

Oklahoma Tornado Strike

Every year, tornadoes can strike with little warning. The high winds damage homes and other buildings. People can be badly hurt. People can even die. On May 3, 1999, Oklahoma had its worst tornado in history.

Tornadoes

Tornadoes are rotating columns of air. They reach down to the ground from thunderstorm clouds.

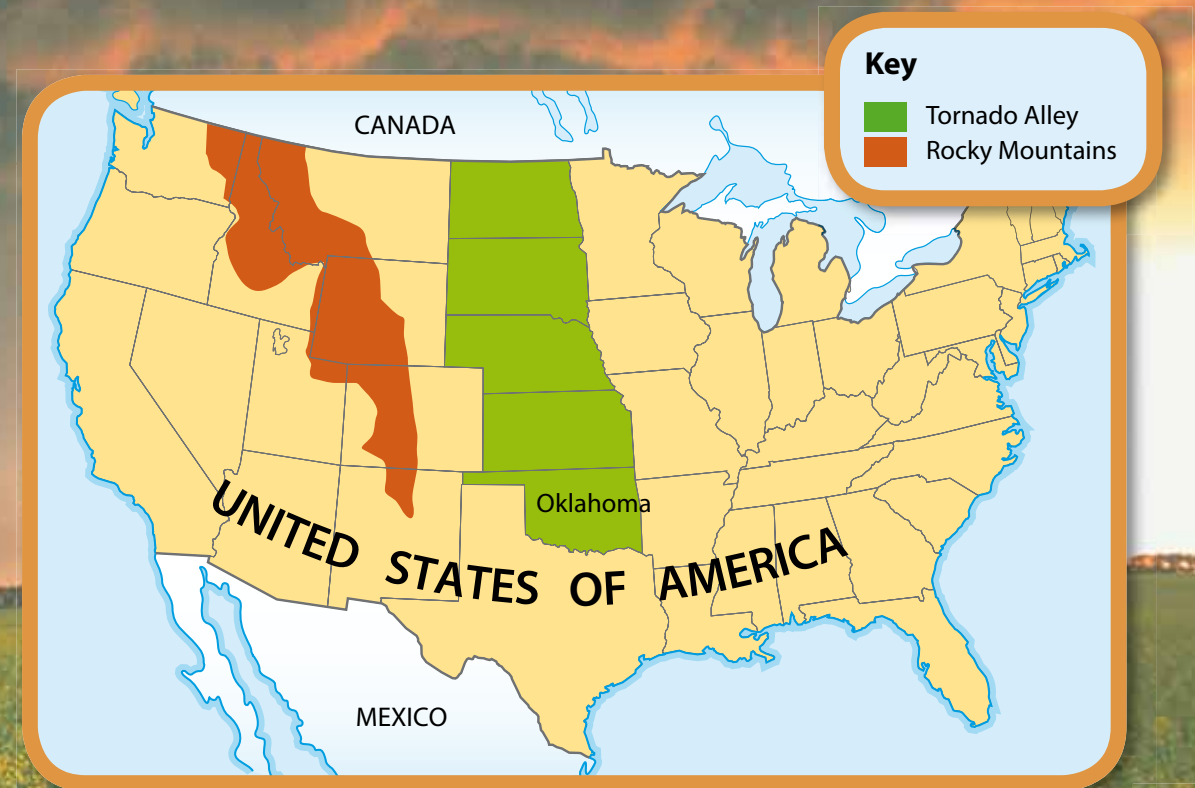
Tornado Force

The strength of a tornado is rated on a force scale of 0–5.

Force	Wind Speed (miles per hour)	Wind Speed (kilometers per hour)
F0	40–72	64–116
F1	73–112	117–180
F2	113–157	181–253
F3	158–207	254–333
F4	208–260	334–418
F5	> 261	> 419

States at Risk

Tornadoes are more predictable in some places than others. More tornadoes form in the central United States than anywhere else in the world. This area is sometimes called Tornado Alley.



From Thunderstorms to Tornadoes

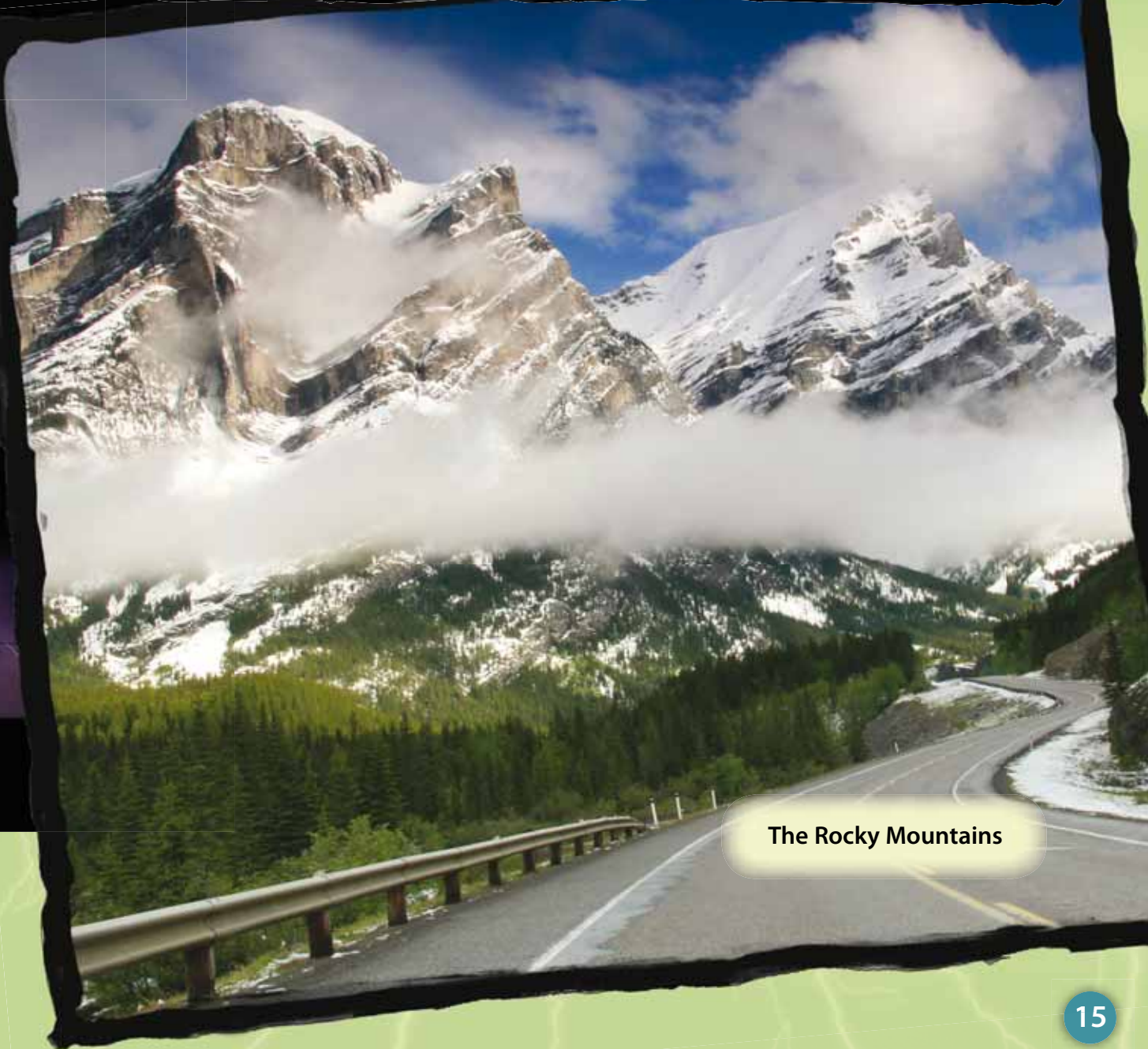
Tornadoes begin from thunderstorms. Thunderstorms begin when warm, moist air meets cool, dry air. This forms what **meteorologists** (mee-tee-uh-ROL-uh-jists) call a **front**.

LET'S EXPLORE MATH

You can estimate the distance between yourself and a thunderstorm by counting the number of seconds between a lightning flash and the sound of thunder. Then divide that number by 5 for a distance in miles or by 3 for a distance in kilometers.

- Estimate the distance in miles if the time between the lightning flash and the sound of thunder was 15 seconds.
- Estimate the distance in kilometers if the time between the lightning flash and the sound of thunder was 21 seconds.

To turn into a tornado, a thunderstorm has to start rotating. Tornado Alley lies east of the Rocky Mountains. Air coming down off of these mountains is cool and dry. This air starts a thunderstorm rotating.



The Rocky Mountains