrate two feet.

After people had domesticated wild stock that roamed the Eurasian steppe five thousand years ago, they discovered that horses could be bred to display certain traits. Height became an important trait as horses were used to serve the military, industrial, hunting, and agricultural needs of people. Pair or triple the students together and assign each a breed card (see examples). Have teams read their cards and decide how many extra students they will need to stack hands to show the height of their breed.

When ready, have students stand in a half-moon in front of the equine educator horse. Invite each team to stand next to the horse and read their card aloud. They will invite students to join them and stack hands to show the height of their featured breed. Stress to students how important it is to approach the horse from a direction where they can clearly see them. Stress that they walk calmly and are mindful of their movement and motions.

When each team has finished their hands-high demonstration they may give the equine educator a gentle pat or rub.



Remember that second set of blank-back breed cards you set aside earlier? After another quick romp around the farm gather the students together in a circle and play a game of Two Card Match. Spread the two sets out on the ground. If windy, move inside. Make sure to really mix them up, face down so students can't see the horse pictures.

Each student will flip one card so that everyone can see it, then flip it back over. As students take turns going around the circle, they try to find a two card match. When a match is made the student can share something they learned about horse height and breeds. Matched pairs may remain face up. Keep going until all matches are made.