

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2017

childArt

the  
**COLOR**  
issue

## Guest Editor's Corner

Color surrounds you. It is everywhere and you see millions of colors everyday. But what exactly do you see? When children are young, we teach them red, yellow, and blue as if colors are absolutes, but the more we learn about color, the less rigid our conception of color becomes. Perhaps the green you see isn't exactly the same as the green I see.

Scientist long believed we all saw the same colors. More recent studies show that color occurs in our minds as a response to our experiences of the outside world. We each develop similar yet not necessarily the same "color vision." Our understanding of color is shaped by our individual experiences. But even if we agree that a specific leaf is green or the ocean blue, colors can still fool our eyes.

Color can be like a chameleon that changes based on its surroundings. It can trick us because context changes not the color itself, but our perception of it. We rarely experience a single color all by itself, rather we find colors juxtaposed with other colors, influenced by different hues. A red square on a green background will seem brighter than the same red square placed on a bright, pure orange background. The logical part of your brain may know the red is the same, but the way we perceive it certainly changes.

The way we see color is constantly being influenced by lighting, the material or surface or an object, neighboring colors, and even how we feel. You could say that seeing color is not as much about what we actually see and more about what we think we see.

The renowned artist and color teacher Josef Albers said, "Color class prepares us to be fooled." Though Albers acknowledged the slippery nature of color, he also wanted his students to be delighted by the ability color has to deceive us. His goal in teaching color was "to open eyes," and that is the same goal I had as I selected the articles included in the "The Color issue" of Child Art magazine.

Each contributor has shared ideas about color that I know can open your eyes to seeing color more actively and your mind to thinking about colors differently. Throughout this issue you will find activities that give you a chance to experiment with color concepts and learn for yourself just how dynamic and powerful color can be.

When you approach color with a sense of wonder, its secrets will be revealed right before your eyes. You will discover the mystery and magic that has sparked the imagination and fascinated us for thousands of years. Color is so much more than simply an element of design. Color touches your heart, mind, and soul.



**Kate Smith**

President and Chief Color Maven  
Sensational Color

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# the power of **COLOR** hidden in plain sight

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Kate Smith

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There are millions of colors in the world, from the vibrant colors on a movie screen, to the subtle glow of a fading sunset, and the bright neon signs of a fast food restaurant. All you have to do is look around. You'll discover unique color is everywhere, and with the world as your palette, there are an infinite number of colors and never-ending color combinations.

## COLOR MULTIPLICATION

Now imagine if you took all of these colors and combinations and multiply that number by 7.5 billion people in the world. The huge number you would get as a result represents how many different ways people respond to colors. It is each person's unique experiences that makes the way they see, feel, or think about color different from the way you do.

To have a true understanding of how color influences all of us every day, you first need to expand your idea of what color is all about. There is more to color than what the eyes see.

## THE EFFECTS OF COLOR

Color finds its way into your eyes but also affects your heart, mind, and body, and you may not even realize

that this is happening. In fact, studies show that most of the time you aren't even aware of the influence color has on you, despite the fact that it is woven into your everyday moods and feelings.

Even when you are tuned in to the color around you, like on a sunny day when a room looks brighter than usual, or on a cloudy day when colors seem drab and lifeless, it can still be difficult to pin down exactly why you are feeling a particular way. That's because your responses to a color or color scheme is something that often occurs beneath the surface.

Many people have studied the effects of color. The research falls into three categories, which are color symbolism, color psychology, and personal color bias.

## COLOR SYMBOLISM: LEARNED RESPONSE

Color symbolism describes what you have learned about color in your childhood, the ideas and concepts shared by your family members and sometimes by your classmate and neighbors as well. In China, for example, red is a lucky color. It symbolizes good fortune and joy.

Red is found everywhere during the Chinese New Year and other holidays and family gatherings. However, in the United States red has many different color meanings, including getting attention and taking action. This is why the color red is used on sales signs.

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**Color finds its way into your eyes but also affects your heart, mind and body.**

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Ask a person from a western culture what color a wedding dress is, and the answer will be white. Years of seeing images of smiling brides dressed in white have put the idea that white equals bride.

Ask about the traditional color for a wedding dress in another part of the world, however, and you'll get a different answer. For example, in India, red is associated with bridal gowns. Our association of color and how it relates to a wedding dress is a learned response based on experiences in our own culture.

Now think of the many symbolic colors you incorporate into your own life. How many can you come up with?

**1** Start by thinking about the colors you associate with your favorite holiday.

**2** What colors do you wear when your favorite sports team is playing?

### COLOR PSYCHOLOGY: HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Color psychology is the study of color as it affects behavior. These are the responses to color that are automatic, and shared regardless of your age, gender, geographical area or cultural background. You share these reactions because you are human.

While the effects of color on the human body and brain are not yet fully understood, studies have shown that the light wavelengths of colors can stimulate the areas of the brain that regulate the body and affect moods and emotions.

For instance, being surrounded by blue can calm you down, while seeing red can increase your heart rate and speed up your breathing. These colors can tap into your emotions, too. Red can evoke feelings of aggression, while blue may make you feel at peace. This combination of physical and emotional responses adds to the effects of color.

Think about the color red. What comes to mind? This color has more associations than any other color,

but there are two that are most common. Red calls to mind love and romance: like the hearts on Valentine's Day. Red is also associated with fast cars, anger and road rage. When someone is furious we say, they are "seeing red." So how is it that the same color has come to represent two powerful emotions that seem so very different?

It's because red is inherently exciting. It stimulates energy and increases your blood pressure, respiration, heartbeat, and pulse rate. Think about love and rage. Both of these emotions produce similar physical reactions. Love, anger, and the color red all produce changes in our body that are very similar. Using the color red in symbols or phrases that describe love or anger reinforces the message because it's a double dose of the same physical and emotional reactions.

### COLOR MEANING: PERSONAL BIAS

As much as red may get your heart beating, not all of your emotional responses to color are instinctive. Through your life, you have developed your own, unique associations with colors. Your color memories, along with the feeling a color evokes – both positive and negative – are strongly linked to your childhood experiences and can have long lasting effects on how you respond to color.

Personal color associations can influence how you feel about a color

and also your decisions about it now and in the future. If your bedroom has green walls that you strongly dislike but your parents won't allow you to change, chances are you may never think of green as a perfect color for your home as an adult.

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Color symbolism and psychology easily become intertwined since our learned color associations often closely correspond to our natural reactions to the same color.

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When I was growing up, some of my best memories are from the time I spent in my grandmother's kitchen. The walls were painted a soft buttery yellow. Even now, all these many years later, when I see a yellow kitchen it also makes me smile and feel happy.

Color symbolism and psychology easily become intertwined since our learned color associations often closely correspond to our natural reactions to the same color. Sprinkle in your own color memories and you'll begin to realize how many layers there are to the effects of color. You can also begin to understand how powerful color associations are and why they stay in our minds.

