

Color Symbolism

Color symbolism is one of the most universal of all types of symbolism, and has been consciously used in the liturgy, in heraldy, alchemy, art and literature. While the following are universal interpretations of color symbology, one must avoid the temptation to evolve any hard-and-fast system of allegories. Bear in mind that the purity of a color will be part of the purity of its symbolic meaning.

Generally, in Western culture, dark colors tend to represent gloom or evil, while light colors represent illumination, glory, and good. Thus dark blue is grouped with black and azure or light blue is coupled with white. Blue is darkness made visible. Color symbolism in other cultures, such as Asian may differ. For example, while black is associated with death in our culture, in China, white is the color of death.

The belief that colors may be grouped according to whether they are of positive value (associated with light) or negative value (linked with darkness) is echoed even in present-day aesthetics. The following are probably the most important color symbols found in Western society and literature. While the list is comprehensive, it is by no means exhaustive (within specific texts, colors can assume additional meanings):

Blue — associated with the Roman god and goddess Jupiter (Zeus) and Juno (Hera) who are god and goddess of heaven, stands for religious feeling, devotion, and innocence. Blue also stands for the vertical and the spatial of the symbolism of levels—height, the blue sky above; depth, the blue sea below.

Green — associated with Venus (Aphrodite) and nature, the fertility of the fields, and often fertility itself.

Violet — nostalgia and memories, because it is made up from blue, signifying devotion, and red, meaning passion.

Yellow — associated with Apollo, the sun god; indicates magnanimity (overwhelming goodness), intuition, and intellect

Orange — pride and ambition. Often associated with fire and flames.

Red — associated with Mars represents passion (both physical and violence), and the life-giving principle. It is also the color of blood and for this reason, prehistoric man would stain with blood any object which he wished to bring to life. It is also associated with fire.

Grey — neutralization (being a combination of black and white), egoism, depression, inertia, and indifference; meanings also derived from the color of ashes.

Purple — comparable to, yet the inverse of violet, represents power, spirituality, and sublimation. Often associated with royalty.

Pink — the color of the flesh, sensuality, and the emotions

Brown — Earth or earthiness.

Gold — the sun, glory

Silver — the moon

Black — the initial germinal stages of all processes, evil, primal, occult, time

White — good, innocence, purity, timelessness, intuition of the beyond, knowledge

White/Black — dualism, opposites (as in the Chinese ying-yang), life/death, light/darkness, appearance/disappearance