

International Leadership Institute

A Lesson on English



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Blue

by Sara Tusek

For 22 years I've been asking people what color best expresses their personality and view of life, as part of a career development exercise. The most commonly chosen color, by far, is blue.

When I ask these people why they chose blue, most reply that blue is calm. It is the color of the sky, and of water. It is soothing and peaceful. But is that all there is to blue?

HAPPY BLUE

No doubt one side of "blueness" is cheerful and carefree. The open sky is reminiscent of childhood days spent outside, maybe swimming or fishing. When Mom announces that the skies are blue, kids cheer and run outside.

A good friend is "true blue." Blue on flags generally represents loyalty. Blue is connected with open water and calm seas. Navy personnel wear blue; many pilots and flight attendants wear blue uniforms.

The US Postal Service showcases blue in its mailboxes, uniforms and trademarked logos. The US Federal Government uses blue for insignia, emblems and symbols closely tied to the identity of the United States.

SAD BLUE

Yet for every happy blue, there's a sad blue. The most

authentic American music is the blues, a subgenre of jazz that chronicles people's misfortune and misery. Depressed people get the blues; feeling blue is synonymous with being sad.

"Once in a blue moon" describes a very unpredictable

occurrence. Blue moons (when they occur, often in songs) are usually sad and lonely. Blue movies offer the saddest view of sex—pornography. Blue is a common name for a hound dog, another symbol of sadness (those droopy ears and sad eyes).

Picasso had a blue phase, during which he painted blue canvases. The paintings got more and more sad as his blue phase progressed.



From http://www.ibiblio.org/jimmy/folkden/php/images/Old_Blue_DC.jpg

UNSTEADY BLUE

Blue dye is notoriously unstable. Blue jeans fade in the wash. Dark blue shirts turn a load of white laundry blue. Blue dye was prized in centuries past, as it was hard to find a good deep blue that performed well as a textile dye. Woad and indigo, both plants that produced blue colors, made fortunes for their growers until more stable synthetic chemical dyes were introduced in the 19th century.

To p.2



Sara and Jarda Tusek with Klaus

“A Lesson on English” is a series of short lessons created for people who want to become fluent in conversational English. The lessons are practical and useful for students who have learned English in a traditional classroom setting or on their own.

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Blue—*from p. 1*

BLUE MOON OF KENTUCKY

When I was a kid, the bluegrass (another blue!) radio station played “Blue Moon of Kentucky.” This was a whiny, pseudo-cheerful song that defied logic, happy and sad at the same time.

Maybe that’s because it was a Kentucky song—as I’ve lived in other parts of the United States, I’ve realized that Kentuckians have a distinct sense of humor, both “dark” and playful. This song illustrates the paradoxical nature of blue.

BLUE SKIES OVER ME

Another popular song of my childhood (written in 1926, but still heard on the radio) shows the dual nature of blue. Written by Irving Berlin, a Jewish-American immigrant from Russia, this song perfectly expresses the American dream of happiness following struggles:

I was blue, just as blue as I could be
 Every day was a cloudy
 day for me
 Then good luck came a-
 knocking at my door
 Skies were gray but
 they’re not gray anymore

Blue skies
 Smiling at me
 Nothing but blue skies
 Do I see

Bluebirds
 Singing a song
 Nothing but bluebirds
 All day long

Never saw the sun shin-
 ing so bright
 Never saw things going so right
 Noticing the days hurrying by
 When you’re in love, my, how they fly

Blue days
 All of them gone
 Nothing but blue skies
 From now on

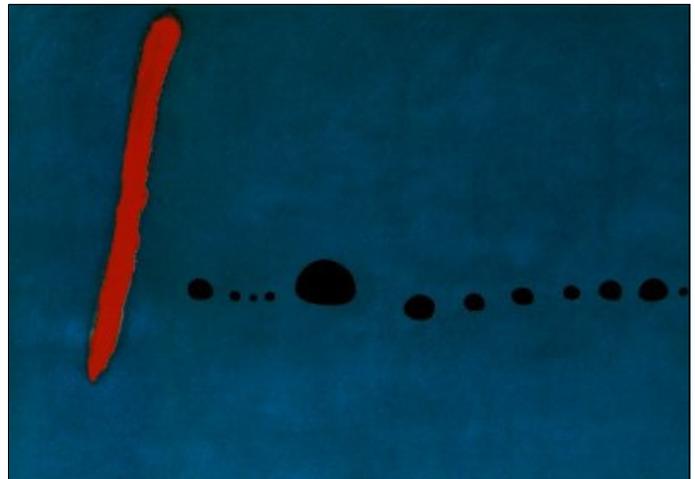
The words are cheerful and optimistic, but the tune has a minor mood. The song implies that blue may be happy today, but it used to be sad, and may be sad again one day.

PRIMARY BLUE

Blue is one of the three primary colors, along with red and yellow. This means that you can’t combine other colors to produce blue—it is “sui generis,” a neo-Latin phrase meaning “of its own kind.”

Blue exists outside of categories, in this definition. It simply is.

So our attempts to define blue, and to use the color as a symbol for human feelings and attitudes, may be foolish. We can no more scientifically define blue than we can scientifically define any abstraction, such as love or loyalty or honor. Blue “is what it is,” no matter what we may call it.



Joan Miro: BLUE II

HUMAN BLUE

Happy, sad, unpredictable, unstable—the color blue illustrates quite a few human traits.

No wonder so many people pick blue.