

Name _____



Air Pressure and Wind

By Sharon Fabian

Air is the atmosphere that is always around us. Most of the time we don't even notice that it is there. We are so used to living in this ocean of air that we don't even feel it most of the time. But when the air moves, that's a different story. We can feel the change when the wind blows and when the air pressure drops or rises. Air pressure and wind are two features of air that are very noticeable.



Air pressure is the weight of the air pressing down on us and on everything else around us. Air pressure causes the air to shoot out all at once when you poke even a tiny hole in a balloon. Air pressure is what makes your ears pop when you go up a mountain. This happens because the air pressure inside your body and the air pressure outside are usually balanced, but when you go up a mountain the pressures become unbalanced. There is less pressure from the air on top of a mountain than there is at lower altitudes. So your ears pop to let the pressures even out. Baseball pitchers even make use of air pressure when they throw a curveball. It helps to cause the spinning motion that makes the ball curve.

Weather forecasters use air pressure every day in their job. They use a measuring instrument called a barometer to measure air pressure, which helps them to predict whether the day will be clear, rainy, or stormy. When the barometer shows that the air pressure is high, they can predict cooler, clear weather. When the air pressure is low, they expect warmer weather and may predict rain or storms.

You can make a simple barometer to see how air pressure is measured for yourself. You will need a glass bottle about half full of water, a clear plastic straw that you put in the bottle, and a stopper to close up the rest of the top of the bottle. Use some chewing gum to seal the opening in the stopper around the straw. As the air pressure changes, the water in the straw should move up or down.

Wind is moving air. Since you can't see air, you also can't see wind directly, but you can observe wind by watching the movements or listening to the sounds that the moving air produces. Wind causes a flag to wave and a sailboat to sail. It causes wind chimes to chime.

Air pressure and wind combine to cause some very dramatic events. Tornadoes, hurricanes, and thunderstorms are all powered by air pressure and wind.

A hurricane, for example, usually forms out over the ocean when large area of the ocean water becomes warmer than usual. The heat causes the air pressure there to drop, and this causes both thunderstorms and strong winds to develop. This is the beginning of a hurricane. Strong, spiraling winds cause the hurricane to move and pick up more energy along the way. An area of high pressure called the Bermuda High often directs hurricanes towards the United States.

Even though we can't see or feel air, we know that it is there. We can observe its effects in the forces of air pressure and wind.

Air Pressure and Wind

Questions

1. Moving air is called _____.
 - A. barometer
 - B. wind
 - C. air
 - D. air pressure
2. The force of the air pressing down on us is called _____.
 - A. barometer
 - B. air pressure
 - C. wind
 - D. air
3. An instrument for measuring air pressure is a _____.
 - A. scale
 - B. meter stick
 - C. barometer
 - D. thermometer