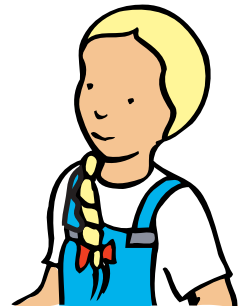


Look at the red sky tonight - it will be a fine day tomorrow

The weather forecast is predicting rain - that's what it will do

The weather could do anything tomorrow - we have no way of knowing



Sayings about the weather come from a time when more people worked outdoors and the weather made a lot of difference to their working lives. Many of the sayings which became embedded into folklore have a grain of truth in them and in the UK this includes the saying 'Red sky at night, shepherd's delight. Red sky in morning, shepherd's warning'. This is because in the UK weather systems usually pass from West to East. In the morning as the Sun rises in the East it can reflect off clouds in the West, and clouds in the West will often be associated with fronts that carry rain in our direction. The light reflected in this way will be red. Similarly in the evening the setting Sun can reflect off clouds in the East, and these clouds will often be associated with rain-bearing fronts that have recently passed over. After the front has passed there will usually be a period of calm weather before any more fronts arrive.

Weather forecasts work on a more scientific and systematic basis. Weather data is constantly collected from observations on the ground, at sea and in the air. It is then analysed and used to produce maps of the weather and how it is changing. The atmospheric pressure and how it is changing, the strength and direction of the wind, and the nature and amount of cloud will all have an impact on the weather. Predictions made from the weather maps are fairly reliable for about 24 hours ahead, but for longer timescales they become increasingly unreliable. Although meteorology can give detailed explanations of why the weather occurs it is still far from 100% accurate at predicting what the weather will be.

The ideas in the concept cartoon invite learners to carry out surveys to investigate how accurate the weather forecasts are and how they compare with the accuracy of sayings such as 'Red sky at night . . .'. The internet is also a valuable source of data which can be researched, for example, www.sciencenet.org.uk, <http://archive.ncsa.uiuc.edu> or www.met-office.gov.uk (click on research, then NWP gazette, then December 1999).