mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Who invented the high five?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hey, it's Esther. Can I show you something super cute? Look at how these animals are playing. Doesn't it look like they're giving high fives? Someone named Max has a question about high fives. Let's give Max a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Esther!

- Hey, Max!

- I have a question for you. Who invented the high five?

- That's a great question.

So you probably have some firsthand experience giving high fives. You might use high fives to say hello at the start of a school day, congratulate someone, or celebrate an accomplishment. I'm curious. When was the last time you gave someone a high five? Why did you high five?

VIDEO 2

It might feel like everyone everywhere has always high fived. You might not even remember how you first learned to high five. But there was a time before the high five, and it wasn't even

that long ago. Take a look. This is a clip from a baseball game in twenty twenty-three. Watch what the team does to celebrate a home run. They're high fiving, right? Okay. Now compare that to a home run from back in the nineteen sixties. Nobody's high fiving. Instead, they're shaking hands? The high five just wasn't as popular then as it is today. So if the high five wasn't always around, how was it invented? Long before the high five became popular, there was the low five—slapping hands like this. No one knows exactly who started the low five, but by the nineteen forties, the move had become popular in black communities in the US, especially among jazz musicians. As time went on, more and more people started doing it, but it still wasn't quite a high five. So how did the low five become the high five? Well, that's a tricky question. Some people point out that women's volleyball players started high fiving during games in the nineteen sixties. Others have noticed occasional high fives or moves that kind of look like high fives in old TV shows and movies. But when did the high five become something millions of people know about and do every day? Well, here's one possibility. Let's go back in time. It's October second nineteen seventy-seven. The LA Dodgers are facing off against the Houston Astros in front of thousands of screaming fans in Dodgers Stadium. Young Dusty Baker steps up to the plate. Dusty Baker's teammate, Glenn Burke, watches nervously from the dugout. Imagine how stressed you'd feel watching your friend face down this big moment. The pitch comes, Dusty Baker swings, and he hits a home run. And the team goes wild in celebration. As Dusty Baker lands on home plate, Glenn Burke is so excited that he runs out onto the field and lifts his hand back in the air to greet his teammate. When Dusty Baker sees the joy in his friend's pose, he knows exactly what to do. He reaches up and smacks Glen Burke's hand. The move caught on. The whole team started high fiving each other. Eventually, the Dodgers even made posters about the high fives So Dodgers fans could learn how to do it. Those fans taught their friends who taught their friends and so on and so on. So is that how the high five was

invented? Maybe here's another possibility. Around the same time the Dodgers started high fiving in California, in a whole other part of the country, two players were playing a different sport. Wiley Brown and Derek Smith were both players for the University of Louisville's basketball team, the Cardinals. That year, the Cardinals were really good. They were so good at slam dunks that they became known as the Doctors of Dunk. One day during practice, Wiley Brown goes to give his best friend Derek Smith a low five, but Derek Smith says, no, up high, and raises his hand in the air. This makes total sense to Wylie Brown. After all, they're the doctors of Dunk. They're all about jumping and dunking up high. That's what makes them great. Why wouldn't their celebration moves also be up high? So he slaps his friend's hand up high. The move caught on. Soon, the whole team was high fiving during practices, during games with each other, and with fans. You see the hands shaking above the heads. You know what the guys call that? A high five. high five. It spread around the country. So in summary, the low five became the high five. But who was the real inventor of the high five? Was it Glenn Burke, Dusty Baker, and the LA Dodgers? Was it Wylie Brown, Derek Smith, and the Doctors of Dunk, or was it volleyball players in the nineteen sixties, or actors in the nineteen fifties? Or someone else. Okay. Hear me out. What if it was all of them? Something like the high five isn't invented by one person, or even four. Would we know about Glen Burke and Dusty Baker's five without the Dodgers fans who picked up the move and taught it to their friends? Who knows? With the doctors of Dunk have started doing the high five if black musicians hadn't started doing the low five many years earlier? Who knows? No matter where the move first started, the high five still exists today because millions of people around the world keep doing it. Every time you high five someone, you're keeping the high fives alive—passing it from one person to another. The high five expresses something important, something lots of people feel in lots of different situations.

Joy and pride. Maybe that's why so many people came up with the idea and why so many people keep doing it today. That's all for this week's question. Thanks for asking, Max.