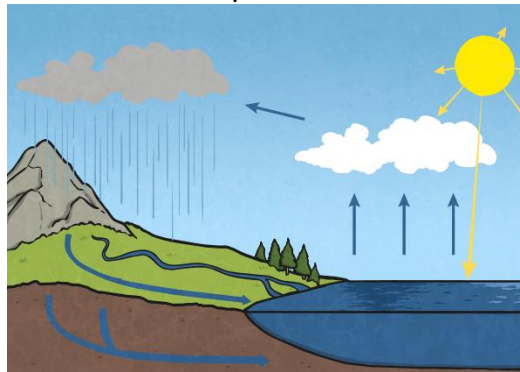


The journey through the Water Cycle

Have you ever looked up at the grey, murky sky and wondered where the rain and clouds come from? Read on to find out how the immeasurable amount of water is constantly moving up, down and around and around in our atmosphere.



Evaporation

Initially, the heat from the sun warms patches of water turning the liquid into a vapour (gas) and this rises because it is lighter. The warmer the air, or if there is a draught or breeze, the quicker evaporation takes place. It even happens on puddles' surfaces. Try and watch the playground dry up next time there has been a shower.

Condensation

Then, the water vapour is lifted into the sky. As you go higher, the air gets colder and cools down the gas. This causes the particles to condense (come together) and form microscopic droplets of water. Over time, millions of them gather and make clouds.

Precipitation

As soon as the water droplets reach a certain size, their weight is too great to stay in the air and they fall towards the ground. This is called precipitation. If the air is very cold, the water falls as ice or sleet. Otherwise, it falls as rain.

Collection

Wherever the water lands, this is the 'collection' stage of the water cycle. Rain and snow may return to Earth in rivers or lakes, on the ground, or on houses and roads, where it soaks down towards the rivers. Eventually, most of this water flows into the sea.

After all of this, the process starts again ensuring that there is always water to sustain life on earth.