



Colour

The colour combinations artists use can have a dramatic effect on the way we feel. Discover how artists have used colour by looking at a range of works and answering these questions.

Colour range

- Identify the colour types in the art work – eg, primary (red, yellow, blue), secondary (purple, green, orange), complementary (red and green, orange and blue, purple and yellow), monochrome (shades of one colour). Are any areas on the colour wheel missing? If so, which ones?
- Are the colours naturalistic or enhanced?
- Has the artist used pairs of complementary colours? If so, are these colours together or apart? What effect do they create?

Tone

- Has the artist used shades (colour plus black) or tints (colour plus white)?
- Is the overall colour tone light or dark, bright or dull?
- How does the overall colour tone affect the mood of the painting?

Warmth

- Does the art work include warm or cool colours? If it includes both, note their position in relation to each other. What effect do these colours have on how the art work makes you feel?

Depth

- Do colours help to establish a sense of depth in the work, or do they flatten it? Have the colours been blended to define 3-D forms, or are there flat areas of distinct colour?

Colour

Contrast

- Have contrasting (strikingly different) colours been used for a particular effect in the art work?
If so, describe this effect.

Density

- Are the colours opaque (solid) or translucent (see-through), or a mixture?
- Can you see any layers of colour?
- Describe the density, sheen, and surface of the colour.

Composition

- Which colours are dominant? To identify them, note the path your eye takes over the art work.
- Has colour been used to link different parts of the composition?

Symbolism

- How does colour contribute to the meaning of the work? Do any of the colours symbolise something? Could the artist be using certain colours for cultural reasons? If so, which colours and why?

Effect

- Describe the overall effect of colour in the art work. Do the colours evoke a certain mood, atmosphere, or emotional response?

