mystery science

# Grades K-5
# Mini-Lesson: “Why do we have eyebrows?”

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# VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

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## VIDEO 1

It's me—it's Doug! Now, you may not have been fooled, but scientists did an experiment recently and found out it might be that we look at each other's eyebrows to tell people apart.

Someone named Paloma is curious about eyebrows. Let's give her a call now.

**[Video Call]**
- Hi, Doug!
- Hey, Paloma!
- I have a question for you. Why do we have eyebrows?
- That's a great question.

When you really stop and think about it, eyebrows are kind of a funny thing, aren't they? We've got hair up here, of course. But the rest of our face is just bare skin—except, right above our eyes. For whatever reason, we got these two big patches of hair right there. Almost like little islands of hair. Like, did they wander away from the hair on our head?

Why do we have eyebrows? After all, most of our body parts do something for us. We have ears for hearing. We have eyes for seeing. We have a mouth for eating and breathing. So, eyebrows? Do they serve any purpose? Do eyebrows help us in any way?

Well, the short answer is, they might. Scientists actually have a few different ideas about how eyebrows might be helpful to us. But before I tell you these, it could be fun for you to think of any purpose eyebrows might have.

## VIDEO 2

Well, one of the oldest ideas there is about eyebrows is that eyebrows might help to keep sweat and dirt out of our eyes. When you're hot, you really start sweating. A lot of sweat forms up here, and so as it drips downwards, it might be that the hairs of the eyebrow catch some of that sweat and stop it from going into our eyes.

Okay, that seems like it could be true, right? It's an interesting idea.

Another idea is that eyebrows are really important for letting people know how we're feeling—whether you're surprised, whether you're really not convinced by something, like *what are you talking about*. It's hard not to use your eyebrows when showing different feelings. For example, pretend to show anger on your face—but without moving your eyebrows. Good luck! It's hard to do. Chances are, when you're angry you usually show that by lowering your eyebrows, like this.

Okay, so protecting our eyes from sweat and dirt, showing the different emotions we have, these are two ways eyebrows might be useful to us. But these are answers to the question of, “What good are eyebrows? What do they do for us?”

There's another question you could mean when you ask “Why do we have eyebrows?” That's the question: Have we always had eyebrows? And if we didn't, why did we get them?

The answer there is—nobody knows. At least not yet. These are much harder questions to answer than the question of how eyebrows help us. What makes these questions hard to answer is this: If eyebrows were something that human beings didn't have at first but then got later, it would have been something that happened a long, long time ago—long before we had pictures of people and even before we kept the knowledge of things that happened.

Scientists have found fossils of ancient human beings, but these fossils only show what's left of bones. They don't show us whether there was eyebrow hair.

But one thing you might find interesting is that almost no animals have eyebrows—at least not the way we have them. Some mammals, like dogs and monkeys, have ridges along the tops of their eyes. But their whole face is covered in fur. It's not really correct to call these eyebrows—they are just brow ridges.

Check this out: dogs sometimes even move their brow ridges—maybe to show how they're feeling, just like we do. Like this dog—maybe it's feeling excited? Or this dog—maybe it's feeling bored?

If eyebrows aren't something that human beings have always had, it's possible that by studying animals, we might find clues that help us figure out why we got them.

So in summary, if eyebrows aren't something that human beings have always had, nobody knows for sure why we got them in the first place. But eyebrows are definitely helpful to us. They keep sweat out of our eyes, they help us show how we're feeling, and more.

That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Paloma, for asking it!