

# How many hands is it?

**Background Information:** For centuries, horses have been measured using "hands." George Washington was an avid horseman and owned many horses during his life. One of Washington's horses, Nelson, was 16 hands high, meaning his withers stood 64 inches off the ground!

## Main Ideas:

- Horses are measured in "hands." Today, one hand is equal to four inches.
- Horses are measured from their hooves to their withers (where their shoulders meet their neck).

## Skills:

- Critical Thinking
- Measuring
- Math

## Question to Consider:

- Why were horses important in the eighteenth century?



## Explore further!

To learn more about horses and George Washington, explore the primary sources below and the **Horses page** of Mount Vernon's website.



**Riding Crop**



**16-Sided Barn**



**Spurs**

# How many hands is it?

**Did you know?** Horses are measured using **hands**! Horses have been measured using human hands for thousands of years. However, our hands are all different sizes. Today, a hand as a tool of measurement is equal to four inches.

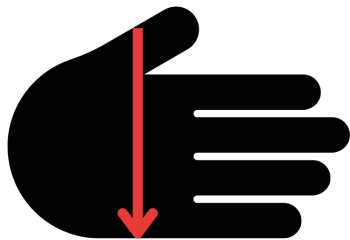
George Washington owned many horses throughout his life. Nelson, one of the horses Washington rode during the American Revolution was 16 hands high. This means his withers (where his shoulders met his neck) stood at 64 inches off the ground. That's 5.3 feet!



*Depiction of George Washington during the American Revolution ca. 1830.*

**Now it's time for you to try measuring using hands!**

**First, measure your own hand.** Measure it from the top of your thumb to the bottom of your palm like this:



**How many inches is your hand?**

**Is it more or less than 4 inches?**

**Now, measure items around you using "hands" (4 inches) and record your observations below:**

1. How many hands is this piece of paper?
2. How many hands is your favorite toy?
3. How many hands is your favorite book?
4. How many hands is your friend/family member?
5. How many hands is your pencil?

**What else can you measure?**

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S  
**MOUNT ★ VERNON**

THE MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION