

## Journaling from the Kindergarten Heart

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### Rationale

The goal of the following unit is to teach students that journaling can be an effective way to convey thoughts, feelings and ideas. Journaling itself can be defined as “a daily record of news and events of a personal nature; a diary”. The more opportunities children are given to write, the better their writing becomes. It is important for teachers to realize to not tell children how to write but to help them sound out words until they feel confident writing independently. At the kindergarten or even primary level a teacher holds the child’s hand so to speak as they write but it is the child that decides when to let go – not the teacher. This practice helps build a self-assured writer. At the kindergarten level students will journal using pictures they create or perhaps pictures they may cut out of a magazine or newspaper.

Through journal writing students will ultimately become better writers as they begin to learn to use their own heads for writing ideas. Eileen Feldgus write about writer’s workshop and states “Journal writing provides children with an opportunity to systematically explore written language in the supportive environment in which they are learning by doing for an authentic purpose – to communicate their ideas”. Students already hold a wealth of stories and writing topics in their heads. They just need to be explicitly taught how to get those thoughts onto paper. Students will start to realize (slowly at the kindergarten level) that events that make up their own individuality are worthy to write about. Journaling is full of academic and emotional growth opportunities for your children. All of us have a story that can be told. Any teacher can easily recall a time when a student verbally rushes into the classroom and is eager to tell you about an event that happened to them between the last time they saw you and now. Students need help to bridge the idea that the event is a story waiting to be written down. When individuals are vested in their own writing, it belongs to them, and it begins to matter to them that their ideas transform into words. Journaling encourages growth while also allowing the child to discover open ended writing. Jodie Rodriguez penned an article about the benefits of journal writing. Below is her main point that is aimed at younger elementary students.

## **Improve Your Child's Writing Skills**

Journaling builds writing skills. Just like basketball players, painters, and guitarists, the more we practice the better we get. Spelling, sentence structure, vocabulary, and grammar can all be enhanced through a regular writing habit.

Writing in journals allows your child to feel in control of the content he chooses to write about and the length of his writing pieces. This control and choice make writing more appealing to your child.

*Tip:* A curiosity journal is an interesting place for kids to record their observations and wonderings. The journal can be a simple notebook or a journal with blank pages. You child can keep his journal with him when setting out on an adventure — whether it's the backyard or a trip to a museum.

Have your child jot down things that interest him, or questions he has about his experiences. He can also fill the journal with drawings and sketches. Encourage him to label his drawings too.

As the students in this unit embrace their journal and what its purpose is they will realize (or you will as the teacher) that it is worthwhile to have an ongoing personal list of topics for students to write about. The purpose of the journal is for the students to have a place to collect their thoughts. As students get older a journal can also be a good place to go back to and reflect upon life events that have occurred. Students will refer back to their heart map they create multiple times throughout this unit and hopefully after as they continue in their journaling journey. It also helps if the teacher has her heart map posted so that students can use it as an example. The heart map can be constantly modified and ideas can be added frequently. Thinking about and talking about topics enables young writers to organize and rehearse their thoughts first. Only then can they turn their thoughts into written word. The heart map will serve as a vehicle for ideas – a way to quickly jot ideas down without expanding upon them.

## Demographic Info

I teach kindergarten at McVey Elementary School in the Christina School District. McVey Elementary School is made up of approximately 410 students, 50% of whom are low income. Approximately 43% of our students are African American, while 40% are Caucasian. The district includes a section of Wilmington, Delaware's largest city, and the city of Newark, some 14 miles to the west. There are three high schools, four middle schools and 18 elementary schools. The elementary schools are configured K-5. McVey Elementary School is situated among a quiet community of small detached homes in Newark just off the I-95 corridor and within a mile of the University of Delaware main campus. As an educator I strongly believe that school is where students should feel safe, take risks, and feel loved. My classroom is a community of learners and I am one of them, not just their teacher. McVey Elementary School has also partnered with the International Literacy Association to help us enable students to find joy and pleasure through literature. I am in the cohort of staff members chosen to work directly with members of the International National Literacy Association team. Over the course of multiple discussions with my colleagues and members of this group, elite, educated, and well-versed in literacy-based research, we have determined that as teachers we often focus on the skill that is on our curriculum maps because that is what is mandated by our district; sticking to a map tells me exactly what to be teaching, how, and when. By doing so, teachers like myself often lose out on the opportunity to teach author's craft—that is, any purposeful and meaningful technique an author uses to capture the reader's attention. If I explicitly teach students to notice and discuss an author's craft when reading, authors can ultimately become mentors for student writing: "Teachers can encourage students to implement the same craft features in their own writing."

My kindergarten class is comprised of 20 students – 13 boys and 7 girls. All of my students are regular education students while some do receive speech pathology services here at school. Three of the 20 students in my classroom are English Language Learners which means another language other than English is spoken in their home. Of those students one goes to an English as a second language teacher daily for services. A majority of my students have attended a preschool program or were enrolled in a childcare prior to attending kindergarten. At the beginning of the year it became very apparent that many students were not familiar with structured routines, and would need to be explicitly taught how to handle such an environment.

## Content objective and goals

**W.K.3. Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.**

At the kindergarten level oral language fuels the beginning of the year! Students that are in my classroom have no writing or phonics skills. At the kindergarten level the students come in with such a wide variety of skills. I have a child who has never been in a school setting and had limited social interaction with age appropriate peers while I also have a student who has had 3 years of pre-school and is well acclimated to routines and expectations. Through the use of songs, drawing, dictating letter practice, and classroom décor my students will be exposed to an educational world of learning that they may not have even known existed ( letters have names and sounds – those sounds form words and those words identify objects, emotions, people etc. and create a means of communication ). How my students communicate will initially be solely through verbal expression as I do not expect that they will come to the classroom with knowledge of sentence structure and spelling patterns. I do know that I can tune in to student’s ability to draw rather than create words. One of my goals for this unit is that my students will create a journal that we visit at least twice weekly.

My students will start their journal experience by helping me identify what a journal even is. I want them to understand that a journal is a place where you can keep your thoughts but also practice writing. Through journal writing students will understand the process of sounding out words and to learn sound relationships. The class will initially be primarily drawing in their journal versus writing. In past grade levels I have done a “heart map” activity where students draw a heart and then write important people in their lives inside the heart, then they write important places, and lastly objects. This activity helps students come up with future ideas about what to write in their journal. A student can simply go find a word within that heart map and write about it because it is have already been identified as something important to them. The hope is that this sparks their imagination to write about a specific memory they may have with that person, place or thing. As students write down ideas they will later choose a topic to elaborate on. Elaboration is defined as the act of developing details carefully and thoroughly. For example if in my “heart map” I have the word “Pop’s house” – I am immediately flooded with memories of all the time I spent there as a child and could easily recall a memory.

At the kindergarten level teachers often dictate for students. Research has shown that teachers need to help children do their own phonics-based writing or kid writing, rather than take dictation from children. Teachers’ expectations of students’ composition send the empowering message, “You can do it!” Taking dictation sends the self-limiting message, “You can’t, so I will do it for you. For the heart map activity I think I would turn it into a home connection opportunity and have students bring in photos of important

people that I could then post into their heart map. Students could also use pictures that I have ready to go from magazines or others books to create their heart map (toys they may like, foods, places etc.). The heart map activity would serve as the driving force for ideas for them to use in their journals throughout the year.

### Teaching Strategies

The next section is made up of a series of lessons. It is written directly at the teacher. These lessons will tell you how to introduce the concept of journaling in kindergarten.

Lesson 1: Creating the heart map (3-5 days depending on class size and independence level of students) – time period could also be affected by what point this project is done in the school year; students will need more “Hand holding” at the beginning of the school year. Teachers can send home a memo to parents regarding bringing in pictures of family members or their home. This should be done prior to the following activity.

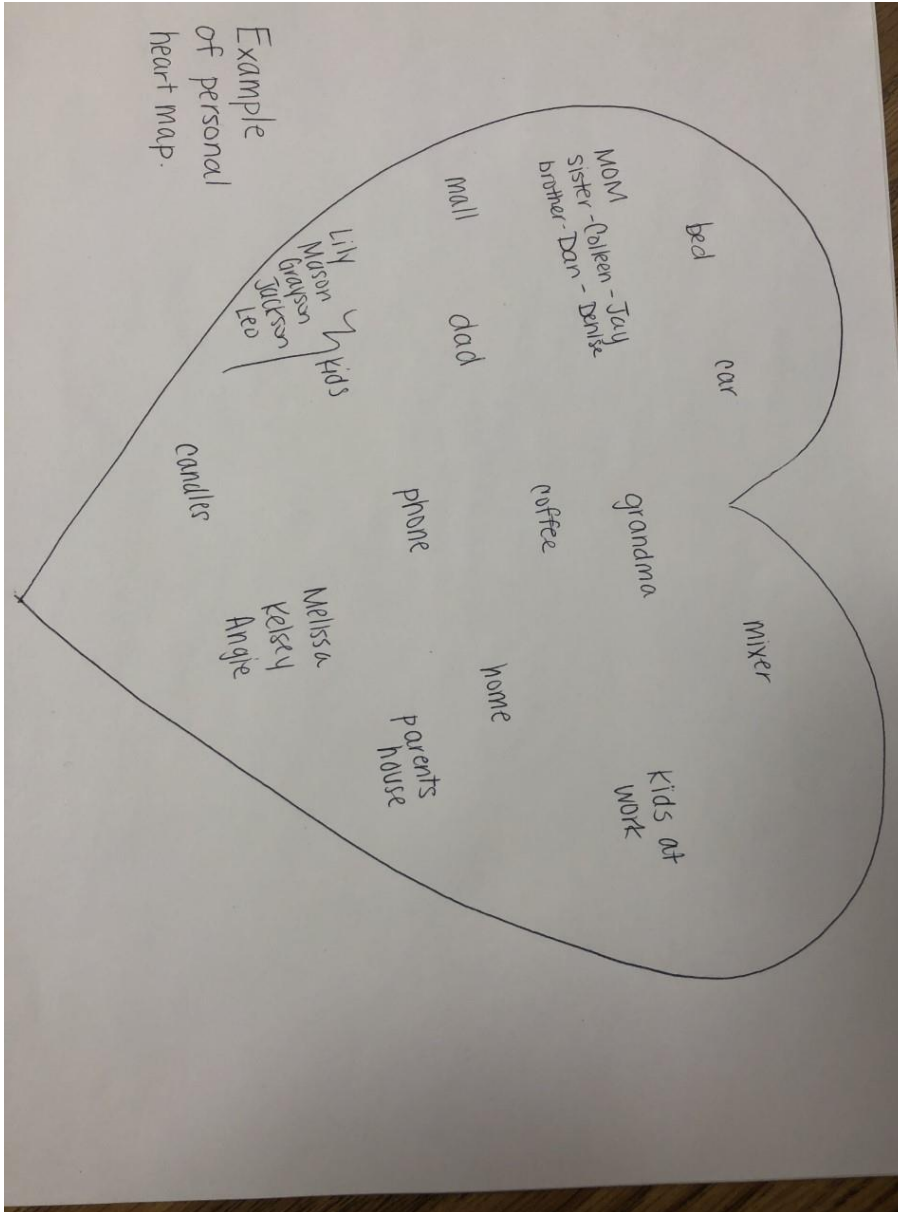
At the kindergarten level students need space – a lot of space! Students are not spatially aware enough to know to write or draw small enough so that they can fit multiple ideas into one area. Students should be given an 11 by 16 piece of construction paper (white works best). The best plan of action would be to have a giant heart already printed onto the paper if possible by using your school’s copier. If that is not possible – drawing 20-25 hearts may be in your future! The larger paper is crucial for students at this age. Once the paper with the heart is handed out students should share out what they think they will do with this paper – this share out may activate their ability to associate a heart with things they love. After students have had time to look at their blank paper heart – invite them to the rug to sit so they can face a larger heart that you have already prepared on a sheet of butcher/ bulletin board paper. This will serve as your model to create your heart map for the class. You want yours to be even larger than theirs so that they can see it as you do it. Modeling is a larger part of kindergarten teaching practice. It is important for children to watch teachers write and for teachers to explain how they approach the creative process of writing. Students need to see something done at least once for them to understand. Students also benefit from seeing the teacher struggle to formulate ideas – because they too will struggle. Children benefit from teachers modeling writing and from opportunities to interact with others on writing projects. Teachers can connect writing to topics of interest, think aloud about the process of composing a message. The teacher can explain that the heart map will be utilized to draw/ write/ or paste pictures onto of items/people/places that the students love or have a connection with. As the teacher creates his/her map they should use a combination of

words/ drawings and cut out pictures so that students understand that they too will utilize a combination of ways to show their ideas. The teacher can start by naming people out loud that they love. It is important that the teacher share out people in their family or close friends but also perhaps a celebrity they really like. The goal of this activity is for students to have a list of topics they can write about not necessarily buy a birthday gift for - so therefore celebrities/sports figures can be loved! Kindergarten students will immediately squirm when you say you love someone – as they understand love to mean marriage and children. It is important to stress that a friend can be loved, or a coworker but that doesn't mean anything more than a deep sense of caring for another human being. The teacher can paste on pictures of family members if they choose or write their names. I would emphasize that if they are talking about a specific person a picture or writing would be better than an attempt at drawing. Drawing can be utilized when drawing a more general “thing” later on in the activity (such as pizza or ice cream). After the teacher does the model of putting people on her heart map students should return to their work space to work on only the people part of their heart map. Kindergarteners will be overwhelmed if you introduce the idea of people, places and things all at once and they will have trouble conveying all their ideas in one sitting. They will need time to do this activity efficiently. This part of the lesson can be done in one session – modeling then having the students do the people part of the map.

The above scenario can be completed two more times as you move through showing students items to put on the heart map followed by places. Below is a general idea of some items that may be included on a heart map for myself followed by a list of places.

- Things - coffee, mixer, phone, books, soda, chicken wings, bed, pillows, couch, candles, a pet, car, classroom etc.
- Places – home, parents house, sister's house, school, gym, mall, restaurants, bank etc.

As you model the heart map students should start to show some ownership of their map and also have some self- awareness of their similarities and differences with each other.



## Lesson 2: Decorating a journal

Students will need a place to actually journal. It is up to the teacher what kind of “Journal” they want the students to use. Some ideas are listed below (resources attached).

1.)Binders with journal paper – journal paper will include a place for drawing and a place for writing . The journal paper will change as the child progresses from drawing to writing more words

2.)Folders with journal paper

3.) Journals that are actual books that will need to be purchased

Depending on what journal is chosen it is imperative to take time to decorate the journal. When a child decorates the “book” they take ownership of the resource and will hopefully be more compelled to write in it knowing it is only theirs. How a child adorns the journal is up to the teacher based on what resources are available. Some ideas include pictures of the child, the child writing their own name in large print with a marker. Stickers are also a great and easy way to decorate the journals and make them personal! This activity should only last one writing session.

Taking ownership of the journal is easy for students at this age because they are often very self-consumed and care a lot about items that are theirs!

### Lesson 3: Moving from the heart map to written composition

The heart map that each student has created should be kept somewhere in the classroom that is easily accessible to the students. While it may be tedious at first that they are large, it makes more sense in the long run for students to have more space than to cram their ideas onto a small piece of paper. Depending on what pictures are on the maps they could perhaps be folded into thirds to save space. Narrative writing uses drawing, dictating and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events; tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened. This next lesson will focus on using the heart map to actually convey an idea.

It is important for students to know that journal writing is not perfect or really ever complete; it is a constant work in progress. When a child journal writes they are allowing their stream of conscious to fuel their words and they will not even realize that as the kindergarten level! The next task is difficult but can also yield incredible results when done with patience! You are going to task the students with choosing one topic from their heart map to write about. For older students you could have had them differentiate between people, places and things by circling, underlining, etc. At the kindergarten level they are still learning what the concepts of those words even mean so that step is not necessary.

Students will be asked to pick one word/phrase from their heart map. This will be hard for some students yet seem so automatic for others. It is important for the teacher to circulate the room at this time to verify the topics. As students decide on a topic the



teacher can write down their topics on a post it note and leave it with the child. All students should pick just one topic. As students pick topics the teacher needs to let go of some control because some of the topics will seem as if students may not have much information to write about that topic. This is where the challenge comes in – for the students and the teacher! After the teacher has written down all topics on a post it note – he/she can collect the heart maps. Students should be left with just a post it note in front of them.

Have the students leave their post it note at their writing spot. Students should now gather together in a community writing area such as the carpet. This area will be where the teacher will model doing his/her first journal session. The teacher should pick a topic that is fairly relatable to the students (picking their mom or ice cream versus spouse). The goal is that the children realize that can write about one of their topics that may be similar to yours. You do not want to discourage the students right off the bat with “writer’s blocks”. Writers block is the term often used when a person runs out of ideas or thoughts to write about. Part of our journaling process will hopefully prevent as much writer’s block as possible. If the teacher chooses to write about ice cream or something tangible it may be easier for the students right away. The word “Ice cream” can be written at the top of the writing sheet. At first students will still be drawing their journal entries and perhaps adding labels or words. Words, phrases and sentences will come later on as students’ progress through the stages of their ability to actually write. The teacher can then draw an ice cream cone to show the students that they are starting with a picture also. Then the teacher can label the picture, and add any words around the picture to describe the picture. For ice cream the teacher could label the ice cream and the cone. Next the teacher can talk about why they love ice cream and include some of those words around their picture. Some words may include “yummy, cold, delicious, sweet, and happy”. A good way to prompt students thinking when they are writing is to ask about how the senses affect their feelings. The next lesson will focus more on using the senses to help students write. After modeling how to do their first journal entry, at this point the students will begin their first journaling session.

Journals should be handed out and students put their post it note at the top of their page. Students can be given an allotted amount of time to draw their picture then transition them if possible into labeling the picture. All students develop differently with their writing skills and they will all be at different stages during each writing session. It sometimes help to group writers together that are working on the same developmental level because it makes walking around and conferring with students easier. The writing environment is crucial. You want the environment to be conducive to writing but also to comfort and routine is key. Kindergarteners thrive off of routine and structure. If a time is set aside each day to retrieve their journal and time is devoted to just journaling the students will start to look forward to it. It is important to have clear, set expectations of what journal writing time looks like in the classroom. A quiet environment is also

important. At the beginning of journal writing time it will be necessary for the teacher to circulate around and manage the children's writing and also their behavior. As the students become more comfortable with writing the teacher can journal during this time too. If the students see you invested in the same work they are doing they will be more interested in their own work. Students are much more likely to stay quiet when they know the teacher is also trying to work on the same task.

#### Lesson 4: Using our senses to write

This next lesson may feel like we are back tracking but it is important that students have tried to write about one or two topics before doing the next lesson. You want the students to have struggled and tried to do one piece so that they can go back to the same piece using the strategy in the following lesson.

Often times when we are writing about something that is important to us or a person we love we can use our senses to help jog our memory and help us come up with descriptive language to use when writing. The concept of the five senses is generally introduced in kindergarten and if not this lesson with introduce them to students in a basic way. More work can be done outside of this unit to develop the concept. For this unit a book will be read to the class about the five senses but much more work is possible!

The teacher will read the book "My Five Senses" by Alike. This book introduces each of the senses and gives an example. Teachers can print out the poster set provided to use as visual aids in the classroom. They are located within the appendices of the unit. After reading the text the teacher will hand out a worksheet that have the five senses on it (worksheet attached). Students will complete the worksheet with the teacher using the same topic (teacher can pick based on class interests). Depending on the time in the year some students may be able to scribe what you write down while others may just need to listen to the ideas. The goal of this lesson is for students to think about how their senses can help them to come up with ideas. You will need to decide based on the needs of your class how much support your class needs with this activity. Your class may need to do complete the worksheet more than once as a whole group or you may want to complete the activity during small group time which may allow for them to pick their own topics. If you are choosing to do the activity in small group students will get the needed support they need from you when it comes to sounding out words and helping convey ideas.

After the five senses session is complete (it may take two sessions to complete this whole lesson) you will now connect what they learned about their senses in connection with their own writing. Students will return to their journals and look at their first journal entry that they wrote (or drew in this case). At this time ask the following questions:

- 1.) What does your item (or person) look like?
- 2.) What does it taste like?
- 3.) What does it smell like?
- 4.) What does it feel like?
- 5.) What does it sound like?

Asking these questions will help the students as they try to add more details into their pictures or as they try to label their picture. Students should now be given time to go back and edit their first drawing – adding details to the picture or adding labels. Encourage them to use their senses questions as they write more.

### Lesson 5: Ongoing Journal Writing

The last and final lesson in this unit is not quite an actual lesson but tips on how to encourage good journaling practices among kindergarten students. My hope is that through the past 4 lessons you have created a culture of comfortable journal writing time in your classroom and that students feel confident in their writing skills. Journaling takes time, practice and creativity. As the teacher you get to ultimately control the time and practice pieces of journaling and the children get to fuel their own creativity.

Tips for cultivating an environment conducive to journaling

- 1.) Structured writing block
- 2.) Assigned writing spots
- 3.) Well-lit environment
- 4.) Available writing utensils
- 5.) Set rules and expectations for writing time
- 6.) Minimal allowance for getting up to use the bathroom/ share work with the teacher/ leave the room etc.

Appendix A

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Topic \_\_\_\_\_

**Feels like**

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**Tastes like**

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**Smells like**

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**Looks like**

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**Sounds like**

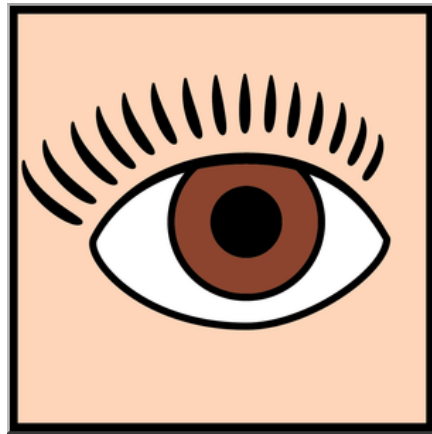
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# HEARING



We use our ears to  
hear sounds.

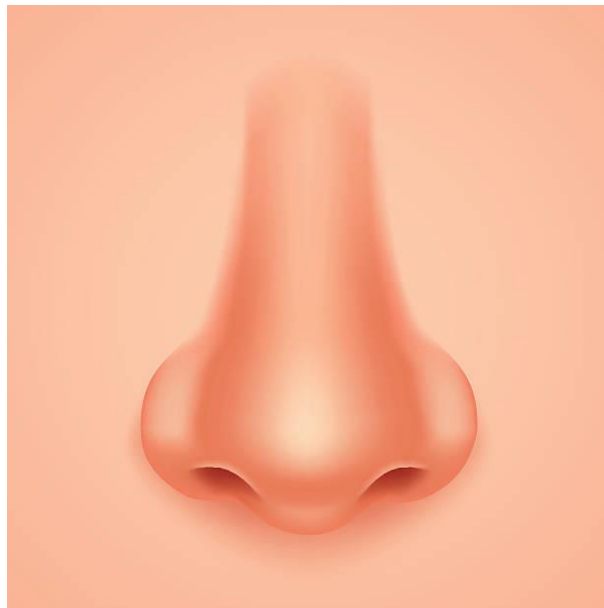
# SIGHT



We use our eyes  
to see things.

Appendix D

# Smell



We use our nose  
to smell things.

Appendix E

# TASTE

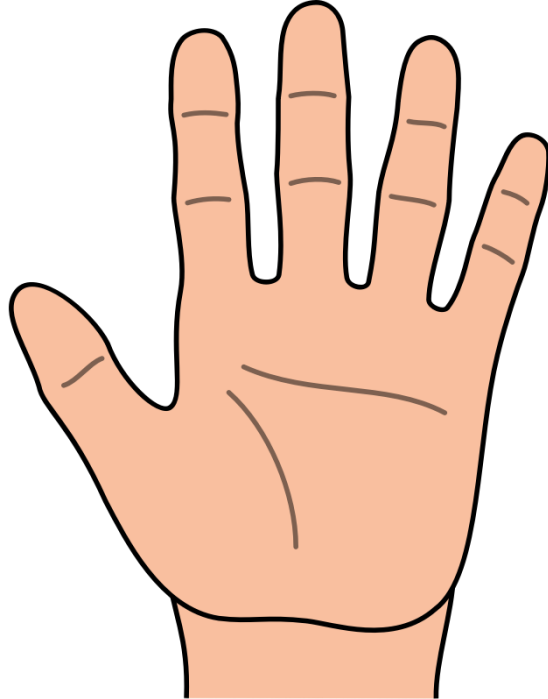


We use our mouth  
to taste things.



Appendix E

# TOUCH



# We use our hands to feel things.

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