

Photo Description



This image shows a dramatic weather scene with a large, dark storm cloud forming over a valley or lake in the distance. The sky is filled with heavy, gray clouds, and the lighting suggests severe weather is approaching. Power lines, utility poles, and buildings line the street in the foreground, showing a town or industrial area that may be in the path of the storm system.

Scientific Phenomena

Anchoring Phenomenon: Severe storm cloud formation and approaching severe weather

This image captures convective storm development—when warm, moist air near Earth's surface rapidly rises and cools high in the atmosphere. As the air rises and cools, water vapor condenses into water droplets, forming the large, towering dark clouds you see. The darkness indicates the cloud contains substantial moisture and may produce heavy precipitation, wind, or severe weather. This is a natural process driven by differences in air temperature and pressure in the atmosphere.

Core Science Concepts

- * Weather Patterns and Systems: Weather changes as air masses with different temperatures and moisture move across regions. This storm cloud represents an organized weather system that will bring measurable change to the area.
- * Water Cycle and Condensation: Water evaporates from oceans, lakes, and land surfaces, rises into the atmosphere as invisible water vapor, and condenses into visible water droplets when it cools, forming clouds.
- * Atmospheric Layers and Temperature: The troposphere (lowest atmosphere layer) has temperature that decreases with altitude. This temperature difference causes rising air and cloud formation.
- * Storm Safety and Weather Prediction: Observing cloud types and color helps people predict dangerous weather and prepare by seeking shelter or securing property.

Pedagogical Tip:

Encourage students to become "cloud watchers" by creating a simple observation journal. Have them sketch clouds, note the time, and predict weather changes over 2-3 weeks. This builds pattern recognition skills and helps them understand that weather observation is a real scientific practice used by meteorologists.

UDL Suggestions:

Representation: Provide a labeled diagram of cloud formation alongside this photo so visual learners can connect the real-world image to the scientific process. For students who need audio support, record a brief description of convection and condensation that they can replay.

Engagement: Ask students to share personal experiences with storms they've observed or experienced. This activates prior knowledge and makes the lesson emotionally relevant and memorable.

Expression: Allow students to demonstrate understanding through multiple modalities: drawing cloud formations, writing weather predictions, creating a short video explanation, or building a 3D model of a thunderstorm cloud.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you observe about the clouds in this photo, and what do those observations tell you about the weather that might be coming? (Bloom's: Analyze | DOK: 2)
2. Why do you think the clouds are so dark and thick in this image? What is happening to the water in the air? (Bloom's: Explain | DOK: 2)
3. If you were living in this town, what actions would you take to prepare for this approaching storm, and why would those actions help keep you safe? (Bloom's: Evaluate | DOK: 3)
4. How do you think this storm formed? What conditions in the atmosphere had to exist for these clouds to develop? (Bloom's: Understand | DOK: 2)

Extension Activities

1. Cloud Type Detective: Provide students with photos of different cloud types (cumulus, stratus, cirrus, cumulonimbus). Have them match the clouds in your photo to a specific type and research what weather each type typically brings. Create a classroom "Cloud Chart" that students can reference to predict weather throughout the year.
2. Weather Prediction Station: Set up a simple weather observation kit (thermometer, rain gauge, barometer if available, notebook). Have students record observations daily for 2 weeks and create a graph showing how temperature, precipitation, and cloud cover correlate with weather changes. Challenge them to make predictions 1-2 days in advance and test their accuracy.
3. Storm Safety Planning: In small groups, have students create an illustrated safety guide or comic strip showing how a family should prepare for a severe thunderstorm (securing outdoor items, gathering supplies, identifying safe shelter locations). Have groups present their plans and discuss why each step matters. This builds both science understanding and practical life skills.

NGSS Connections

Performance Expectation:

5-ESS2-1: Develop a model to describe that water cycles among the Earth's land surface, ocean, and atmosphere as the result of sun energy and gravity.

Disciplinary Core Ideas:

- 5-ESS2.A Earth's Materials and Systems (Weather and Climate)
- 5-ESS2.B Weather and Climate (Recognizing patterns in weather)

Crosscutting Concepts:

- Patterns (Cloud patterns indicate changing weather systems)
- Cause and Effect (Temperature differences cause air movement and cloud formation)
- Systems and System Models (The water cycle and atmosphere work as interconnected systems)

Science Vocabulary

* Convection: The movement of warm air upward and cool air downward in the atmosphere, which causes weather and cloud formation.

* Condensation: The process where water vapor (invisible gas) cools and turns into liquid water droplets, forming clouds.

- * Weather System: A large area of air with similar temperature and moisture that moves across Earth's surface and brings changes in weather.
- * Atmospheric Pressure: The weight of air pushing down on Earth's surface; changes in pressure help predict whether weather will be sunny or stormy.
- * Precipitation: Water that falls from clouds to Earth's surface, including rain, snow, sleet, and hail.
- * Severe Weather: Dangerous atmospheric conditions such as thunderstorms, tornadoes, or heavy rain that can harm people and property.

External Resources

Children's Books:

- National Geographic Little Kids First Big Book of Weather by Catherine D. Hughes (National Geographic, 2014)
- The Cloud Book by Tomie dePaola (Holiday House, 1975)
- Weather by DK Eyewitness (DK Children, 2016)

YouTube Videos:

- "How Do Clouds Form?" by Crash Course Kids (2:54)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0rnI8J1z5E>

A clear, animated explanation of condensation and cloud formation suitable for Fifth Grade.

- "Thunderstorms Explained for Kids" by Weatherimager (4:32)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3B9Lmvmcr5g>

Shows real storm footage with age-appropriate explanations of how severe storms develop and move.

Instructional Tip for Implementation:

Display this photo on the first day and ask students, "What's happening here?" before revealing any information. Let them brainstorm and make predictions. This activates curiosity and prior knowledge. Then, over the next few days, guide them through investigation and discovery to explain the phenomena scientifically. This approach aligns with NGSS-recommended 5E (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate) instruction.