READING PRACTICE

The Meaning of Colour

Read the text and answer the questions that follow.

Throughout the ages, different colours have had symbolic meanings and some have even entered our language – “seeing red” describes anger, for example. In some cases, the meaning is the same as it was in ancient times, and in others, colours have acquired new associations.

In many cultures, white symbolises purity and innocence. This isn’t surprising since even the smallest speck of dirt ruins its purity and this has taken on a symbolic dimension. Likewise, black, which is associated with the unknown state of darkness, has taken on the symbolic meaning of the greatest unknown of all, death. The fact that the world appears black during the night, when ancient people were most vulnerable, reinforces its negativity.

Other colours whose ancient associations have continued to this day include red, yellow and purple. Red is associated with strong emotion because blood comes to the surface of the skin when we are angry or feeling particularly well (resulting in “rosy cheeks”); red stones were often given to children in ancient Rome to ensure their health. Yellow symbolises happiness, reflecting the sun’s warmth. Although in ancient Egypt and China royal and religious figures wore yellow, it may also represent cowardice and deceit – Judas is often painted wearing faded yellow robes. Finally, purple is still the colour of royalty and nobility in many Western cultures. This was originally because purple dye was very expensive, so displaying it in the empires of Rome, Egypt and Persia signalled wealth and prestige.

However, some colours have acquired new meanings in modern times. Green, originally associated positively with wisdom and negatively with jealousy (“green with envy”), is now linked almost exclusively to nature and environmentalism. Similarly, blue has virtually lost its connection to truth and is now the colour of sadness – perhaps because it is associated with water, which forms rain and tears. And orange, previously classified as red or yellow, now alerts us to danger: think of traffic cones or the amber traffic light. The reason is that orange forms a strong contrast against a blue sky and so is easily visible.

And so even today, our ideas and our language often reflect an unconscious knowledge of a colour’s meaning: Brides wear white, mourners wear black and “feeling blue” means experiencing sadness.

5. Find words or expressions in the text that mean:

1. time periods (paragraph I): _____

2. destroys (paragraph II): _____

3. strengthens (paragraph II): _____

4. showing (paragraph III): _____

6. Write a composition of about 100–150 words. Choose ONE option.

1. A Description: How does colour affect your mood? Give examples.

2. An Opinion Essay: Should babies be dressed according to their gender (in pink or blue)? Explain your reasons.

SUMMARY

Summarise the text in a maximum of 20 words.

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