

How colors got their names:

Answer key

1. Color associations

What is the first object, feeling, or idea that comes to mind when you see these colors? Discuss your associations with a partner.

- **Red:** Answers will vary. (e.g., love, danger, anger, stop)
- **Blue:** Answers will vary. (e.g., calm, sadness, sky, water)
- **Green:** Answers will vary. (e.g., nature, money, envy, go)
- **Yellow:** Answers will vary. (e.g., happiness, sunshine, caution, warmth)
- **Black:** Answers will vary. (e.g., death, elegance, mystery, night)
- **Purple:** Answers will vary. (e.g., royalty, magic, creativity, luxury)

2. Vocabulary preview: The language of color history

Match the words with their definitions. These words will help you understand the video.

- b. To become aware of something through the senses, especially sight.

1. To perceive	
2. Gradation	f. A range of gradual differences or stages.
3. Landmark (study)	a. An important event or discovery that marks a turning point.
4. Hierarchy	d. A system in which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.
5. Dichotomy	g. A division or contrast between two things that are represented as being opposed or entirely different.
6. Euphemism	c. A mild or indirect word substituted for one considered too harsh or blunt.
7. Vibrance	h. The quality of being bright, strong, and striking.
8. Proficient	e. Skilled or accomplished in a particular activity.

3. Video: The surprising history of color names

Watch the video and answer these questions to understand the main ideas.

1. What did a landmark study find about the order in which languages develop color words?

A landmark study found that languages develop color words in a specific, universal order. The first words are always for black and white, followed by red, then yellow and green, and then blue.

2. Why did the word for 'blue' appear much later than other colors?

The word for 'blue' appeared later because the color blue is very rare in nature, apart from the sky, which didn't need a specific color name to be identified. Words for blue were not needed until humans began creating blue dyes and paints.

3. Which came first: the color orange or the fruit?

The fruit came first. The word 'orange' was adopted in English after Portuguese merchants started importing the fruit from Asia. Before that, the color was simply called 'yellow-red'.

[Watch the video on YouTube](#)

4. Listening for detail

Watch the video again (from 01:53 to 04:30). Are these statements true or false according to the video? Correct the false statements.

1. The English word 'white' comes from a root word meaning 'to burn'.

False

Correction: The word 'white' comes from a root meaning 'to shine'. The word 'black' comes from a root meaning 'to burn'.

2. The word 'green' is related to words like 'graze' and 'grass'.

True

3. Humans can perceive more shades of blue than any other color.

False

Correction: Humans can perceive more shades of green than any other color.

4. The original Sanskrit name for the orange fruit was 'naranga'.

True

5. Redheads are called that because the word 'orange' didn't exist in English for a long time.

True

5. Grammar focus: Describing origins and etymology

When we talk about where words or ideas come from (their **etymology**), we often use specific verb phrases. These are common in historical and academic contexts.

- **`[Word] can be traced back to...`** (Emphasizes a long history)
- **`[Word] comes from...`** (Common and direct)
- **`[Word] goes back to...`** (Similar to 'comes from', suggests a historical journey)
- **`[Word] is based on...`** (The origin is a source or a model)
- **`[Word] referred to...`** (Used to explain the original meaning)

Complete the sentences using a suitable phrase from the box above to describe the origin of these color names from the video.

1. The word 'black' **goes back to / can be traced back to** the Proto-Indo-European root 'bhleg', which meant 'to burn'.
2. 'Yellow' **comes from** the P.I.E. root 'ghel', which also gave us words like 'gold' and 'glow'.
3. The name 'purple' **comes from** the Latin word 'purpura', which was a type of shellfish used for dye.
4. The word 'brown' **can be traced back to / comes from** the P.I.E. root 'bher', which meant 'bright' or 'polished'.
5. Before the fruit was imported, the color we call orange **was referred to as** 'geoluhread' (yellow-red).

6. Vocabulary in context: The story of words

Complete the sentences with the correct word from the box. You may need to change the form of the word.

perceive

hierarchy

dichotomy

euphemism

proficient

vibrance

landmark

gradation

1. The study by Berlin and Kay was a **landmark** piece of research that changed how we think about color language.
2. The human eye can **perceive** millions of slight **gradations** of color.
3. The most fundamental **dichotomy** in early language was between light and darkness.
4. Languages seem to develop color words in a specific **hierarchy**, starting with black, white, and red.
5. Because it was dangerous to say the animal's real name, hunters used a **euphemism**: "the brown one."
6. The **vibrance** of the purple dye made it very popular among royalty.
7. It wasn't until humans became more **proficient** artists that the number of color names exploded.

7. Discussion: Colors in your culture

Discuss these questions with a partner or in a small group. Use the vocabulary and grammar from the lesson.

- Think about your native language. Do any color names come from objects, like 'orange' in English? What about a flower, a stone, or an animal? **Answers will vary. Encourage students to use the lesson's vocabulary and grammar structures.**
- What do colors like red, white, green, and black symbolize in your culture? Are they associated with weddings, funerals, holidays, or specific emotions? **Answers will vary.**
- The video says we have fewer names for cool colors (like green and blue) than for warm colors (like red and yellow). Do you think this is true in your language? Why might this be? **Answers will vary.**

- In English, we have idioms like "feeling blue" (sad) or "seeing red" (angry). What color idioms exist in your language? Explain them to your partner. **Answers will vary.**

8. Writing task: What's in a name?

Choose a color that wasn't discussed in detail in the video (e.g., pink, grey, silver, indigo). Do a quick online search to find its etymology. Write a short paragraph (50-70 words) explaining where its name comes from. Use at least two of the phrases for describing origins from exercise 5.

Example: **Crimson**

*The word **crimson** can be traced back to the Arabic word 'qirmizi', which itself comes from 'qirmiz', the name for an insect. This insect, the kermes, was used to create a deep red dye. The name for the color, therefore, is based on the source of its pigment.*

Your chosen color: **Pink (Example Answer)**

The word 'pink' **comes from the name of a flower with fringed petals. Interestingly, the flower's name **can be traced back to** a 14th-century verb, 'to pink', which meant to cut a decorative jagged edge, like with pinking shears. So, the color is ultimately named after an action. The name was first used to describe the pale red color in the late 17th century.**