

# Color

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

Artists have a wide variety of tools available to use when creating artwork. Color is an excellent element of composition artists can use to affect the overall feel of a work of art. In this lesson, you will learn about:



### BIG IDEA

Color is an important element of composition and a tool used by artists to enhance their artwork.

## 1. Primary vs. Secondary Colors

This lesson explores pigment-based colors as opposed to the color spectrum of white light. This is important to note as the primary colors for pigments are different than the primary colors of light, which can sometimes introduce a bit of confusion.

For pigments, the **primary colors** are blue, red, and yellow. These basic colors, along with white and black, can be combined to create an infinite number of colors by adjusting the type of color, as well as the amount of color.

**Secondary colors** are those colors that are created by combining equal amounts of the basic primary colors. Blue plus red creates purple. Blue plus yellow creates green. Red plus yellow creates orange. Purple, green, and orange are secondary colors because they can only be created by combining primary colors.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Primary Colors

Red, yellow, blue

#### Secondary Colors

Orange, green, purple—the colors made by specific combinations of primary colors

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## 2. Complementary Colors

The **color wheel** is a useful reference tool that helps artists identify complementary colors, those colors that are of an opposite **hue**. If you look at the color wheel, every color's complementary color is directly across from it.

Take a look at the below color wheel. Take note of the colors directly across from each color. These are complementary colors:



➞ EXAMPLE Yellow's complementary color is purple, red's complementary color is green, and blue's complementary color is orange.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Color Wheel

The arrangement of prismatic colors on a circle so that complementary colors are across from each other

##### Hue

The types of color—blue, green, red—are all different hues.

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## 3. Color Value vs. Color Saturation

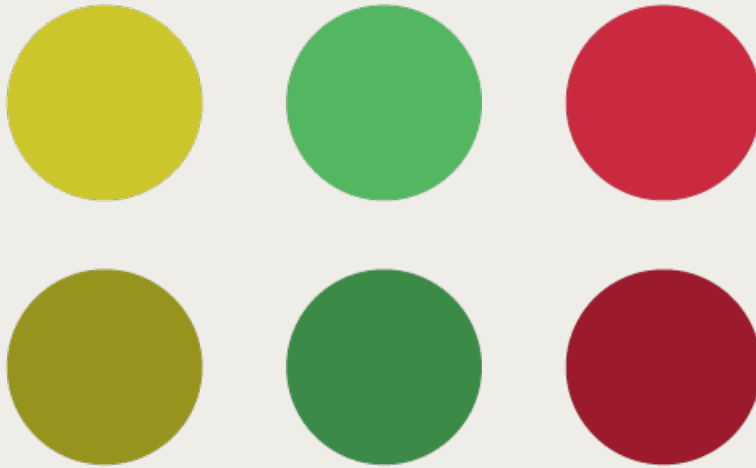
The amount of black added to a color is called color **value**. If you started with the secondary colors of orange, green, and purple and added a dollop of black to each, you would see them darkening a bit. The amount of white added to a color is called color saturation, or intensity. When color **saturation** is used, colors are not only lightened a bit but seem to “pop” more.

#### IN CONTEXT

Below are examples of color value and color saturation.

First, color value. When a small amount of black is added to the colors here in the image, the colors darken. Here you can see the black has been added to the bottom row of colors.

## Color Value



Next, color saturation. When a small amount of white is added to the colors in the image, the colors lighten. Here you can see the white has been added to the top row of colors. Notice how colors are not only lightened a bit but seem to pop a bit more off the screen as their intensity has increased.

## Color Saturation/Intensity



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Value

The amount of black added to a color

#### Saturation/Intensity

The intensity of a color is dependent on the amount of white added. Lavender is a low-intensity shade of purple.

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## 4. Hot Colors vs. Cool Colors

**Hot colors** refer to colors in which yellow and red are the most dominant. On the other hand, **cool colors** are colors in which blue is the dominant color.

### IN CONTEXT

Take a look below at this painting of haystacks by Vincent van Gogh. Yellow is clearly the dominant color. Ask yourself the following questions as you observe the painting:

- How does this choice of color affect the feel of the painting?
- How would the feeling change if the dominant color was blue or green?



The Haystacks by Vincent van Gogh

Now, compare the above painting to the painting below, which is an example of Pablo Picasso's Blue Period paintings. These are excellent examples of how an artist uses color to evoke a particular mood. Ask yourself the following questions as you observe the painting:

- How does this choice of color affect the feel of the painting?
- How would the feeling change if it was in a different color, such as pink or hot pink?



# Cool Colors

The Old Guitarist by Pablo Picasso



## DID YOU KNOW

Picasso's Blue Period was a consequence of some upheaval in the artist's personal life, including the death of a friend, a bout of depression, and changes in his political ideology. Now the choice of color enhances the subject matter, which usually consisted of solitary figures and/or depictions of the poor.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Hot Colors

Colors in which yellow and red are dominant

### Cool Colors

Colors in which blue is dominant



## SUMMARY

Artists attempt to enhance their artwork in many ways. One element of composition that is an excellent tool for artists to use is color. In this lesson, you learned about **primary vs. secondary colors**. The primary colors are blue, red, and yellow. The secondary colors are those colors that are created by combining equal amounts of the basic primary colors. Mixing equal amounts of blue and red, for example, creates purple.

**Complementary colors** are those colors that are of opposite hue. These can be found directly across from each other on the color wheel. You learned about **color value vs. color saturation**. Remember that color value is defined by the amount of black added to a color, and color saturation is defined by the amount of white added. Choosing one over the other will darken (color value) or lighten (color saturation) the color.

Finally, you learned about **hot colors vs. cool colors**. In hot colors, yellow and red are dominant. In cool colors, blue is dominant.

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## ATTRIBUTIONS

- [The Haystacks](#) | Author: Vincent Van Gogh | License: Public Domain
- [The Old Guitarist](#) | Author: Pablo Picasso | License: Public Domain



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Color wheel

The arrangement of prismatic colors on a circle so that complementary colors are across from each other.

**Cool colors**

Colors in which blue is dominant.

**Hot colors**

Colors in which yellow and red are dominant.

**Hue**

The type of color—blue, green, red, are all different hues.

**Primary colors**

Red, yellow, blue.

**Saturation/intensity**

The intensity of a color, dependent on the amount of white added. Lavender is a low-intensity shade of purple.

**Secondary colors**

Orange, green, purple—the colors made by combining primary colors.

**Value**

The amount of black added to a color.