

LITTLE SONGS COLORS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

VOCABULARY

add, balance, believe, black, blend, blue, bold, bottom, bright, capture, change, chorus, clear, close, color, color wheel, combine, compare, complement(ary), confident, contrast, cool, cranky, dark(er), drama, dream, duet, dull, duration (long, medium, short), dynamics (loud, soft), emotion, feeling, grumpy, hue, imagine, light(er), lyrics, melody (pitch, high, middle, low), mix(ture), mood, movement/dance, murky, music, musical instrument, musician, note, open, overlap, pattern, picture, primary, rainbow, red, refrain, repetition, respect(ful), rhyme, rhythm (beat, tempo, pulse, fast, slow), secondary, shade, sing(er), solo, song, stance, steady, strong, texture, timbre, tint, tone, top, treat, trio, tune, underneath, unison, verse, visual art, warm, weak, white, yellow

CREATIVE MINDS

Like most human qualities, creativity is a combination of nature and nurture. Young children possess a natural curiosity about their environment, which seems to flow effortlessly into creative expression and imaginative play. Creativity is not a nebulous, mysterious quality bestowed on some and not others. It is a “process of combining known factors (knowledge, understandings, skills) into new relationships to produce new results – a new product, a new way of thinking and perceiving, or a new way of performing.” (Burton and Kudo, 2000). It is a human quality that is clearly valuable. Creativity must be nurtured, even taught with intention, in order for it to flourish as children grow older and become adults. As educators, we are responsible for designing environments and teaching in ways that encourage children to engage in the creative process.

Creative people are perceptually aware of their environment. They are visually observant and interested in how things feel to the touch. They listen to sounds and are sensitive to the way things smell and taste. They absorb information without prejudging it, then savor it, and delay structuring the information until they’ve had the time to consider it from several points of view. Imagination relies on this level of perception for recharging and enhancement.

Researchers generally agree on the basic characteristics of the creative mind. They are evident in young children and include the following:

- ❖ A sense of wonder and heightened awareness of the world
- ❖ Openness to inner feelings and emotions
- ❖ Curious, exploratory, adventuresome spirit

- ❖ Imagination, the power of forming mental images of what is not actually present to the senses or of creating new images by combining previously unrelated ideas
- ❖ Intuitive thinking, the solving of problems without logical reasoning
- ❖ Independent thinking, the desire to find things out for oneself rather than accepting them on authority
- ❖ Personal involvement in work, total absorption in meaningful activities
- ❖ Divergent thinking, thought patterns that seek variety and originality, that propose several possibilities rather than seeking one right answer
- ❖ Predisposition to create rather than considering how things are supposed to be or always have been expressed
- ❖ Tendency to play with ideas, to mentally toy with the possibilities and implications of an idea

(Herberholz and Hanson, 4-5)

COLOR AND CHILDHOOD

Color is an important anchor in the life of a child. Color incorporates and reflects both the cognitive and affective domains of the child's mind. We live in a world filled with color. We see it everywhere in the natural and manmade worlds. We use color to describe things, which helps us identify and understand them. We use color in giving directions and in communicating information about health and safety. We employ our knowledge of color to solve everyday problems. Color evokes emotion. The colors children choose to wear and to use in their artwork reflect their experiences and feelings and the things that are important to them. As children use color in their artwork and other aspects of everyday life, they form color/object relationships, like reds and yellows for fire, blues for the sky, and greens for trees. Children like to have favorite colors and usually choose bright, intense hues. As we encourage them to observe the world around them, they will develop a more refined awareness of color variations. They will grow in understanding their personal color aesthetics, as well as the social and cultural color principles of the world in which they live.

COLOR AND MUSIC

The colors of music are the qualities of a musical sound stripped of its pitch (note), dynamics (loudness), and duration (length of the sound). Color in the vocabulary of music refers to the timbre or tone quality of a particular musical sound. Much like visual colors have distinctive hues, tints, and shades recognizable to the observant eye, musical colors or tones have unique characteristics discernable to the listening ear. Timbre is caused by the fact that each note from a musical instrument is a complex

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wave containing more than one sound frequency. We hear each mixture of sound frequencies not as separate sounds, but as the color of the musical sound. Small differences in the balance of the frequencies create the various musical colors. We are capable of hearing and distinguishing variations in timbre – the tone or color of a flute vs. the tone or color of a trombone. With training and dedication, the human ear and brain are even capable of discriminating between the color or tone of one trombonist and that of another trombonist. Brassy, mellow, flat, clear, harsh, warm, dark, bright, heavy, and light are some of the many words used to describe the color or tone quality of a musical sound.

COLOR IN SCIENCE AND VISUAL ART

All color theory is based on the principle that *color is light*. When a beam of light, which is white, from the sun is diffused or separated by means of a crystal prism, a spectrum of the range of pure colors visible to the human eye is formed, a rainbow. Every color we see is light that has been reflected from or transmitted by a chemical colorant, such as a pigment or dye. Pigments or dyes can be naturally occurring and extracted from plants, animals, and rocks or they can be artificially produced chemical substances. Colors have a chemical structure that gives them the property of selectively absorbing and reflecting certain areas of the light spectrum. So, a paint that looks red-violet to the eye, has the property of absorbing all of the colored rays in white light except the violet and red, which combine to produce the color we see. Grass is green because it reflects green wavelengths of light and absorbs the other colors of the spectrum.

The idea that color is light suggests that the source of light will affect the colors we see. The spectrum range of natural light is affected by the position of the sun with regard to the time of day or season of the year and also by the atmospheric conditions we know as weather – fog, mist, haze. The spectrum range of artificial light is determined by the physical nature of that light, where it comes from and how it is produced i.e. fluorescent or incandescent light bulbs. We cannot see anything unless it has light falling on it.

A color wheel makes it easy to understand colors, also called *hues*, and to learn how to mix and use them to make artwork. The three *primary* paint or pigment hues are red, yellow and blue. They cannot be made by mixing other colors. Mixing any two of the primary colors makes the *secondary* colors orange, green, and violet or purple. The *intermediate* colors are between each of these six colors: red-orange, yellow-orange, yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet, and red-violet. These fully saturated colors have high intensity. Any two colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel are called *complementary* colors, meaning that they contrast strongly with each other. When a small amount of one complementary color is mixed with its opposite, the other color becomes dull or loses intensity. A pair of complementary colors mixed together in roughly equal amounts makes a dull gray. A *monochromatic* group of colors (one color group) is made by selecting one color and mixing in black or white to create its tints and shades. *Tints* are made by adding a dab of white to a color. The more white paint you add the lighter the tint. *Shades* are made by adding a bit of black to a color. The more black paint you add the darker the shade. Neutral colors are black, white, and gray.

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Colors can be grouped by the psychological impact they have on the viewer. Oranges, and yellows are considered warm, cheerful colors because they remind us of sunlight and heat. Red is associated with blood and fire and is considered a violent, powerful, or exciting color. Blues are cool and serene, associated with still and gently flowing water. Greens are cool and restful like a field of grass and leafy shade trees. Violets are considered mysterious. While these statements are generally true, color and feeling associations are highly individual and personal, as well as cultural.

How colors are placed in relation to each other is important in making a visual impact. Warm colors tend to come to the foreground and cool colors tend to recede into the background. Lighter colors appear lighter against dark backgrounds while darker colors appear even darker against light backgrounds. An intense hue will appear more intense next to an area of dull color.

Value refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. A value scale shows a gradual transition from a very light tint to a very dark shade. With a gradual, blended transition from light to dark values, artists can create the illusion of three-dimensional forms. Sharp changes in value depict angular surfaces. A strong light tint coming from one direction creates a great contrast between light and dark, resulting in a dramatic and expressive or emotional impact. Changes in value can be achieved by shading techniques called hatching (many parallel lines), cross-hatching (many crossed parallel lines), stippling (many dots), or blending (smooth transition from dark to light).

Color can be used in many ways in creating visual imagery. It can be used realistically, decoratively, expressively, and symbolically. Expressionist artists used the intensity and power of color to interpret and depict their personal innermost emotions, moods, visions, or memories. The Impressionists also gave particular attention to color in their paintings. "What color is water?" they asked. Its color changes endlessly with the light. A river becomes a kaleidoscope of mixing, merging color fragments. Working in the outdoors had focused the Impressionists' attention on the fleeting light effects and colors of nature. They observed that the colors of the world are not fixed, but modified by their surroundings – weather, seasons, time of day, etc. - and that colors react with each other. Neighboring colors modify each other, the most intense effects occurring when complementary colors are contrasted, such as blue with orange, red with green, and yellow with purple.