
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

How colour affects us



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Georgina

And I'm Georgina.

Neil

This is the programme where we hope to add some colour to your life by talking about an interesting subject and teaching you some useful vocabulary.

Georgina

And colour is what we're talking about today. What's your favourite colour, Neil?

Neil

Oh, I like green – a fresh, bold colour, that reminds me of nature – it can have a calming effect. And you?

Georgina

It's got to be blue – it reminds me of the sea, the sky – and holidays, of course!

Neil

Colour – no matter which one we prefer – affects how we feel. And we'll be talking about that soon. But not before I challenge you to answer my quiz question, Georgina – and it's a science question. Do you know what the splitting of white light into its different colours is called? Is it...

- a) dispersion
- b) reflection, or
- c) refraction?

Georgina

Hmmm, well I'm not a scientist, so I'll have a guess as c) refraction.

Neil

OK, I'll reveal the right answer later on. But now, let's talk more about colour. Colour can represent many different things, depending on where you come from. You can be '**green with envy**' – wishing you had what someone else had.

Georgina

And someone can feel blue – so feel depressed. We choose colours to express ourselves in what we wear or how we decorate our home.

Neil

The BBC Radio 4 programme, You and Yours, has been talking about colour and whether it affects everyone's mood. Karen Haller is a colour psychologist and a colour designer and consultant – she explained how colour affects us...

Karen Haller, colour psychologist and a colour design and consultant

It's the way that we take in the **wavelengths** of light because colour is **wavelengths** of light, and it's how that comes in through our eye, and then it goes into the part of our brain called the hypothalamus, which **governs** our sleeping patterns, our hormones, our behaviours, our appetite – it **governs** everything and so different colours and different frequencies or different **wavelengths** of light, we have different responses and different reactions to them.

Neil

So, colour is **wavelengths** of light - a wavelength is the distance between two waves of sound or light that are next to each other. As these wavelengths change, so does the colour we see.

Georgina

Thanks for the science lesson! Karen also explained that there's a part of our brain that controls – she used the word **govern** – how we feel and how we behave. And this can change depending on what colour we see.

Neil

Interesting stuff – of course, colour can affect us differently. Seeing red can make one person angry but someone else may just feel energised.

Georgina

Homeware and furnishing manufacturers offer a whole spectrum – or range – of colours to choose to suit everyone's taste, and mood. But during the recent coronavirus pandemic, there was a rise in demand for intense, bright shades and patterns. This was referred to as 'happy design' - design that was meant to help lift our mood.

Neil

Yes, and Karen Haller spoke a bit more about this on the You and Yours programme...

Karen Haller, colour psychologist and a colour design and consultant

In the time when everyone was out and we were all working, and we lived very busy lives, quite often what people wanted – they wanted a quiet **sanctuary** to come back to, so they had very **pale** colours or very low chromatic colours in their house – low saturation – because that helped them unwind and helped them relax and to feel very soothed. But what I have found since the first lockdown is a lot of people, because they're not getting that outside **stimulation**, they're actually putting a lot of brighter colours in their home because they're trying to bring in that feeling that they would have got when they were out – that excitement and that buzz.

Georgina

It seems that in our normal busy working lives, our homes were peaceful places and somewhere to relax – they were a **sanctuary**. To create this relaxing space, we use **pale** colours – ones that lack intensity, like sky blue.

Neil

But during the recent lockdowns, when we weren't outside much, we tried to get that **stimulation** - that excitement or experience – by decorating our homes with brighter colour. Such as yellow!

Georgina

Hmmm, perhaps a little too bright for me! It is all about personal taste and the connections we make with the colours we see but it makes sense that brighter colours can certainly lift our mood.

Neil

Now, earlier I asked you, Georgina, do you know what the splitting of white light into its different colours is called? Is it...

- a) dispersion
- b) reflection, or
- c) refraction?

Georgina

And I said it was refraction.

Neil

Sorry Georgina, that's wrong. It is actually called dispersion. Back to school for you – but not before we recap some of today's vocabulary.

Georgina

OK. Firstly we can describe someone who wishes they had what someone else has, as being **green with envy**.

Neil

We also talked about a **wavelength** - the distance between two waves of sound or light that are next to each other.

Georgina

To **govern** means to control or influence.

Neil

A **sanctuary** can be a peaceful or relaxing place – in some cases it can be a safe place for someone in danger.

Georgina

Stimulation describes the feeling of being excited, interested or enthused by something. And **pale** describes a colour that lacks intensity, it's not very bright – and for me, they're much better than a bold bright yellow!

Neil

Well, Georgina, thanks for showing your true colours! That's all for now, but we'll be picking another topic to discuss out of the blue, next time.

Georgina

Don't forget you can hear other 6 Minute English programmes and much more on our website at bbclearningenglish.com – and we're always posting stuff on our social media platforms. Bye for now.

Neil

Goodbye.

VOCABULARY

green with envy

the feeling someone has who wishes they had what someone else has

wavelength

distance between two waves of sound or light that are next to each other

govern

control or influence

sanctuary

peaceful, relaxing or safe place

stimulation

feeling of being excited, interested or enthused by something

pale

colour that lacks intensity