

ONCE UPON A CLOUD:

Observing and Identifying Clouds



NATURAL HISTORY
MUSEUM OF UTAH

Materials Needed:

- 8x11 sheet of paper
- Pencil
- Cloud field guide

To Do:

- Fold your paper in half, then in half again, then in half again. When you open the paper up, you should have eight rectangles. In these rectangles you will be recording your observations of the clouds.
- Go outside and observe any clouds you might see. Draw and record what the clouds look like in the first rectangle. Title the rectangle with the day and time when you made this observation.
- Using the cloud field guide identify the clouds you see.
- In the rectangle next to your observations answer the questions below.
- Check the sky 15 minutes later. Have the types of clouds changed? Record and sketch the clouds you see in a different rectangle and identify them. You may want to do this several times during the day and keep a log of the different types of clouds you see during a day. Some days can be cloudless. Some days can have the same type of cloud the whole day long. Some days will have all the different types of clouds but at different times during the day.
- Using both sides of your paper, repeat steps and questions for different times and days in the different rectangles.

Questions to Answer During Your Observations:

1. From the movement you see in (with) the clouds, can you make an inference if it is windier where you are standing or where the clouds are?
2. What direction is the wind blowing?
3. Is it blowing from a different direction than it is blowing where you are?
4. Are there more than one type of clouds in the sky?

Additional Activity:

Copy the pictures on the field guide, cut them out, and make a log book of the different type of clouds you see.



Cirrus clouds

Cirrus clouds are white and feathery. They are the highest clouds in the sky.

Check list:

- Are the clouds white?
- Are they high in the sky?
- Do they appear wispy or like horse tails or feathers floating in the sky?



Cirrocumulus clouds

Cirrocumulus clouds are small and look like puffy sheep. They are high in the sky.

Check list:

- Are the clouds white?
- Are they high in the sky?
- Do they have a ripple pattern, or are there lots of little puffs clustered together?
- When you hold your hand up at arm's length are the puffs about the size of your fingernail?



Cirrostratus clouds

Cirrostratus clouds are high in the sky. They look like thin white sheets and you can see the sun and moon through them.

Check list:

- Are the clouds mostly transparent and/or milky in color?
- Are they high in the sky?
- Are they like a veil covering parts of the sky?
- Can you see the sun through them?
- Can you see your shadow?



Altostratus clouds

Altostratus clouds look like sheets of gray or blue. They are in the middle of the sky. They bring rain or snow.

Check list:

- Are they gray or blue gray in color?
- Do they look smooth?
- Do they cover most of the sky?
- Can you see your shadow? (If you can, they are probably Cirrostratus clouds)



Altocumulus clouds

Altocumulus clouds look like puffy clouds that are gray or whitish. They are in the middle of the sky and bring drizzle or snow flurries.

Check list:

- Do they look like small cumulus clouds?
- Are they different shades of gray with some white?
- Are they grouped or clustered together?
- Do they look like a flock of sheep or lots of cotton balls?
- When you hold up your hand at arm's length are the puffs about the size of your thumb?



Cumulus cloud

Cumulus clouds are puffy shaped. They may look like popcorn or cotton and have flat bottoms. They are low in the sky.

Check list:

- Is it a sunny day?
- Is it a cloud low in the sky?
- Does it look like a big puffy cotton ball?
- Is it mostly white with a grayish bottom
- When you hold up your hand at arm's length are the puffs about the size of your fist?



Cumulonimbus clouds

Cumulonimbus clouds look like dark mountains during a thunderstorm or intense weather. They can bring thunder and lightning with rain.

Check list:

- Does the cloud have a dark base?
- Does it tower in the sky?
- Is it raining?
- Has there been a sudden shower, hail or thunder or lightning?



Stratocumulus clouds

Stratocumulus clouds are black or blue and look like rolls of puffy clouds. They are seen during the winter.

Check list:

- Are the clouds gray and puffy?
- Are they low in the sky?
- Do they look like soft cotton candy or pillow stuffing?
- Do they cover most of the sky?
- Are the clouds attached or close together?
- When you hold up your hand at arm's length are the puffs about the size of your fist?



Stratus cloud

Stratus clouds are low and look like a wide gray blanket. They bring rain or snow.

Check list:

- Is the cloud grayish in color?
- Is it low in the sky?
- Is it like a blanket covering the sky?
- Is the cloud featureless and uniform in appearance?