

## Colours

Colour is everywhere around us. Colours play a huge part in our everyday lives, more than we might think. The theory of colours, how they interact in art, their cultural and emotional significance and how they are perceived by humans and animals — all these are major areas of study called colour science.

Colours take on different meanings and associations depending on the country or culture. In Western countries, for example, the colour white represents youth and purity, while black represents death and grieving. In many Asian countries red is considered a lucky colour and is worn at celebrations. In Ancient Egypt, however, red was considered the colour of chaos and destruction because of its association with the dry red soil of the desert. Black was considered the colour of life and **fertility** in Egypt because it was the colour of the rich soil, hydrated by the flooding of the river Nile.

These colour connotations can affect traditions in different cultures. For example, in the West people would wear white to a wedding, while in Asian countries people wear warm colours like red, purple or pink.

Colour meaning can also have a historical component, as associations change over time. In England, it was not until the reign of Queen Victoria that white became the colour of a bride's wedding dress. She was one of the first women to wear a white dress when she married Prince Albert. Before her, there was no specific wedding dress colour with brides wearing red, pink, blue or even black dresses. Queen Victoria's wedding changed the way wedding dresses were perceived, with many people claiming that wearing white was an ancient tradition, effectively re-writing history.

A similar re-writing of history happened with the gendered connotations of the colours pink and blue. It seems as if pink has always been a colour associated with girls, while blue has always been the colour favoured by men. In reality, before the 1940s it was the other way around. The reason for this was that pink is essentially a shade of red, **which** was historically a harsh colour associated with the courage and strength of men, while blue was considered a softer colour, and therefore more suitable for women.

Studies have shown that certain colors can change our mood and even ease or trigger stress and anxiety. Complementary colours can create harmony and visual interest, while conflicting color choices may lead to discomfort or disinterest. It is also known that when specific information is associated with distinct colors, it becomes more memorable. Companies use certain colors in their logos and marketing to make sure that customers remember their products and associate them with particular feelings.

While colours may seem like concrete categories, that is not always the case. Colour is fluid — one colour flowing seamlessly into another, making the specific line between basic colours not as obvious as one may think. A large portion of this is determined by language. Most languages have around six basic colours, though some have as little as three and others have as many as twelve. For example, some languages, such as Italian, Russian and Greek make an additional basic colour distinction between light and dark blue. Many other languages, such as Arabic, Hebrew, Korean and Japanese make no distinction between blue and green as basic colours.

The word **fertility** in paragraph 2 is closest in meaning to "the ability to..."

1. ...have children.
2. ...produce energy.
3. ...bring luck.
4. ...work hard.