

University of Chicago Transfer Application Supplemental Essay

1. We're all familiar with green-eyed envy or feeling blue, but what about being "caught purple-handed"? Or "tickled orange"? Give an old color-infused expression a new hue and tell us what it represents. – Inspired by Ramsey Bottorff, Class of 2026

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BEFORE WILL'S REVISIONS

There is an expression I'd like to offer for your own consideration. It's a phrase I often revisit when trying to express how I'm split between two sides—stuck in a paradoxical median of the best and better, entranced in a back-and-forth dance between order and chaos, or caught in the crossfire of two camps called no man's land. When people attempt to capture this paradox, they often brand it as the "gray area." It's meant to describe the vagueness that lies between black and white, but to me, this expression is terribly limited and outdated. Black and white are locked in a unidimensional stratum, which is not able to capture the multifaceted complexion of the unique human experience.

Color is ultimately a three-dimensional measurement: it's not merely light, but also hue and saturation. Black and white simply don't do justice to the perplexity of the events that unfold in our lives. Ergo, I'd like to propose a new expression of the "gray area". Since we are no longer trapped in the colorless options of television prior to the mid-twentieth century, we can stop using that drab expression and instead utilize all the glory of the complexity of color. Let us call it, "orange area."

Why "orange," you might ask? Do you find it grisly? An unresolved hue and an outlier at best? Good. That's why it's the perfect choice. Orange is a color that presides over a niche milieu. It's calm yet disturbing. A close comparison can be made with its fruit-counterpart—an orange. Within the first bite, the orange exudes both sweet and sour, sometimes very sweet, other times too sour. Its essence is unpredictable, soundly resembling the nature of life.

Orange sits between two colors: red and yellow. Red, in its effulgence, espouses its intensity and macho. It's the color of fiery passionate love, or the anger felt from a killer's gaze. It summons your attention and echoes power. Yellow is the opposite. A comforting, bright color, it's cousins with daffodils and champions a happy-go-lucky lifestyle. Yet, it can be overwhelming at times, keeping you mellow and fatigued. In the middle of these two extremes, sits orange. It carries with it the intensity of red and warmth of yellow, but it's not an exact average of the two. It's the antithesis of predictability, defying all labels and categories.

The very phrase “orange area” carries an unease—an awkwardness and unfamiliar string of consonants and vowels to your tongue, as well as a complicated visualization in meaning. This, ironically, makes it more fitting than “gray area.” A gray area is supposed to represent ambiguity, yet the color itself is all too neutral, too subdued, as if it can classify the very uncertainty it aims to describe. But true ambiguity is not very neat; instead it’s disorienting and uncomfortable. For this reason, orange is better. It opposes its own moniker, just as uncertainty opposes easy classification. In trying to pin it down, it shifts, being too bright to be ignored, yet all too strange to feel entirely comfortable. In this way, we don’t merely describe the uncertainty, we are able to embody it with our words.

Furthermore, we can add a whole new axis: brightness. From this point, we can begin to traverse the spectrum of orange in a wholly new way—light or dark orange. If we find ourselves needing to add a dollop of hope and optimism, we may describe it as a light-orange area. But if things need an appropriate black tone peppered in, we may describe it as a dark-orange area. This flexibility gives the person on the receiving-end a more nuanced understanding, acknowledging grayness, but also the fluctuating rich flavors of life.

On this account, it must be acknowledged, that is, orange’s superior fulfillment of gray’s long-overdue role. Life is far more unpredictable than we may want it to be, and are never in a simple transition between a black-and-white world. We are in the orange area, where dual ideas meet, where transitions occur, where clarity is too-often fleeting, and where confusion transpires. Hence, our language must evolve too, to reflect this enormous complexity, that is, life. If we are stuck between two conflicting camps, emotions, ideas, opportunities, or choices, we cannot merely say we are in a gray area. It’s an orange area, filled with both sweet and sour.

It’s time we move beyond simple labels, and profess the space between certainty and uncertainty as not solely gray. It’s vibrant and full of mysterious hues of orange. Call it an orange area.

AFTER WILL’S REVISIONS

There is a phrase that I often revisit when attempting to express the idea of being stuck in the middle—in the “no man’s land,” so to speak. Ah yes—the “gray area.” It is used to describe the nebulous limbo that lies between black and white. But to me, this expression is egregiously limited. For one, black and white are locked in a unidimensional spectrum, which is woefully incapable of capturing the multifaceted complexity of the human experience.

It’s a tragic misnomer, really. A gray area is supposed to represent ambiguity, yet the color itself is all too neutral, too subdued. Its dullness can hardly capture the chaos, discomfort, and paradoxicality that actually characterize the ambiguity in so-called “gray areas.” The uncertainty of a dire moral quandary? A relationship with ill-defined boundaries? Undesignated territory in a bloody conflict? These are anything but “gray.” Moreover, the complexity of color, a three

dimensional quality composed of brightness, hue, and saturation, far surpasses the utility of comparatively drab and antiquated black-and-white. Ergo, I propose that we call it, “orange area.”

Why “orange,” you might ask? Imagine it in your mind’s eye. Do you find it repellant? Or better yet, lay your eyes upon some innocent object with the unfortunate fate of bearing its dreadful glow. Is it not utterly irksome? Do not your retinas cry out for respite from its blaring brightness?

There is indeed something disturbing about the way it glares at you. On animals and on man-made signage, orange warns of poison and danger. It evokes images of perilous canyon walls and corroded metal. Something about it seems to squawk like a toucan. Its alter ego, “amber,” gets its namesake from fossilized sap that sadistically imprisons its insect victims in eternal purgatory. Unsurprisingly, it is the most commonly disliked color in the world. Hence, it is the perfect color to describe the horrible agony of being torn between two realms.

I once read that every color has an “evil shade”—every color except orange. Red’s sinister rendition is scarlet, with all of its connotations of sin, immorality, and violent bloodshed. Blue’s may be said to be cyan, after which cyanide is named. Yellow’s? Jaundice. But orange—orange has no malevolent counterpart. Why? Could it be because orange by itself is so inherently displeasing that it is its own dark side!? Is it the singular color whose intrinsic distastefulness was deemed sufficient to preclude the need for a villainous alias??? If so, then what better color is there to describe the abysmal dissatisfaction of vagueness itself!

Orange also conveys the self-contradictory nature of confusing, “half-way between” kinds of circumstances. There is a mild and even-tempered quality about it, yet somehow it still agitates, loudly announcing its presence wherever it appears. It sits between green and red on the traffic signal, commanding you to both stop and go at the same time. It is the color of twilight—that unsettling yet captivating interval nestled between day and night that serves as the subject of lurid psych thrillers and fantasies epitomized by the *The Twilight Zone* or the *Twilight* saga. Even the taste of an orange is an unpredictable combination of sour *and* sweet—sometimes delectable and other times insufferably acidic. Orange is the color of ambivalence and mystery.

On the rainbow, orange occupies the space between red and yellow. Red, in its resplendent effulgence, imposes with its intensity and aggression. It is the color of fiery, passionate love, or the anger felt from a killer’s bloodthirsty gaze. It summons your attention and reverberates power. Yellow, on the other hand, can be considered red’s foil in many ways. A bright, comforting color, it is the complexion of sunshine and daffodils. It champions a happy-go-lucky lifestyle, but it can also overstimulate its viewer with its radiance, leaving him with ocular fatigue. In the middle of these two extremes lies orange. It carries with it the vigor of red and the warmth of yellow, yet it is not an exact average of the two. It bears its own unnameable eccentric quality. It is the antithesis of predictability, defying all labels and categories.

With all of these reasons accounted for, the fact must be acknowledged of orange’s obvious superiority and long-overdue succession to tired gray’s role. Life is far more unpredictable than

we may want it to be, and seldom do we find ourselves in a simple transition along a black-and-white scale. Rather, the orange area, where dichotomies blur in the most discomfiting ways and constant change disorients, is much more suitable to describe the increasingly nuanced and ever-transforming society we live in today. Hence, our language must also evolve to reflect the growing intricacy of our dynamic world. The simultaneous thrill and anguish of being stuck in the “space between”—between conflicting things, ideas, and people—cannot merely be captured by sadly inadequate, placid gray. Let it thenceforth be called, in its fully nauseating splendor, the “orange area.”