



The Weather Zapper

Objective: Students will develop an ending to a radio play about weather control. They will learn the pros and cons of controlling the weather.

Materials:

Ruler or yardstick
Box filled with jars, dishes, stones, and cans
Blender or hot air popcorn popper
Shoes
Radio
Tape recorder
Microphone
Copies of the Weather Zapper play

Background:

What would happen to the world if someone could “control” or modify the weather? Could long-term weather modification affect our climate? Could it help us wipe out droughts and prevent deaths from raging storms? These are some of the questions that scientists have been thinking about since the first cloud seeding experiments began in the 1940's. Since then, many weather modification experiments have been conducted. But none of the experiments have been as successful as many scientists hoped they would be.

As water shortages continue to be a growing problem, some scientists think there will be an increased interest in weather modification experiments and a need for them to continue. They feel we need to keep experimenting so we can learn more about how the weather works and how we can influence it to help save lives and bring rain to areas that need water. Other scientists feel weather control won't ever work - we just won't ever know enough about how the atmosphere works to successfully control it. And if we could control it, we might create more problems than we solve.

Procedure:

- Radio plays can be a lot of fun. You don't have to worry about costumes, make-up, or even memorizing your lines. But radio plays are a challenge. Since no one can see the characters, the radio actors must project the personalities of their characters through their voices. Radio plays also use sound effects to help dramatize the action. Footsteps, thunder, rain, wind, motors, fighting, and other sound can be imitated by a well-equipped sound effects team.
- In this play, we have ten characters listed. More can be written in by the authors of the endings. You will also need someone to work the tape recorder or microphones, another (the director) to follow along with the script and cue in the actors and sound effects team, and several people to handle the sound effect table. If necessary, one person can play more than one part by disguising his/her voice.

Grade Level:

Elementary

Subject Areas:

Science, Drama, Creative Writing

Setting:

Classroom

Skills:

Critical thinking, observation, identification, experimenting, discussion

Prior Preparation:

Go to the public library and check out a sound recording of Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" radio program. As you are playing the recording, stop the tape (or CD) to point out where the actors/sound effect people make the story come alive with sound effects. Discuss with the class what items have been used to make the effects.

Vocabulary:

none

- Give copies of the script to each student. After reading aloud, assign students into small groups to create an ending to the story. Allow several class periods toward the completion of the play. When all groups have finished with their endings, read all endings aloud to class and vote on the ending that the class should produce. **Note:** another suggestion is to have each group record their play with their ending.
- After the play(s) are taped, let the students lean back, munch on some popcorn, and listen to the production(s).

Extensions:

- Discuss how people have already affected the weather by polluting the air. As we add more substances to the atmosphere, we change the chemical balance in the air, and this could create changes in our weather patterns. Acid rain and chemical smog are two examples of serious air pollution problems. Then lead a discussion on how this type of pollution is changing our climate.
- Make a water cycle in a jar. Explain to students how weather is a product of the water cycle.
- Make a classroom weather chart. Make a grid for the month and on each day draw a smiling face for days the weather is good and a sad face the days the weather is inclement. Review at the end of the month and compare the months as they go by in the school year. At the end of the year, look back and decide what the overall weather was.

The Weather Zapper: A Radio Play

Characters:

Dr. El Nino
Buster Bora
Gerry Greedstone
Gale
Glazer
News Reporter
Ed Front
Elizabeth Hale Hodgson
Narrator I
Narrator II

Stagehands:

Stage Director
Sound Effects team

(All sound effects and stage cues are in parentheses)

Narrator I: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to tonight's radio play, "The Weather Zapper." It is a story about a brilliant scientist who discovers an amazing way to control the weather. We hope you'll enjoy tonight's exciting adventure.

Scene I

Narrator II: Dr. El Nino, a world renowned weather scientist, is working late one night in his research lab in southern Kentucky. His assistant, Buster Bora, is helping him with a new invention.

Dr. El Nino: Come here quickly, Buster. (Heavy footsteps) I think I've finally perfected the Weather Zapper!

Buster: What great news, Dr. El Nino! How will it work?

Dr. El Nino: It's pretty complicated, Buster. But if I shoot this special chemical - tetraethyl dibromyl sulferine bimethyl - into the sky, I can make it rain just by adjusting the controls. And I can also create huge swirling winds that can push tornadoes and hurricanes off their courses to save towns from disaster.

Buster: Wow! What an invention! But how can you control it?

Dr. El Nino: All I have to do is set these four controls and shoot the chemical into the right type of cloud. Then whammo!

Buster: Just think, Doctor - flash floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and droughts can all be disasters of the past. (A door slams)

Dr. El Nino: Who would be here at this hour? (Heavy footsteps pound up the stairs)

Dr. El Nino: Quick, Buster, hide the weather Zapper in that drawer and lock it. No one must know we have it until it is tested. (A drawer slams, the door opens and three people storm in. Footsteps)

Gerry Greedstone: Too late, my clever Doctor. I know you have the Zapper. We've bugged your lab for the last three months. Now where is it?

Dr. El Nino: Who are you, and what gives you the right to barge in here like this?

Gerry Greedstone: My name is Gerry Greedstone, and these are my two assistants Gale and Glazer. When I heard that you were researching a weather controller, I knew I had to get my hands on it. With this Weather Zapper, I will be rich. (Laughs an evil laugh) Now I will be the only person in the universe who can control the weather, and people will do whatever I say!

Dr. El Nino: You're a fool, Greedstone. The Weather Zapper hasn't even been tested. Besides, you don't know how to use it. I warn you, it can turn on you.

Gerry Greedstone: Too late, Doc. Gale, Glazer, quick - tie them up and find the Weather Zapper. (First, the sounds of shuffling and fighting: Shake a big box filled with cans, stones, jars and other junk. Then, the sound of a gunshot: Slap a yardstick or ruler on a table.)

Buster: Oh, no - they've shot the lock off the drawer. And they've got the Zapper!

Gerry Greedstone: Come on, you guys. Let's get out of here before we get caught. (Footsteps running downstairs)

Dr. El Nino: We're in deep, deep trouble, Buster. With that Zapper they can change the world's weather in a flash. And I don't think they will use it to help people.

Buster: There's always a chance it won't work, isn't there?

Dr. El Nino: Yes, I suppose there's always a chance. There they go, Buster. (Imitate a motor by running a blender or a hot air popcorn popper, or by saying "varoommmmm") Hurry! Try to loosen your ropes, Buster. We need to get to the police! (Grunts and gasps, heavy breathing)

Buster: I've done it, sir. I've slipped the ropes off. Here, I'll untie you, and we'll call the police. Don't worry sir!

Commercial break - a group of students do a PSA (public service announcement) or a commercial during the scene change.

Scene II: Radio Station Newsroom

Narrator I: News of the Weather Zapper has spread quickly - no one knows where or when the first "zap" will take place. Dr. El Nino and Buster, along with meteorologists all over the world, keep watching the sky and listening to the news. In a few days, strange reports start pouring in. (Music playing)

Reporter: We interrupt this program to bring you a special news flash from Hawaii. We now switch to our Hawaii correspondent, Ed Front.

Ed: Hawaii's never seen anything like this folks. It's been snowing in Honolulu for over three hours. The palm trees and beaches are covered with snow. There are already three inches on the ground and chilling winds are blowing! (Blow on the mike) Brrrr! And the weather's getting worse by the minute.

Reporter: Thank you Ed. And now we take you to our London correspondent, Elizabeth Hale Hodgson.

Elizabeth: I say, this is the strangest thing. A tornado has just touched down near Buckingham Palace. The queen and her family have managed to escape the storm with no harm. Oh, no - I see another funnel cloud.... *hellllp!* (Loud wind - blow on mike)

Reporter: The world's weather seems to be in an uproar. Skies are being zapped everywhere. Who's doing this and what's the reason? We'll have more on the eleven o'clock news tonight. Now back to our program. (More music and then face out)

Commercial break - a group of students do a PSA (public service announcement) or a commercial during the scene change.

Scene III: Back in the Lab

Narrator II: **Meanwhile, back in the lab, Dr. El Nino and Buster work through the night, trying to figure out a solution to the world's weather mess.**

Dr. El Nino: **I've got a plan, Buster. I know how to stop them before they do more damage and kill innocent people.**

Buster: **How, Doctor?**

Now you finish the play!