mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Why are some people left-handed?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hi, it's Doug! Question for you. What do the following people have in common? Former President Barack Obama, pop star Lady Gaga, Olympic volleyball player Gaila González, basketball player James Harden, scientist Marie Curie, and Star Wars character Luke Skywalker. Well, take a close look here. They're all doing something with the same hand, they're left hand. They're all left-handed. Someone named Allie has a question about this. Let's give Allie a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Doug!

- Hi, Allie!

- I have a question for you. Why are some people left-handed?

- Ooh, that's a great question.

Most human bodies have lots of things in twos. One on each side of the body. Try this, move something on this side. Maybe an arm, or a leg, or an eyebrow, your left side. Now, move something on the other side, your right side. Now let's try something else. Write your name with

your finger. Now try the same thing with your other hand. If you can, grab a pencil and paper and try actually writing your name with each hand. What does it feel like?

VIDEO 2

Most people naturally use one hand in particular to do things, like write, draw, eat with a spoon, throw a ball, or brush their teeth. About nine out of 10 people naturally use their right hand to do these one-handed tasks. They're right-handed. About one out of 10 people naturally use their left hand to do one-handed tasks. They're left-handed. More rarely, some people don't have a strong preference of one hand over the other, or they use their right hand to do some things and their left hand to do other things. If you're right-handed, writing your name with your left hand probably feels awkward and unnatural. But if you're left-handed, you might feel just as awkward writing with your right hand. In some cases, people haven't always been so good at listening to left-handers when they share what it feels like to be left-handed. For example, for a long time, many teachers in the United States tried to make left-handed kids use their right hand in school. Some even thought that holding a pencil in your right hand was the only correct way. Some teachers thought that a left-hander could become a right-hander if they just forced themselves to switch the pencil to their right hand. But it doesn't always work like that. With months or even years of practice, some left-handers can learn to use their right hand like right-handers do. That's great news for folks who need to use the other hand for some reason like one hand is injured or if they're doing something that needs both hands. But just because you can do something, that doesn't necessarily mean it feels good to do it. With lots of practice, some left-handers may eventually feel comfortable doing some things with their right hand, but other left-handers may find that even with practice it's just never quite as comfortable to use their right hand. Even if they can learn to write or throw a ball with their right hand, it just feels better and

easier to use their left hand. Scientists aren't sure exactly what causes a person to be right or left-handed, but we do know that being left-handed isn't something you choose or something you learn, it's just the way a person's body works. And it starts early. Kids usually start using one hand more than the other by age three. And even if we could just magically make all people right-handed from birth, why on earth would we want to do that? There's nothing wrong with being left-handed. Sometimes left-handedness is even an advantage. Many sports have high numbers of left-handed athletes at the elite level. Think about it. Because left-handers are less common than right-handers, athletes have less practice facing off against a left-handed pitch or a sword thrust. In these situations, left-handers have an edge, the element of surprise. Still, left-handers can face some annoying challenges in their daily lives. Not because it's bad to be left-handed, but because people have designed a lot of everyday things with only right-handers in mind. Like, check this out. This is an ordinary pair of scissors. If you're left-handed, you might already know what makes these challenging. The handles are designed to be used with your right hand. If you use your left, you have to scrunch your fingers up, like this. But there are simple solutions to this problem. This is a pair of scissors designed to be used by left-handers. You see? No scrunching. And check this out. These scissors are designed so both sides of the handles are the same size—easy to use with your right or your left hand. Why try to change left-handers when it's so much easier, not to mention more kind, to just make the world friendly for all people, no matter which hand they use? So in summary, being left-handed means you find it easier to use your left hand to do one one-handed tasks. Handedness isn't a choice, it's just how your body works. If we pay attention to how left-handers feel and experience everyday things, we can help design a world that works well for left-handers, right-handers, and anyone in between. That's all for this week's question. Thanks for asking, Allie!