

Introduction to Color



Exploring primary and secondary colors, warm and cool colors, complementary colors, a basic color wheel, and two optical illusions

This resource has seven sections:

- Primary Colors
- Secondary Colors
- Warm and Cool Colors
- Complementary Colors
- The Magic of a Color Wheel
- Contrasting Colors to Black and White
- Spotting Colors in a Drawing



Tip!

When you learn colored pencil techniques and basic color theory, you have the option of creating drawings in color.

Compare the colored pencil drawing in Figure 1 to the grayscale version in Figure 2 to see why colored pencils were chosen for this tattoo design.

Figure 1

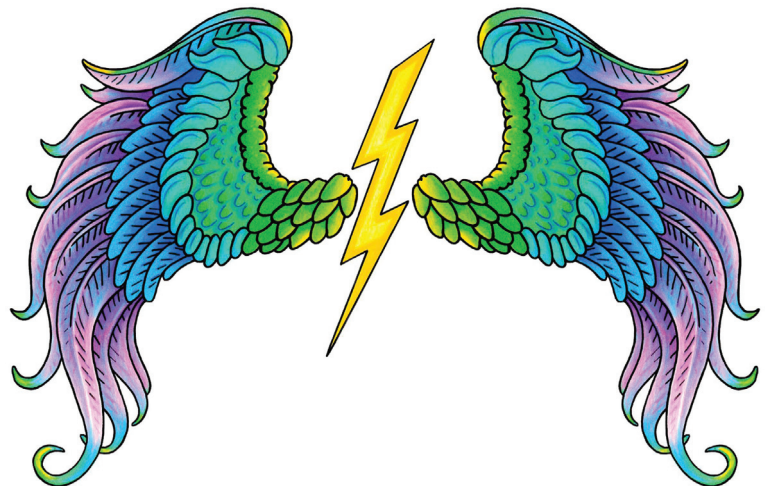
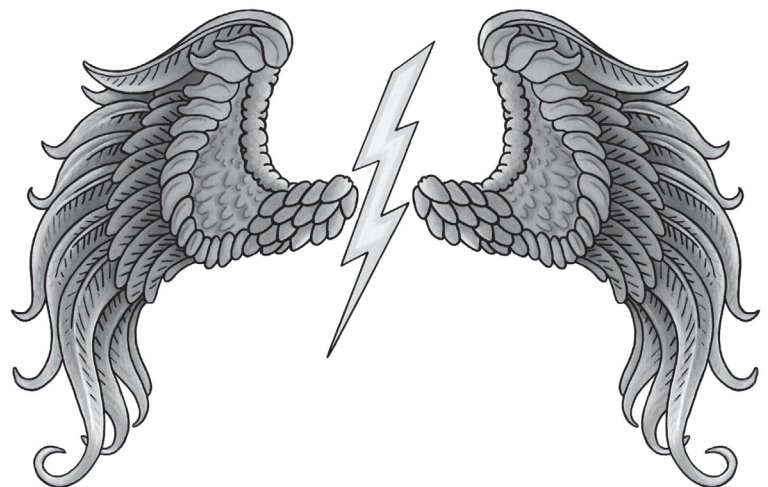


Figure 2



Primary Colors

The three primary colors are yellow, red, and blue (Figure 3).

All other colors originate from primary colors and no combinations of other colors can make primary colors.

Primary colors are high-intensity and a drawing looks brighter and more vibrant when all three are used. You can create millions of different colors by mixing two or three primary colors together in various intensities.

Yellow (Figure 4) is bright, cheery, and powerful. Yellow is the color of happiness, sunshine, and several types of flowers, including daffodils and dandelions.

Red (Figure 5) is the warmest and most energetic primary color. Red is associated with love, energy, and danger – such as a red traffic light.

Blue (Figure 6) represents tranquility, harmony, and peace – as in a blue sky, a calm ocean, or an iceberg.

Figure 3



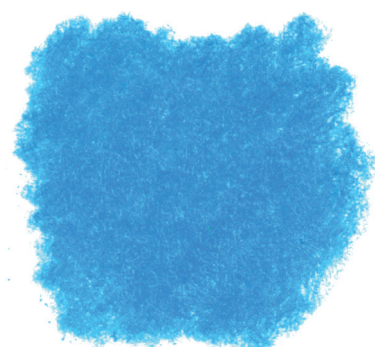
Figure 4



Figure 5



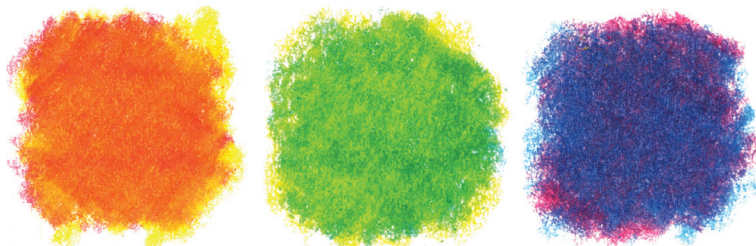
Figure 6



Secondary Colors

The three secondary colors (Figure 7) are orange, green, and purple. Each secondary color is created by mixing two primary colors together.

Figure 7



Orange (Figure 8) is created by mixing yellow with red. Orange is energetic, vibrant, and flamboyant.

Green (Figure 9) is created by mixing yellow with blue. Green is soothing, nurturing, and calming.

Purple (Figure 10) is created by mixing red with blue. Purple is spiritual, mysterious, and exotic; and represents royalty, nobility, and enlightenment.

Figure 8

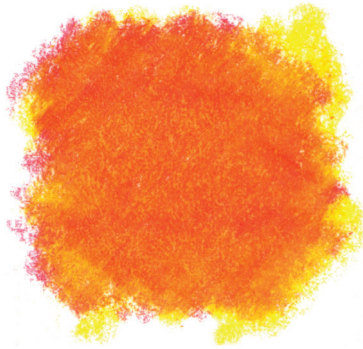


Figure 9

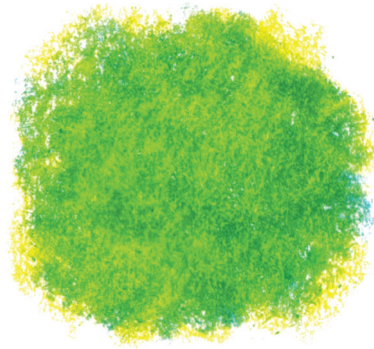
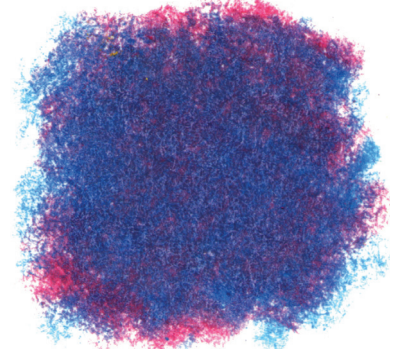


Figure 10



Warm and Cool Colors

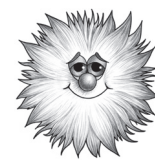
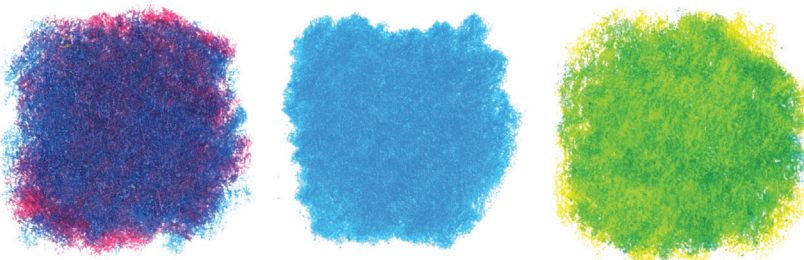
Yellow, orange, and red are considered warm colors (Figure 11). They are dramatic, bright, bold, and energetic – the colors you see in fire.

Figure 11



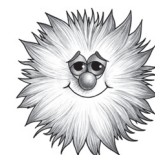
Blue, green, and purple are considered cool colors (Figure 12) – the colors you see in snow and ice. They tend to be soothing and calming.

Figure 12



As an Aside

Some greens that have more yellow than blue are considered to be warm colors, as are some purples that have more red than blue.



As an Aside

Colored pencils come in a wide variety of qualities, from student to professional. The permanency rating of the pigment used in the mixture helps determine the ultimate quality of the pencils.

During the manufacturing process, various synthetic and/or organic pigments are added to wax and binding agents such as clay or chalk.

Complementary Colors

Each of the two colors that makes up a set of complementary colors is very different. When placed beside one another, the powerful contrast seems to make each color brighter and more vibrant.

When used in a drawing, a set of complementary colors creates harmony because each set contains all three primary colors.

Examine three sets of complementary colors:

Figure 13: yellow and purple (purple is made with red and blue)

Figure 14: orange and blue (orange is made with yellow and red)

Figure 15: red and green (green is made with yellow and blue)

Figure 13

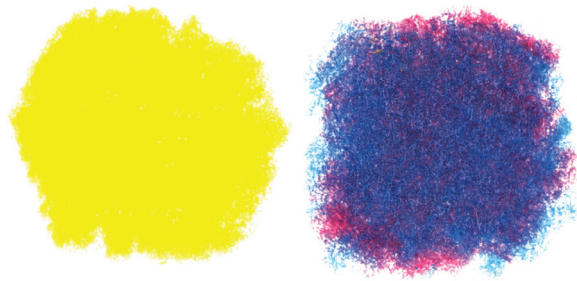


Figure 14

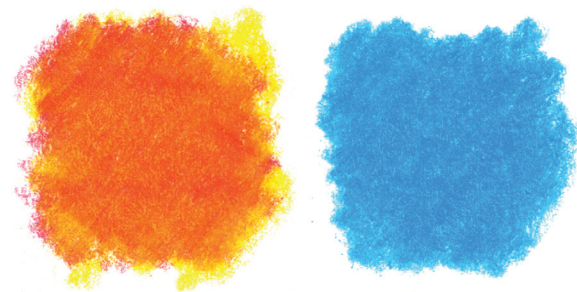


Figure 15

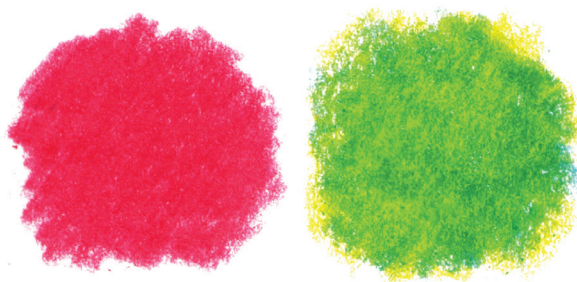
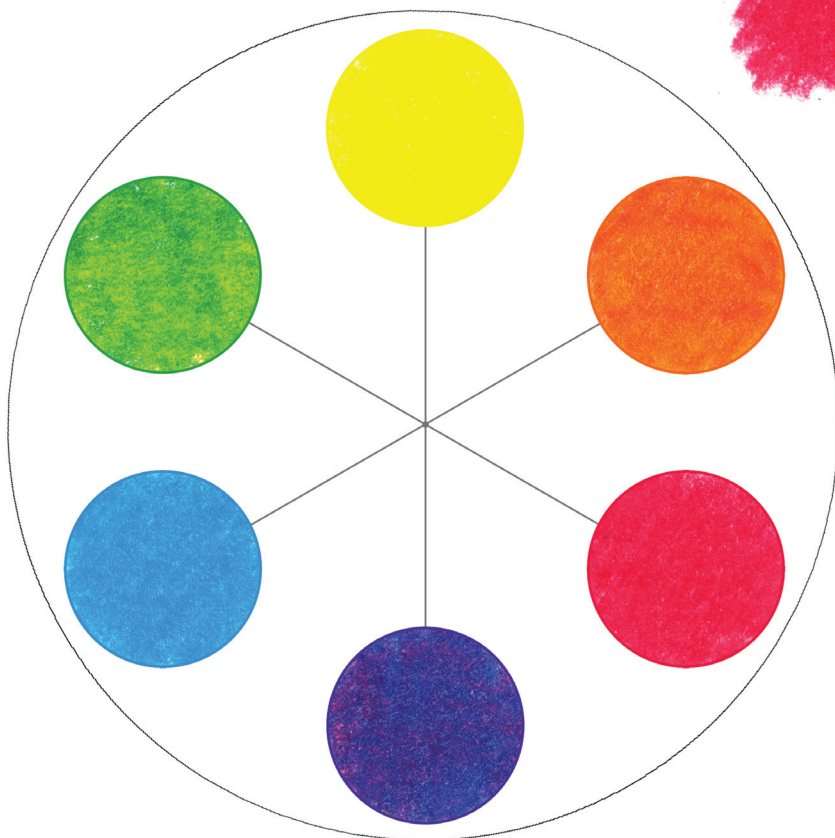


Figure 16



The Magic of a Color Wheel

A color wheel (Figures 16 to 18) is a circular format of colors arranged to easily reference primary, secondary, and complementary colors.

Keep a color wheel close by when you draw so that you have an easy reference for choosing colors.

Sets of complementary colors are easy to find on a color wheel because they are directly across from one another. If you ever forget which sets of colors are complementary, just look for any two colors that are directly opposite on a color wheel.

Although complementary colors appear brighter when placed next to one another, this is actually an optical illusion!

Contrasting Colors to Black and White

Compare the six colors in Figure 17 to the six colors in Figure 18 – which set of colors appears to be brighter?

Contrast creates the illusion that the colors on the black color wheel are brighter than the set on the white color wheel. In reality, each set of six colors is identical.

Compare the size of the color wheel in Figure 17 to the one in Figure 18. Which is larger?

In fact, they are the same size. A dark circle (Figure 18) tends to look smaller than a light circle (Figure 17).

Figure 17

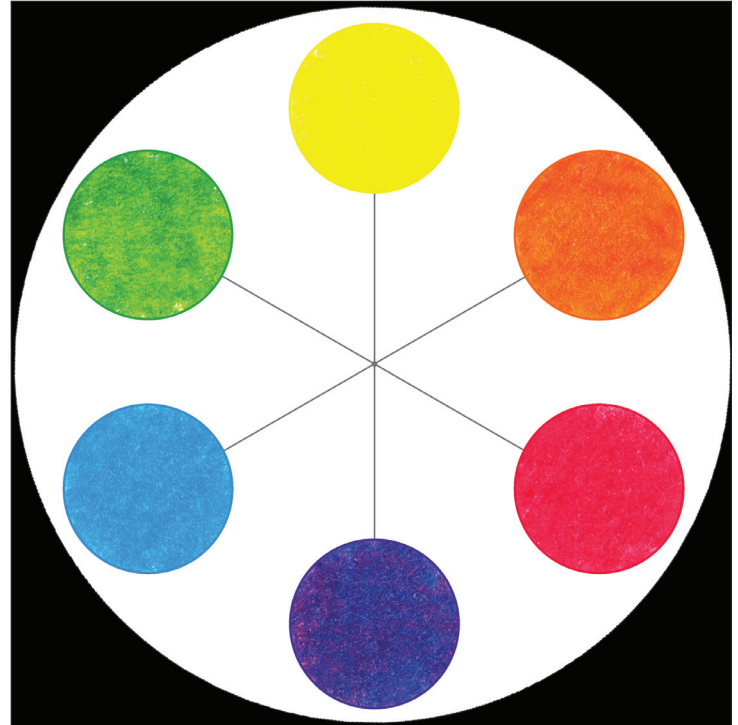
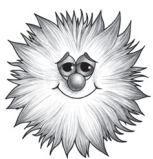
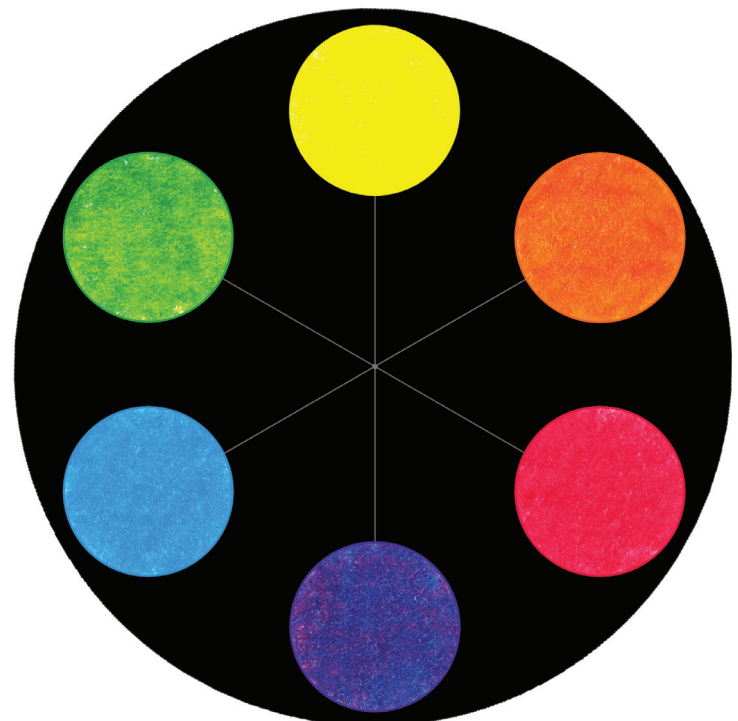


Figure 18



As an Aside

Colored pencils were originally developed for commercial artists and illustrators.

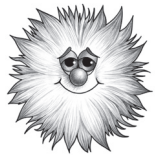
Over the past few decades, “painting” with colored pencils has gained a new respect within fine art disciplines.

Spotting Colors in a Drawing

Examine the colored pencil drawing of an adorable cartoon puppy in Figure 19.

Find the following:

- Three primary colors
- Three secondary colors
- Three warm colors
- Three cool colors



As an Aside

Colored pencils are a wonderful medium for drawing everything and anything.

They beautifully render delicate drawings such as portraits and flowers, and also work very well for subjects that need a bolder, more colorful approach.

Colored pencils are relatively neat, inexpensive, and portable tools for “painting.”

Figure 19

