

By the Foot: The History of Measurement

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum Focus: Measurement

Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Student Objectives

- Discuss the importance of accurate measurements.
- Recall how units of measurement have been calculated throughout history.
- Use their own feet as a standard measurement, and then measure and compare distances.

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Measure for Measure: Lengths and Heights*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- Units of Length
 - Measurement Rules Our Lives
 - Ancient Measurement
 - Foot: Around the World
 - Meter
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- Rulers or tape measures (one for every two students)
 - Quarters (one for every two students)
 - Paper and pencil

Procedures

1. Before you begin this lesson, determine the distances between the places listed below. You can use MapQuest (<http://www.mapquest.com/directions/>) for those in the U.S. and the Distance Calculator (<http://www.indo.com/cgi-bin/dist>) for international distances.
 - Distance between your school and the closest shopping mall
 - Distance between your school and a school in another town in your state
 - Distance between your town and a large city elsewhere the United States

- Distance between your town and Paris, France, or any other foreign city
2. Watch *Measure for Measure: Lengths and Heights*, and point out that the narrator says, "Measurement rules our lives. It has sliced up our world and helped us impose order and logic on our restless universe." Ask students: What do you think the narrator means? What would a world with no measurements be like?
 3. The video reviewed the history of measurements and noted that different countries once used their own measurement systems. How have units of length been determined? (People used the length of their own foot, hand, fingertip, pace, or the distance from the elbow and fingertip. In England, the distance from the ruling monarch's nose to fingertip was one yard and three barleycorns made up one inch.) What was the problem with using the human body or natural products as a standard of measurement? (They always differ.) Who first called for standard measurements, and why? (Traders needed to know how much they were buying or selling.)
 4. The foot has long been a unit of measurement, but it has ranged between 10 and 27 inches. Explain to students that in this activity, they will use their own feet as a standard measurement and then measure and compare distances.
 5. Have students work with a partner to measure the length of their feet without shoes. Have them record this measurement in standard inches.

Length of my foot in standard inches: _____

6. Using their personal unit measurement, have students determine the length of a personal non-standard inch. They should divide the length of their foot by 12. (Example: If a student's foot measures 8 inches, a non-standard inch would be 8 divided by 12 = .6.) Students may round their answer to the nearest eighth.
Length of my personal inch in standard inches: _____
7. Have students draw two squares with four-inch sides, one using standard inches, the other using personal inches. (Using the personal non-standard inch example above, the second square would have 2.5-inch sides.)
8. Have students attach their personal squares to the board. Discuss the consequences of countries using non-standard measurements. For example, what if one country supplied parts for a machine produced in another country?
9. Now students will consider their personal units of measurement on a larger scale. How many personal feet would go into a mile? (5,280 standard feet = one mile) When comparing feet to miles, the numbers are very large, so it will be easier to compare standard miles and new miles using a ratio. First, determine the ratio of the standard foot to a personal foot. For example, 12 inches to 8 inches is 12:8, or 1.5. In other words, a standard foot is 1.5 times larger than the personal foot. Since ratios are constant, you can also say that a standard mile is 1.5 times longer than a personal mile. That means a distance of 100 standard miles would measure 150 personal miles. (They will multiply the distance times 1.5: $100 \times 1.5 = 150$)
10. Give students a chart to show distances between your school or town and different locations. Then have them use the ratio to determine the distances with their personal measurement system. For example, a completed chart might look like this:

Distance From	Standard Miles	Personal Miles
school to mall	5 miles	7.5 miles
Charlotte, North Carolina, to Asheville, North Carolina	130 miles	195 miles
Charlotte to New York, New York	630 miles	945 miles
Charlotte to Paris, France	4,165 miles	6,247.5 miles

11. Have students share some of the distances they determined. Then discuss the consequences of using non-standard units of measurement. Pose these questions to the class: What would happen if you gave directions to the mall using personal miles? What if a pilot used personal miles to calculate the distance on an international flight to Paris? Why are standard measurements so important? Ask students to share other examples of why accurate measurements are critical.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussions about measurements; accurately measured their own feet; correctly calculated all of the lengths and distances; demonstrated a clear understanding of the importance of standard measurements.
- **2 points:** Students participated in class discussions about measurements; closely measured their own feet; correctly calculated most of the lengths and distances; demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of the importance of standard measurements.
- **1 point:** Students did not participate in class discussions about measurements; made sloppy, inaccurate measurements of their own feet; could not calculate the lengths and distances; demonstrated a poor understanding of the importance of standard measurements.

Vocabulary

distance

Definition: The length of the space between two points

Context: The distance between Los Angeles, California, and Tokyo, Japan, is 5,478 miles, or 8,815 kilometers.

foot

Definition: A unit of length equal to 12 inches



Context: Although the standard length of a foot is 12 inches, it has ranged throughout history between 10 and 27 inches.

metric system

Definition: A decimal system of units based on the meter as a unit length

Context: Most countries use the metric system.

ratio

Definition: The relation of one part to another or to a whole

Context: In the group are four boys and three girls, so the ratio of boys to girls is 4 to 3, or 4:3.

Academic Standards

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching mathematics. To view the standards online, go to <http://standards.nctm.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following math standards:

- Understand both metric and customary systems of measurement
- Understand relationships among units and convert from one unit to another within the same system
- Select and apply techniques and tools to accurately find length, area, volume, and angle measures to appropriate levels of precision
- Solve problems involving scale factors, using ratio and proportion:

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Mathematics – Understands and applies basic and advanced properties of the concepts of measurement, Understands the general nature and uses of mathematics
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

