

Choosing and using colour

Colour infuses our world with emotion and meaning. Children often use the first colour that pops into their heads. However, careful choice and use of colour adds expression and emphasises details. Encouraging children to think about colour choice will help them produce more expressive and better works of art and design.

The **primary** colours are red, yellow and blue. These can't be made by mixing other colours, but we can mix them in different ways to make any other colour we see. Mixing two primary colours together makes a **secondary** colour.

A **colour wheel** is a tool that includes both primary and secondary colours. It is designed to help you use colours effectively. Colours close to each other on the colour wheel are called **harmonising** colours, and are often put together as 'matching', colours. You can see this in, for example, home or workplace decoration and car interiors.

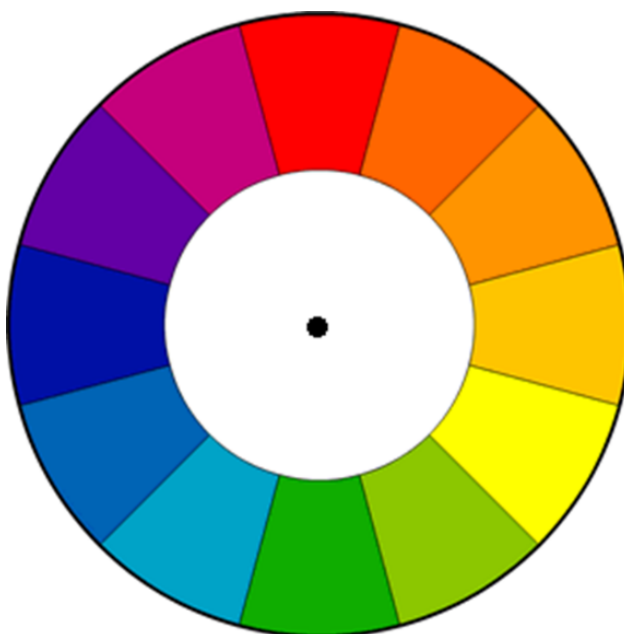
Colours opposite each other on the wheel are called **complementary** or contrasting colours. Using complementary colours next to each other makes each colour look brighter. Hence, complementary colours are used to make things stand out, e.g. signage, and for identifying items such as switches or controls.

Warm colours for example, red, orange, yellow and brown are on the red side of the wheel. Cool colours for example, blue, green and violet are on the blue side of the wheel. Black and white do not appear on the colour wheel, as white is a mixture of all colours and black is the absence of colour.

Art ideas using complimentary and harmonising colours

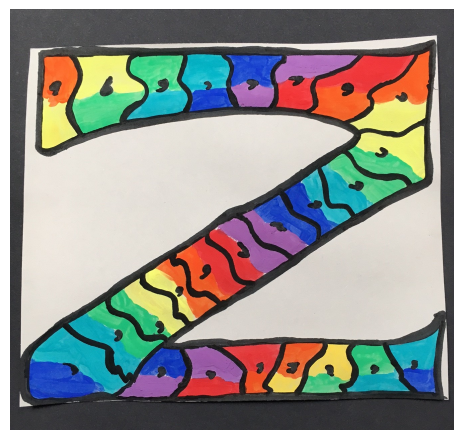
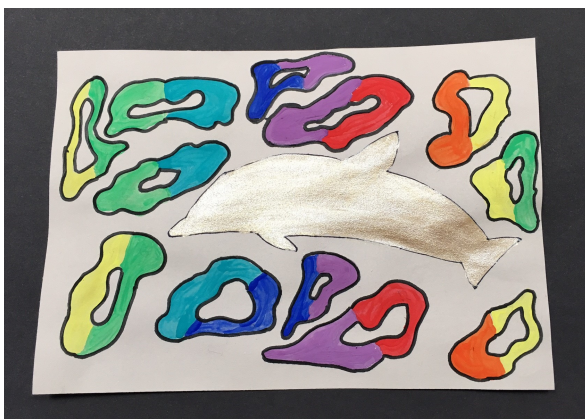
1. Draw a portrait or still life using two complimentary colours for example red and green or blue and orange, etc. In these examples of children's self-portraits, you can see that using complementary colours next to one another makes each colour appear brighter.

Encourage the children to colour some areas lightly and in other areas, press hard on the crayon. The use of heavily coloured lines in the hair adds texture. Suggest adding a pattern to a shirt or background to make the portraits more interesting.





2. Design a clock face that uses complementary colours to enable people to read the time easily, or design a sports kit using complementary or harmonising colours. Which kit do your children think looks best and why? Are they being influenced by something other than the colours?
3. Draw a set of shapes that are very similar to each other. The shapes could fill the outline of a bigger, recognisable, shape. Use the colour wheel to pick 2 harmonising colours. In one of the shapes, colour one side in one of the colours and the opposite side the other colour. Where the colours meet in the middle blend the colours together. Go around the colour wheel choosing different harmonising colours to gradually colour each shape, until your picture is completely coloured in.



4. A good way of supporting, even young, children to focus on colour is to give them old magazines/catalogues/fabrics. Assign each child a colour and have them cut out samples of that colour. In groups they can then make a colour wheel collage by assembling all the coloured samples onto a big colour wheel template. Children could sort their colour into different shades and marvel at the number of different colours that exist.

