

Disclaimer: NOTE TO STUDENTS: This information is not "authoritative" - I am not an expert on this topic. This page was created first for my students to give them an awareness of symbolism of colors in different cultures. Some of the listings come from Pagan/Witchcraft sites which would not be acceptable for my students to view from school (sites would be blocked now by filtering software) - so I copied the lists (without permission). If you are doing research - look for sources that have been researched and can be verified. ~Judy Decker -Mrs. Green

Color Symbolism:

Color is considered one of the most useful and powerful design tools you have. People respond to different colors in different ways, and these responses take place on a subconscious, emotional level. In our American culture, black has long been associated with death, while white is believed to signify life and purity. In the Orient, however, white is the traditional color of mourning. In the United States, black has also come to suggest sophistication and formality. Americans generally associate trust and stability with the color blue, while Koreans have this reaction to pink and other pastel colors.

In the Western Culture:

Colors represent holidays and seasons of the year.
Halloween: Orange and Black.

Cherokee

The Four Directions
Colors were associated with the four directions.
West was black the color meaning problems and death.

Navajo Meanings of Colors

This information was posted to Getty Teacher Art Exchange by Christine Merriam
The Four Sacred Mountains and directions are associated with colors. The Navajos belief is that their Creator placed them on the land between the following 4 mountains representing the 4 cardinal directions:
Black: Mount Hesperus Dibe Nitsaa (Big Mountain Sheep) - Obsidian Mountain Sacred Mountain of the North La Plata Mountains, Colorado. http://www.lapahie.com/Sacred_Mts.cfm
The principal colors, white, blue, yellow and black are linked to the four sacred mountains as well as the directions-

White Mountain Apaches

Four sacred colors of the White Mountain Apaches in east central Arizona contrast interestingly with the Cherokee colors:
Black is west, home of the sun's setting

Medicine Wheel color symbolism:

WEST- black-introspection, self examination, reflection-bear

The Flag of the Flag of the Iowa Nation

The color of the streamers brings together the four primary colors in Native American art, the black, yellow, red and white. These colors are said to represent the four races of man and the four prime directions of the compass. With its use of color and its chosen emblems the flag of the Iowas may be the most typical of all Native American flags.

Native American Color Symbolism (varies by ethnic group - this source was not "authoritative")

Black (Hearing) Harmony; listening

Asian Color Symbolism

Black: Career, evil influences, knowledge, mourning, penance, self-cultivation

Color Therapy - Color and the Brain

Specific colors have different effects (list copied from Biopulse.org)

Black: self-confidence, power, strength

All About the Color Black

Black is authoritative and powerful; because black can evoke strong emotions, too much can be overwhelming. Black represents a lack of color, the primordial void, emptiness. It is a classic color for clothing, possibly because it makes the wearer appear thinner and more sophisticated.

HOW THE COLOR BLACK AFFECTS US PHYSICALLY

- makes one feel inconspicuous
- provides a restful emptiness
- is mysterious by evoking a sense of potential and possibility

THE MEANING OF BLACK AROUND THE GLOBE

- In Chinese culture, colors corresponded with the five primary elements, the directions, and the four seasons. Black was associated with water, north, and winter.
- In Aztec culture, black represented war because black obsidian glass was used as the cutting edge of battle swords. It was also the symbol of religion; priests wore no other color but black.
- In the west, black is the color of mourning but the custom of wearing unadorned black clothing for mourning dates back at least to the Roman Empire, when the Toga pulla made of dark-colored wool was worn during periods of mourning.
- In rural areas of Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece widows will wear black for the rest of their lives. The immediate family members of the deceased will wear black for an extended period of time.
- In England, taxi cabs are traditionally black.
- In China, black is a traditional clothing color for boys.

POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS OF BLACK

- Mussolini's Fascist militia was known as "the Blackshirts."
- Black is the color of the Portuguese political party Leftwing Bloc.

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT BLACK

- A black cat crossing one's path is considered bad luck in many cultures, except in England, where spotting a black cat is considered good luck.
- Black implies weight — people will think a black box weighs more than a white one.
- The color black is associated with sophistication and power...tuxedos, limousines, judge's robes, and priests' attire are all typically black.
- Musicians in an orchestra pit often wear all black during live concerts, so as not to draw attention away from the stage performers.
- The color black is so widely regarded as sophisticated in fashion that the term "the new black" is often used to describe and give merit to a color trend.
- One old wives' tale claims that if a woman is buried wearing the color black, she'll come back to haunt the family.
- Do. Black symbolizes the combination of all colors of the universe. From black, all colors originate and spring up to create the lively rainbow. The Black Belt is the beginning of true achievement, understanding and wisdom, and blending the mind and the body into one, into a unity within oneself and with the universe.

BLACK IN ATHLETICS AND SPORTS

- Football teams include the Oakland Raiders, New Orleans Saints, and Carolina Panthers.
- Baseball teams include the Chicago White Sox, San Francisco Giants, and Pittsburgh Pirates.
- Dr. Jigor Kano, founder of Judo, created divisions among students using Belt colors, in order to give students recognition for certain achievements. The Black Belt is the highest color belt in most martial arts, including ITF and WTF of Tae Kwon

BLACK AS A SIGNATURE COLOR

- Johnny Cash — This country music icon was referred to as "the man in black."
- Roy Orbison — His trademark black sunglasses caused a lot of speculation.
- Kiss — American rock band Kiss was known for their black wigs, black clothes, and painted faces.

COMPANIES OR BRANDS IDENTIFIED WITH BLACK

- Chanel

POPULAR PHRASES THAT INCLUDE THE COLOR BLACK

- Black comedy: creating comedy out of a tragic event or situation
- Black coffee: coffee without milk
- Black belt: the highest awarded belt in the martial arts
- Blackball: voting against someone in a secret manner to prevent them from becoming a member of a club
- Blackmail: to demand payment or action by means of a threat
- Black sheep: a bad character in an otherwise respectable group
- Black day: a bad day; often used before the name of a particular day to symbolize a tragic event, such as black Tuesday or black Friday.

Please note that while the terms above illustrate how black has historically been used in language, equating black to negativity is outmoded (outdated) and using these terms could be hurtful. **Like color, language is a powerful tool, so please always choose your colors and words wisely.**

QUOTES ABOUT BLACK

- “I’ve been 40 years discovering that the queen of all colors was black.” — Pierre-Auguste Renoir
- “Black is real sensation, even if it is produced by entire absence of light. The sensation of black is distinctly different from the lack of all sensations.” — Hermann von Helmholtz
- “I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down, / Livin’ in the hopeless, hungry side of town, / I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime, / But is there because he’s a victim of the times.” — Johnny Cash
- “Without black, no color has any depth. But if you mix black with everything, suddenly there’s shadow – no, not just shadow, but fullness. You’ve got to be willing to mix black into your palette if you want to create something that’s real.” — Amy Grant
- “People can have the Model T in any color – so long as it’s black.” — Henry Ford
- “Black is not a color.” — Edouard Manet
- “There’s something about black. You feel hidden away in it.” — Georgia O’Keeffe
- “Black seems to make a colour cloudy, but darkness doesn’t. A ruby could thus keep getting darker without ever becoming cloudy; but if it became blackish red, it would become cloudy.” — Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein
- “Black is a color of power and strength, and to see all those players, with the captains linking their arms in front – it’s a powerful picture.” –Hayden Fry

WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT YOU WHEN YOU BUY A BLACK VEHICLE

- There is no question that the vehicle you drive is an extension of your personality — an unspoken but clear message to the rest of the world.
- The message you send by driving a Black vehicle: Empowered, not easily manipulated, loves elegance, appreciates classics.

SONGS WITH BLACK IN THE TITLE

- *Baby's in Black* by The Beatles
- *Paint it Black* by The Rolling Stones
- *Back in Black* by AC/DC
- *Black and Blue* by Van Halen
- *Black Betty* by Lynyrd Skynyrd
- *Black Country Woman* by Led Zeppelin
- *Black Crow Blues* by Bob Dylan
- *Black Magic Woman* by Carlos Santana
- *Black Velvet* by Alannah Myles

BLACK IN THE GARDEN

- Why grow black flowers? Not just for the sake of having a conversation piece in your garden, although they are good for that. The best reason is because they have so many design uses. For example, black flowers are great for cooling down hot colors, like fire-engine-red 'Lucifer' crocosmia or hot-orange Mexican sunflower. – *Garden Gate Magazine*
- The magic of black flowers has attracted our attention for centuries. Black tulips and black roses appear to originate from a fairytale world.
- A pure black flower is the Holy Grail of plant breeders worldwide. Their improbable and "unnatural" color inspires a powerful feeling of mystical expectation.
- Creating a black garden needs to be given some thought. Is your aim formal or modern? Do you wish to use black as accents and highlights or as the main color? Forget people who say that black cannot be used on its own and don't argue over what is or is not black, just simply plant it. Use the differing tones and hues to enhance the overall feeling. Be certain of one thing: this color is not gloomy. It is modern and vibrant. It mixes so easily with other colors of the spectrum, above all with green, chartreuse, gold, and silver. – *Karen Platt*

BLACK AND OUR SENSE OF TASTE

- Black tea accounts for over 90% of the tea consumption in the western world. The characteristic flavors of black tea range from flowery to fruity, nutty, and spicy and emerge during the production process. – *SpecialTeas*
- A pinch of black pepper is added to almost every type of recipe imaginable. Once used as currency and presented to the gods as a sacred offering, it is fortunate that this most popular of spices is available throughout the year. – *whfoods.org*
- True licorice candy contains an extract from the root of the licorice plant, *Glycyrrhiza glabra*. This licorice root has been used since ancient times to flavor and sweeten candies, teas, throat lozenges, pharmaceuticals, and other products. Today many, but not all, black licorice candies are flavored with licorice extract. – *Hersheys.com*

BLACK AND OUR SENSE OF SMELL

- Anise: Licorice scent. An all time favorite of licorice lovers. Aromatherapy benefits: Cheering, sense-enhancing, mildly euphoric. – *Scent It.com*
- Licorice: mysterious, spicy-sharp, almost louche — as scents go, licorice is notoriously polarizing. Blended into perfumes, it gives otherwise ho-hum fragrances a “sexy, murky spin.” – *Cristina Mueller* (Lucky magazine Sept. 2006)
- “Licorice” was the original scent of the black colored Magic Scents Crayons from Binney & Smith Inc., introduced in 1994 with mostly food scents. However, there were numerous reports that children were eating the food-scented crayons, so the food scents were retired and replaced with non-food scents. The scent for the color black became “leather jacket.”

MOOD:
