The weather

Topic: The weather

Aims:
- To give students practice in reading for specific information in an online article about the weather
- To practise pronunciation, word stress and collocations connected with the weather

Level: Advanced

Introduction
The aim of this lesson is to give students practice in reading for specific information in an online article about the weather. Students will also have an opportunity to practise pronunciation, word stress and collocations connected with the weather.

The plan is based around a text from the British Council LearnEnglish Central website at: http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/magazine/weather

The webpage also has a variety of online interactive activities.
We have also included the text for students and teachers without Internet access in class.

Procedure

Introduction task

- As a lead-in to the topic, you could show students the BBC weather website at http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/ and look at the five-day forecast for your area.
  Elicit from students what the various symbols and words mean.
  Alternatively use a weather map from a magazine or newspaper.

Pre-reading discussion

Worksheet A
- Students should discuss in pairs or groups the difference between the different weather phenomena.

Tip: photos or drawings of the various weather phenomenon will make comprehension checking much easier as well as making the vocabulary more memorable for your students.

Pronunciation work

Worksheet B
- Ask students in pairs to match the beginnings to the ends of the phonemically spelt words.

- Write the phonemic next to the actual spelling and drill pronunciation.

Answers:

a	3	/ˈblɪzədz/
b	5	/ˈhʌɪkənz/
c	6	/ˈsaɪkləʊnz/
d	1	/draʊts/
e	4	/hjuːˈmɪdɪtɪ/
f	2	/flʌdz/

Vocabulary

Worksheet C

- Ask students what adjectives we often use with 'rain' and why, for example, we say 'heavy rain' and not 'strong rain'. (Answer: because the words form common collocations or word partnerships).

- Ask students in pairs or groups to match the adjectives in column A to the nouns in column B to form strong collocations. (Note: in some cases there is more than one possibility).

> **Tip**: If available, provide students with good monolingual dictionaries as these will often give common collocations, sometimes with example sentences so that your students can see how the words are used in context. Using a bilingual dictionary is not as helpful and often confusing as collocations tend to differ between languages.

Suggested collocations:
> torrential rain
> flash floods
> severe gales/weather conditions/storms/floods
> dense fog
> sunny spells/weather conditions
> freak gales/weather conditions/storms/floods
> violent gales/weather conditions/storms
> high humidity

Pre-reading discussion

Worksheet D

- Ask students to discuss the questions in pairs or groups. Monitor the discussions closely so that you can ask students to bring up any interesting points they raised in an open-class discussion afterwards.

Reading task
- Show students the text about the weather from the website and give them the reading comprehension questions (below) in **Worksheet E**. Ask them to find the answers to the questions. If you have a computer room, you may prefer them to read the article online at:
http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/magazine/weather

- In class, elicit the answers to the questions.

Worksheet E

1. According to scientific studies, what effects can the weather have on people?

2. What causes changes in the weather in the British Isles?

3. According to some researchers, what effect has human activity in Europe and North America had on Africa?

4. How can pine cones and seaweed help us predict the weather?

5. How reliable is technology in predicting the weather?

6. What did a recent study by an Australian psychologist suggest?

7. What's the connection between weather and disease?

8. What are stormchasers

Text

Weather
by **Mike Rayner**

It's hardly surprising that weather is a favourite topic for so many people around the world – it affects where we choose to live, what we wear, our moods, and perhaps even our national characteristics. A sunny day can relieve the deepest depression, while extreme weather can destroy homes and threaten lives.

The effects of weather
Palm trees bent double in hurricane force winds, cars stranded in snow drifts, people navigating small boats down flooded city streets – images we are all familiar with from news reports of severe weather spells. But many of the effects of the weather are less newsworthy.

'I'm feeling a bit under the weather' is a common complaint in Britain, especially on Monday mornings, and it seems that weather really can be responsible for moods. Studies have shown that changeable weather can make it hard to concentrate, cloudy skies slow down reflexes, and high humidity with hot, dry winds makes many people irritable and snappy.

Some suggest that the weather also leaves its mark on character, giving people from the same region similar temperaments, although it seems that economic, political and social factors are likely to have a much stronger effect than the weather.

What causes changes in the weather?
If you live in a place like Britain, where the weather seems to change daily if not hourly, you could be forgiven for thinking that the weather is random. In fact the weather is controlled by systems which move around areas of the globe. In the UK the weather depends on depressions, often called 'lows', and anticyclones, also known as 'highs'. These systems start in the Atlantic Ocean, and make their way across the British Isles from the west to the east. Highs bring sunny weather, while lows bring rain and wind.

The weather systems in tropical climates are very different from those in mid and high latitudes. Tropical storms develop from depressions, and often build into cyclones, violent storms featuring hurricanes and torrential rain.

In modern times, human activity seems to be altering weather patterns. Gases produced by heavy industry change the temperature of the Earth's surface, and affect cloud formation. Some researchers say that factories in Europe and North America may have been one of the causes of the droughts in Africa in the 1980s.

Can we predict the weather?
The human race has always tried to guess the weather, especially in areas of the world where there are frequent changes. Traditional rhymes point to early attempts to identify weather patterns, popular poems include:

Red sky at night, shepherds' delight; Red sky in the morning, shepherds' warning

Ash leaf before the oak, then we will have a summer soak;
Oak leaf before the ash, the summer comes without a splash

Flies will swarm before a storm.

Rain before 7, clear by 11.

Two other popular traditional ways of forecasting the weather used pine cones and seaweed. When the air has a high level of humidity there is a higher chance of rain, when the humidity is low, there is more chance of fine weather. Pine cones and seaweed react to changes in humidity - pines cones open, and seaweed feels dry when the humidity is low, while high humidity has the opposite effect.

While folk wisdom can still provide a guide to help forecast weather, today's methods of prediction increasingly rely on technology. Satellites, balloons, ships, aircraft and weather centres with sensitive monitoring equipment, send data to computers. The data is then processed, and the weather predicted. However, even this system cannot predict weather for longer than about week.

A recent study by an Australian psychologist suggests that certain people may have a special gift for predicting the weather. However it is possible that these people would use their talent in another way, since the same group had considerable success in forecasting changes in another chaotic system – the stock market.

It appears that a study of weather patterns may also enable scientists to predict the outbreak of disease. An Ebola epidemic in Uganda in the year 2000 came after the same rare weather conditions that had been present before an outbreak 6 years earlier. Efforts to limit the spread of airborne diseases such as foot and mouth, are also strongly dependent on favourable wind conditions.

Extreme weather
Although people in Britain often moan about the weather, we should spare a thought for the inhabitants of parts of the world where extreme weather regularly wreaks havoc on the environment and population. Sandstorms, tornadoes, blizzards and flash floods regularly kill thousands of people and leave many others homeless.

While most of us try to avoid extreme weather, some adventurous souls actively seek out places where extreme weather conditions exist. Sports such as surfing, kiteboarding, ice-climbing and white-water rafting are becoming increasingly popular with people seeking relief from the monotony of daily routine. Extreme sports are about exhilaration, skill and danger, and often harness the weather to provide adrenaline addicts with their kicks.

Even more extraordinary are storm-chasers – weather enthusiasts who risk their lives following tornadoes and thunderstorms at high speed to witness the damage they cause at close hand.

Discussion task
- In pairs, ask students to discuss the following questions:

- Had you heard of any of the ideas in the article before?

- Are there any parts of the article that you agree or disagree with? Why?

- Have you ever experienced any extreme weather conditions? Where were you and what was it like?

Follow-up
- If your students have Internet access, ask them to search the net for any stories about extreme weather conditions and report back to the class.

The weather

Worksheet A

Speaking
Look at the following groups or pairs of words and discuss what the differencevis between them:

- snow, sleet and hail
- a storm and a blizzard
- a breeze, a gale and a hurricane
- flooding and droughts
- mist and fog
- a shower and sunny spells
- rain and humidity
- a hurricane and a tornado

Worksheet B

Pronunciation
Match the beginnings of six weather phenomena with the ends of the words. The words are all written in phonemic script, so this is how the words **sound** – **not** how we spell them.

a)	ˈblɪz	1)	ts
b)	ˈhʌrɪk	2)	dz
c)	ˈsaɪkl	3)	ədz
d)	draʊ	4)	ɪtɪ
e)	hjuˈmɪd	5)	ənz
f)	flʌ	6)	əʊnz

Write the written word (i.e. how we spell it) and the corresponding phonemic script next to each other and practise saying them with the correct pronunciation and word stress.

Worksheet C

Collocations
It is useful to know which adjectives collocate strongly with which nouns. For example, we don't say "strong rain", but "heavy rain".

Can you match an adjective below in column A to a noun in column B so that they form strong collocations? In some cases there will be more than one possibility. Use a monolingual dictionary to help you.

A	B
torrential	gales
flash	humidity
severe	spells
dense	weather conditions
sunny	rain
freak	storms
violent	floods
high	fog

Worksheet D

Speaking
Discuss the following questions with a partner.

1. In what ways can we predict the weather?

2. There are many sayings in English about the weather. For example:
   Red sky at night, shepherd's delight; red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning.
   What do you think this saying means?
   Are there any similar sayings in your own language? Can you translate them into English and say what they mean?

3. Do you think the weather can influence our moods? If so, in what way?

4. Do you think the weather can influence the personalities of people living in different countries or regions? If so, in what way?

Worksheet E
Read the article and answer the following questions.

1. According to scientific studies, what effects can the weather have on people?

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