



The Mini-Rainstorm Mystery

Ever wonder where the water in rain clouds comes from? Try this experiment, and you might answer your own question before the next big rainstorm.

Put a little potting soil in the bottom of a plastic zip bag, and tape it to a sunny window. Then close the bag tight and sprinkle a little tap water on it to moisten it. Leave the bag in the window to see what happens as the water in the soil warms up. Come back in a few hours. What's really going on here?

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What you are seeing inside the bag is a mini version of the water cycle. When rain falls, it soaks into the earth or runs into rivers, lakes and oceans. When the water on Earth is heated, it turns into vapor and rises up into the air. Eventually, the water vapor comes back together and cools down, forming clouds. We call this condensation.

When enough water has condensed, it falls back to earth again as rain. This is exactly what happened inside your bag. When enough water had collected at the top, it became heavy and fell back into the soil. You were actually watching a mini-rainstorm.