

The Meaning of Colours

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This file was developed by Max Darby in June 2010.



Senior student Mel used sexpressive colours for her *Party Girl*

Colours are important ingredients that we use in the artroom and in life. Like things that we use in a cooking recipe to create different tastes, they also can be combined in different ways to impact on the visual expressions we call 'artworks'. Colours can be used for many reasons...sometimes randomly and sometimes deliberately.

Try to think of something in everyday life that is somehow associated with a colour – any colour.

Some examples you might have considered include:

Red is used to indicate stop

Green is used to indicate envy

Blue is used used to express sadness

Purple is used to signify expensive

Black is used to signify death.

There are many others.

Below is a table of colours and their meanings that I found on the web at –

http://changingminds.org/disciplines/communication/color_effect.htm

Of course, there are thousands of entries on the web if you search for colour including:

<http://www.colorquiz.com/>

<http://www.colorgenics.com/>

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/colors1.html>

Meanings of colours

Following is a table of colours and many of the meanings they tend to evoke. Notice how colours can mean very different things – it is not that the colours themselves have meaning, it is that we have culturally assigned meanings to them. For example, red means warmth because of the colour of fire. Likewise, it means anger because of the increased redness of the face when it flushes with blood. Purple symbolizes royalty only because the only purple dye that was available for many centuries was very expensive. If you find other meanings that are applied to colours please add them to your own list (and leave a reply in the space below so that I can include it in this list). Some meanings are associated with more than one colour.

Color	Meaning
RED:	<p>warmth, love, anger, danger, boldness, excitement, speed, strength, determination, desire, courage</p>
ORANGE:	<p>cheerfulness, low cost, affordability, enthusiasm, stimulation, creativity</p>
YELLOW:	<p>attention-grabbing, comfort, liveliness, cowardliness, hunger, optimism, overwhelm, Summer, comfort, liveliness, intellect, happiness, energy</p>
GREEN:	<p>durability, reliability, environmental, luxurious, optimism, well-being, nature, calm, relaxation, Spring, safety, honesty, optimism, harmony, freshness</p>

BLUE:	peace, professionalism, loyalty, reliability, honor, melancholia, boredom, coldness, Winter, depth, stability, professionalism, honor, trust
PURPLE:	power, royalty, nobility, elegance, sophistication, artificial, luxury, mystery, elegance, magic
GREY:	conservatism, traditionalism, intelligence, serious, dull, uninteresting
BROWN:	relaxing, confident, casual, reassuring, nature, earthy, solid, reliable, genuine, Autumn, endurance
BLACK:	Elegance, sophistication, formality, power, strength, illegality, depression, morbidity, night
WHITE:	Cleanliness, purity, newness, virginity, peace, innocence, simplicity, sterility, snow

Cultural effects

Remember that color can be culturally dependent – for example,

although Black is the colour of death in many countries, in China the colour associated with death is White.

McDonald's, apparently, use red and yellow because red=fast and yellow=hunger (hence fast food!).

Remember also that meaning is what we create. It does not exist in the colour itself and individual meanings may or may not exist in different cultures and individuals.

Colours have an unending range of variations, tones and hues. When making an artwork it is wise to consider all of these variations before applying a colour to the work. You can do this deliberately and methodically, or you can explore the variations more spontaneously on the surface of the work itself. It can be fun as well as rewarding to spend some time just exploring the many variations within a single colour. This can be done in your visual diary or workbook.