

handout

Rain Detective



Exploring your world,
one mission at a time
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What Is This Activity?

Is rain on the way? Can you tell before the storm clouds roll in? You will look up to the sky for clues that the weather is about to change.

Big Science Idea: Before a rainstorm, the wind, temperature, and air pressure change. Those changes affect animals, plants, and the sky.

Go Outside

- 1. On clear days, look up at the sky for the “Rain Clues” on the checklist.**
- 2. Jet contrails:** If you see a jet making one, time how long it takes for the contrail to disappear. A contrail that lasts 20 to 30 minutes and spreads out into a puffy line is a sign of very moist air.
- 3. Low-flying birds:** This one takes a little practice to learn how high or low birds in your area generally fly.
- 4. Sunrise, sunset:** A colorful sky in the morning forecasts rain (“sailors take warning”) and a colorful sunset forecasts fair weather (“sailor’s delight”), but it’s not foolproof. View as many sunsets and sunrises as you can to see a pattern.
- 5. Glowing moon:** Go online and check a “moon phases” calendar for evenings when the moon is visible. A full or nearly full moon appears in the eastern sky just after sunset.



Explore Some More

Smoke Signals

Does your city or town have factories or power plants with active smokestacks? Or subway vents with rising steam? If so, add another “Rain Clue” to the chart! If the smoke or steam rises straight up, the weather is good and likely to stay that way. But if it starts to twist around and drop low, that means rain is likely. (It’s a sign that air pressure is dropping.) Have your child make up a rhyme to remember this rain clue.

Activity Time

5–10 minutes to look for and record each rain clue

Materials

- “Rain Detective Checklist”
- Pencil or pen

Outdoor Family Fun with Plum APP

This app gets families outdoors exploring the world. Every day, the app offers five outdoor missions to get everyone thinking and talking about nature and the science that’s all around us.

Find the app and more fun resources on pbskids.org/plumlanding.



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