When is it going to rain? How much will it rain? We ask these questions every day to know if we need to wear rain boots or bring an umbrella. We also ask questions about the bigger issues concerning safety, transportation, and our jobs. In this story, you will learn how scientists measure rain and snow. Follow along as a GPM satellite helps children learn how these measurements are made worldwide and how they are important. Follow along as GPM begins to observe the world of precipitation and meets some new friends along the way.
IN HIS FIRST DAYS IN ORBIT, THE GLOBAL PRECIPITATION MEASUREMENT CORE OBSERVATORY (GPM) SHOULD HAVE FELT LIKE HE HAD IT ALL.


NASA AND JAXA

CAN I OPEN MY EYES NOW?

REMEMBER, WE CAN'T SEND ANYONE TO FIX YOUR HARDWARE NOW THAT YOU'RE UP IN SPACE.

INSPIRED, GPM WAS IMPATIENT.

THAT ANGLE GETS YOU THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF SUNLIGHT BECAUSE OF YOUR ORBIT.

YOU'LL BE ABLE TO SEE FROM BETWEEN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE AND THE ANTARCTIC CIRCLE.

*NOAA AND JAXA

START BY STRETCHING OUT YOUR SOLAR PANELS.

HEY, I'M CURIOUS, WHY IS ONE OF MY SOLAR PANELS AT A DIFFERENT ANGLE?

IT FEELS STRANGE TO NOT BE SYMMETRICAL.

LET'S TRY YOUR HIGH GAIN ANTENNA NEXT.

THAT'S HOW YOU SEND YOUR DATA DOWN TO EARTH.

OHHH DO I GET TO OPEN MY EYES NOW?

YOU'LL WANT DATA TO TEST THAT THE ANTENNA IS WORKING!

YOU'LL WANT MORE CHECKS, GPM.

I'M GETTING A SIGNAL FROM THE ANTENNA THROUGH THE RELAY SATELLITE NETWORK.

AND IT LOOKS LIKE YOUR STAR TRACKERS AND GPS ARE WORKING, SO I KNOW WHERE YOU ARE IN ORBIT AND IN COMPARISON WITH EARTH'S SURFACE, WHICH WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO DIRECT YOUR INSTRUMENTS PROPERLY.

THE INSTRUMENTS YOU WON'T LET ME USE YET.

I SUPPOSE I CAN HEAR YOU A LOT BETTER NOW BUT I SHOULD HAVE SOME DATA TO SEND ALONG AS WELL.

HAHA OKAY, GPM, IT'S TIME.

HOORAY!

WOAH!

THE EARTH IS REALLY BEAUTIFUL FROM UP HERE!

HEY, WHO'S THAT?
HELLO!

WAIT, I JUST WANT TO TALK TO YOU!

I KNOW! I HAVE THIRTEEN DIFFERENT FREQUENCIES IN MY MICROWAVE IMAGER!

I'M TRAM**, AND I'M A PRECIPITATION MEASUREMENT SATELLITE TOO.

YOUR PREDECESSOR, IN FACT.

WELCOME TO MEET YOU.

I COULD USE SOME HELP. I JUST SAW SOMEONE IN THE CLOUDS ON EARTH--

NICE TO SAY HELLO, BUT SHE RAN OFF.

AH, YOU'VE SEEN MIU-CHAN. I'VE BEEN WATCHING HER SINCE I LAUNCHED IN 1997.

I WANTED TO SAY HELLO!

WHO'S MIU-CHAN?

MAYBE I'LL BE ABLE TO CATCH UP WITH HER USING ONE OF THE OTHERS!

PLEASE STOP AND TALK TO ME!

I JUST WANT TO SAY HELLO!

YOU LOOK LIKE YOU COULD USE SOME HELP!

SHE'S THE PERSONIFICATION OF RAIN, SNOW AND ALL ITS COMBINATIONS.

YOU'LL SEE HER MOOD CHANGE DEPENDING ON THE CONDITIONS IN THE ATMOSPHERE.

MY INSTRUMENTS AREN'T SOPHISTICATED ENOUGH TO SEE--

BUT I'M TOLD THAT AT HIGHER LATITUDES SHE EVEN MAKES SNOW.

SOMETIMES THERE WILL BE ONLY LIGHT RAIN, RARELY A PRIZZLE

OTHER TIMES, POWERFUL STORMS AND HEAVY RAINS.

I'VE ALWAYS FOUND HER THE MOST MESMERIZING AND TERRIFYING WHEN SHE FORMS A HURRICANE.
That's the great thing about being a scientist! We're all committed to making sure our missions are successful, no matter what the challenge. We're like the different instruments of an orchestra, each with our own role in making sure the music is in tune.

Even though we all have different instruments, we work together to combine our efforts. The more we gather, the stronger our signal becomes.

Are we going to be able to combine our efforts this time? If we can, we can make sure the mission is a success. And if we can't, we'll keep trying. Remember, the difference between success and failure is often just a matter of perseverance.

When I'm tracking satellites, I often think of the Earth's vastness. It's a reminder that even though we may be small, we have the power to make a big difference. I see the Earth as if I were in a spaceship, and I feel a sense of awe and responsibility.

But the persistence! It's what makes us great. And even though we may face challenges, we all have different strengths and abilities. Together, we can overcome anything.
Glossary

Antenna
A device used to transmit signals. GPM uses its antenna to send data and get instructions from the ground.

Calibrate
To measure and adjust readings in comparison to a set standard. The GPM Core Observatory is the calibration standard for the other satellites in the constellation to be able to combine all the data together.

Constellation
In this case, the group of international satellites that combine their data to get a global view of precipitation.

Drought
Long periods of low precipitation.

Evaporation
The process by which water molecules in liquid water are heated and escape into the air as water vapor.

Flooding
The submerging or covering of land under water.

Frequency
The number of cycles (up and down) per second of a wave of electromagnetic energy as it moves. GPM measures thirteen different frequencies, each sensitive to different types of precipitation.

GPS - Global Positioning System
A satellite network used to provide information about the position and velocity of an object.

Hurricane
A tropical storm that has winds of 115 kilometers (74 miles) per hour or higher; the scientific term is “tropical cyclone”.

Instrument
A tool used to make specific measurements to answer a scientific question.

Landslide
The sliding down of a mass of earth or rock from a mountain, cliff or other slope.

Microwave Imager
A GPM science instrument designed to sense the total precipitation within all cloud layers, including light rain, heavy rain and snowfall.

Monsoon
A seasonally reversing wind pattern that brings heavy rains during certain times of the year.

Orbit
The path followed by an object revolving around another object.

Precipitation
Any product of the condensation of atmospheric water vapor that falls quickly out of a cloud. The main forms of precipitation include drizzle, rain, sleet, snow, graupel and hail.

Precipitation Radar
A GPM science instrument that provides detailed three-dimensional measurements of particles of rain and snow, including information about their size, shape and location in the cloud layers.

Relay Satellite Network
The Tracking and Data Relay Satellite System (TDRSS) is a group of communications satellites and ground stations used by NASA for space communications.

Satellite
Anything that orbits or circles something else. Human-made satellites are artificial machines that are put in space in order to collect information or for communication.

Solar Panel
A panel that absorbs the sun's rays to create electricity. In the case of GPM, this energy powers the scientific instruments.

Star Trackers
Devices that measure the positions of stars and use a catalog of star locations to help the satellite know where it is in space.

Swath
The area of Earth observed by a satellite as it revolves around the planet.

Background Image:  
Grant Petty

Learn More Glossary Terms At: 
pmm.nasa.gov/resources/glossary
Measuring Rain: On the Ground and From Space

When is it going to rain? How much will it rain? We want to know about precipitation to plan daily-to-day events, but also to help us make decisions about bigger issues related to safety, transportation and our jobs. Precipitation also significantly affects our food and water supply. Therefore, it is important to accurately measure rain and snowfall.

There are many ways to measure precipitation. Rain gauges collect and measure rainfall in a location over a period of time. However, rain gauges only measure rain in one specific spot. Radars can be set up on land and cover more area. From Earth, radar sends out a signal to the sky and measures how much of the signal is scattered by rain or snow. However, radars are only available in certain locations and do not measure rain over most of the oceans.

For a truly global picture of precipitation - over land, oceans and in all parts of the world - we use satellites in the sky.

The Global Precipitation Measurement mission (GPM) is an international network of satellites that are all looking down on Earth and measuring precipitation from space. The GPM concept centers on the deployment of the GPM Core Observatory, a satellite that helps measure precipitation all over the world every three hours. Not only will this data give us a better picture of global precipitation, it will help advance our understanding of Earth's water and energy cycle and improve forecasting of extreme events like floods, droughts, landslides and hurricanes.

Background Image: Steven Sandner

The GPM Core Observatory

The GPM Core Observatory carries two instruments that measure precipitation from space. The data from these two instruments serves as a reference standard to unify precipitation measurements made by an international network of partner satellites. The design and sampling technique of the Core Observatory builds on the concept of the Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission (TRMM), which was launched in 1997 and continued collecting data until 2015.

The two main instruments on the Core Observatory are the Dual-Frequency Precipitation Radar (DPR) and the GPM Microwave Imager (GMI). The DPR provides three-dimensional information about precipitation particles in the different layers of clouds. It sends energy at two frequencies (Ku- and Ka-band) into the cloud and observes the energy that is reflected from different heights. It is an active radar instrument since it actually sends out energy. The GMI is a passive radiometer - it just observes and measures energy that is emitted by precipitation within clouds. Different types of precipitation, like heavy rain and light snow, emit different frequencies of energy. The GMI measures these frequencies to tell us what kind of precipitation is in the cloud. Other components of the satellite include the solar panels to provide power, a high gain data-relay antenna for communication, a star-field finder for navigation and a control system to manage the satellite.

GPM Microwave Imager (GMI) is a passive radiometer with a reflector above to receive the microwave energy reflected from precipitation.

The Dual-Frequency Precipitation Radar (DPR) is the two boxes on the bottom of the Core Observatory - the small one is the Ka frequency radar and the larger flat box is the Ku frequency radar.

The GPM mission is co-led by NASA and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). The GPM Core Observatory launched from the Tanegashima Space Center on Tanegashima Island, Japan in February 2014.
Global Precipitation Data

The GPM Microwave Imager (GMI) can generate 2D images of the rainfall and snowfall rates within storms, similar to an x-ray. This data can then be combined with other satellite data and used to calculate the total precipitation that fell over a period of time.

Rainfall rates (mm/hour) from Hurricane Bianca on June 4th, 2014 are shown overlaid on top of a GOES satellite image of visible clouds. The red areas have the highest rainfall rate, while the blue areas are the lowest for the storm.

GPM’s Dual-Frequency Precipitation Radar (DPR) can provide 3D images of the intensity of precipitation within storms, similar to a CAT scan. This image shows precipitation within Typhoon Hagupit on December 9th, 2014. You can see a layer of frozen precipitation in blue above the melting layer, shown in red and pink.

Data from all the satellites in the GPM Constellation is combined to create a global image of precipitation known as IMERG (Integrated Multi-satellite Retrievals for GPM), which scientists use to study the global water cycle.

gpm.nasa.gov/data-access

About the Characters

GPM

Designed by Japanese comic writer and illustrator Yuki Kinjo, the design for the GPM character was selected as one of the winners of the GPM Anime Challenge, a character creation contest held in 2013. His blond hair and kimono (with snow and rain patterns drawn on it to represent the rain and snow he observes) show that he is half American and half Japanese, just like the real satellite.

TRMM

The Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission was launched in 1997 to study rainfall for weather and climate research. After 17 years of productive data gathering, the instruments on TRMM were turned off in April 2015, and the spacecraft re-entered Earth’s atmosphere. In addition to a microwave imager, TRMM carried the first precipitation radar into space, a legacy GPM continues with its improved instruments. The character of TRMM is depicted as an older man, imparting his wisdom to the next generation GPM satellite.

Mizu-Chan

From the Japanese word for water, Mizu-chan is the personification of water and precipitation. Designed by then 14-year-old Sabrine Buchholtz of Hudson, Colorado, USA, Mizu-chan was selected as one of the winners of the GPM Anime Challenge, a character creation contest held in 2013. As explained by her creator, her flowing dress in many shades of blue signifies the many forms of water found on Earth, although it can change color to be gray during storms, or white in the winter. Her helmet is surrounded by clouds, showing water vapor condensing as part of the water cycle. Depending on her “mood” (which correlates to temperature, pressure and other atmospheric conditions on Earth), the clouds will also form different types of precipitation – rain, sleet or snow. During storms, her hair may be tousled by the wind or strands may stand out straight to look like lightning bolts. She wears boots to avoid getting her feet wet from run-off, although they may also be covered by frost when the conditions are cold.

The Engineer

The Engineer is based on GPM Deputy Project Manager Candice Carlisle, who works at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, USA. Prior to working on GPM, she worked on the Space Technology 5 project as well as the Earth Science Data and Information System. Candice holds a B.S. in Computer Science and Physics from the College of William and Mary and M.S. degrees in Technical Management and Computer Science from Johns Hopkins University.

NOTE: IN THE STORY, THE SATELLITES HAVE CHARACTERS TO REPRESENT THEM. HOWEVER, THE REAL SATELLITES ARE REMOTELY OPERATED AND DO NOT HAVE PEOPLE ABOARD.

Background Image: Jesi Fite
The GPM Constellation

GCOM-W

The Global Change Observation Mission - Water (GCOM-W) was launched by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency on May 18, 2012 from the Tanegashima Space Center on Tanegashima Island, Japan. GCOM-W observes global water and energy circulation using an Advanced Microwave Scanning Radiometer 2 instrument, the world’s largest revolving space antenna at time of launch. GCOM-W is one of two satellites in the GCOM mission, along with GCOM-C, which observes climate change with an emphasis on the carbon cycle. The GCOM-W satellite is also known as “Shizuku,” and the character in the comic reflects that Japanese heritage.

Megha-Tropiques

Megha-Tropiques was launched on October 12, 2011 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, India. A joint mission between the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the Centre National D’Études Spatiales (CNES), the French government space agency, Megha-Tropiques studies the water cycle and energy exchanges in the tropics. This satellite holds a microwave imager that observes precipitation and cloud properties, a six channel microwave radiometer that observes water vapor distribution, and a radiometer that measures outgoing radiative fluxes. Because of the joint nature of the Megha-Tropiques mission between ISRO and CNES, two characters were used to represent the satellite.

MetOp

The Meteorological Operational Satellite Program is a series of three meteorological satellites developed jointly by the European Organization for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites and the European Space Agency (ESA). MetOp-A and MetOp-B were launched in 2006 and 2012, respectively, both from Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, and MetOp-C is scheduled to be launched in 2017. These satellites provide global weather data services and improve weather forecasting. The MetOp satellites carry 13 different instruments and sensors, supplied by both American and European agencies. Many of the instruments measure similar aspects of climate and weather, but use different measuring techniques to develop more accurate models. Although only one character was used to represent the satellite, ESA is an international organization with 22 member states and centers all over Europe.

Acknowledgements

Global Precipitation Measurement Mission
pmm.nasa.gov
www.nasa.gov/gpm

Precipitation Education
pmm.nasa.gov/education

Supplemental Resources for this Comic Book
pmm.nasa.gov/education/comics

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