

Using Color as Expression

We are going to explore colors, how we see them, and the ways we can mix them to create amazing art. By exploring an important painting at Shelburne Museum—*The Grand Canal, Venice (Blue Venice)* painted by Edouard Manet in 1875, we will look closely at how the artist used color to create his masterpiece.

Goals

We will learn some art vocabulary to identify color schemes, explore Manet's techniques and create our own version of Manet's *The Grand Canal, Venice* painting.

Background Information

In 1875, Manet painted this view on the Grand Canal, which H. O. Havemeyer purchased for his wife Louise 20 years later. She was particularly fond of the picture and changed its name to *Blue Venice*. Mrs. Havemeyer wrote that her friend Mary Cassatt "congratulated us when we bought this picture, saying she considered it one of Manet's most brilliant works; it was so full of light and atmosphere and expressed the very soul and spirit of Venice." Her daughter Electra Havemeyer Webb inherited *Blue Venice*, which hangs in the living room of her New York City apartment, reinstalled in Shelburne Museum's Memorial Building.

The myth of Venice was largely established by visiting artists during the 19th century. The atmospheric chemistry between sky and sea, light and water inspired epoch-making works that provided crucial impulses to the development of modern art. Manet commented that this play of light reminded him of champagne bottles floating bottom up and it was precisely this sparkling effect he tried to capture on canvas.



Edouard Manet, *The Grand Canal, Venice (detail)*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 23 1/8 x 28 1/8 in. Gift of the Electra Havemeyer Webb Fund, Inc. 1972 69.15.

More Resources

- Edouard Manet (1832-83), The Met, <https://bit.ly/met-SM>
- What's the Difference between Manet and Monet, The Iris: Behind the Scenes at the Getty, <https://bit.ly/Getty2-SM>
- Impressionism: Art & Modernity, The Met, <https://bit.ly/met1-SM>
- Beginner's Guide to Impressionism, Khan Academy, <https://bit.ly/khan-SM>
- Color Matters for Kids, Color Matters, <https://bit.ly/colormatters-SM>

National Core Art Standards

VA:Cr2.1.2a Experiment with various materials and tools to explore personal interests in a work of art or design.

VA:Cr2.1.5a Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice.

VA:Cr3.1.1a Use art vocabulary to describe choices while creating art.

Color Resources

Color Vocabulary

Color Wheel—an illustration showing the relationship between primary, secondary and tertiary colors.

Color Scheme—A color scheme is the group of colors chosen by the artist. Ideally, these colors are aesthetically pleasing and should appeal to the viewer.

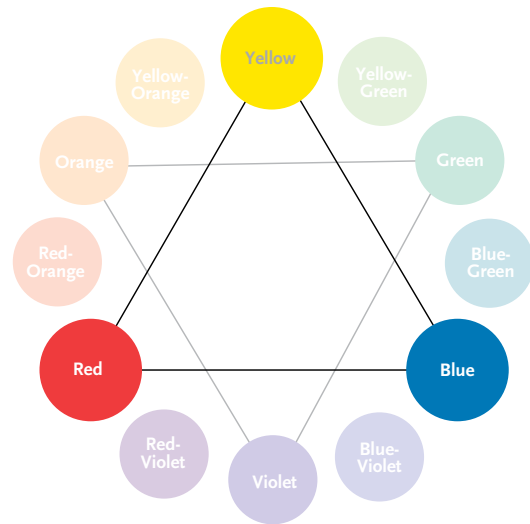
Primary Colors—red, blue, and yellow. They are colors that cannot be mixed from other colors, and serve as the basis of all other colors.

Secondary Colors—colors that are created by mixing two primary colors together. i.e. green, orange, and purple (violet).

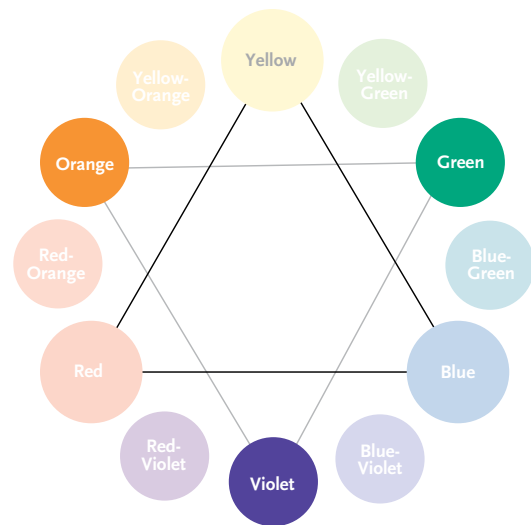
Tertiary Colors—created by mixing one primary and one secondary color together.

Complementary Colors—colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel, for example, yellow and purple (violet), red and green, or orange and blue.

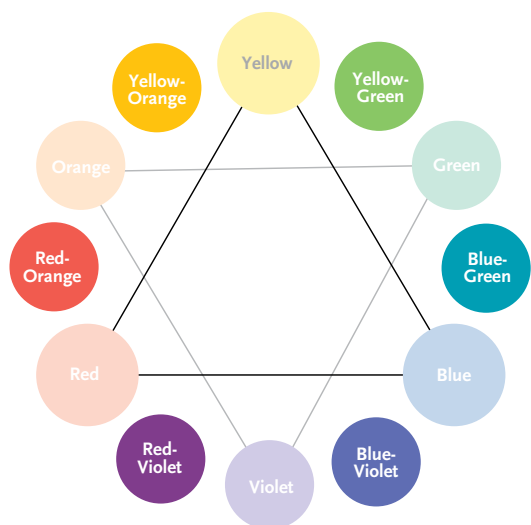
Split Complementary Colors—involves the use of three colors. Start with one color, find its complement and then use the two colors on either side of it. For example, the complement of yellow is violet (purple) and the split complement of yellow would be red-violet and blue-violet.



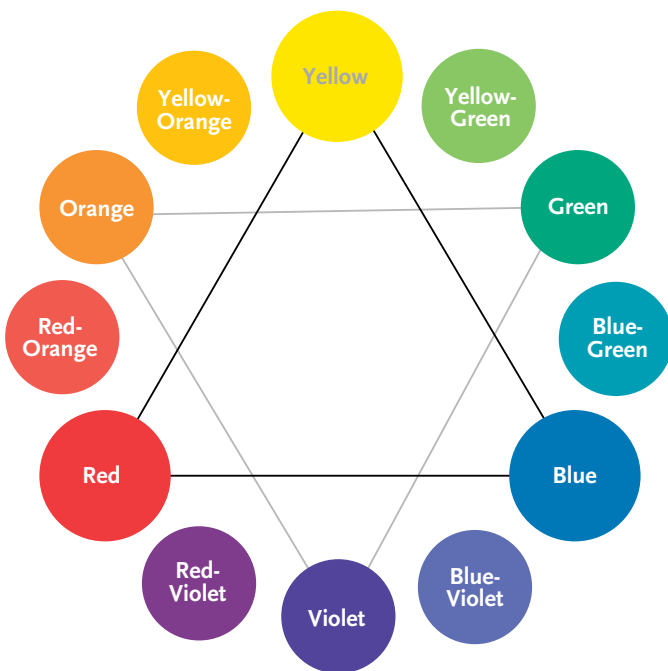
Primary Colors



Secondary Colors



Tertiary Colors



Color Wheel

Color as Expression: Level 1

Edouard Manet was inspired by color and light and their relationship with the landscape. Today we will be exploring how color can change the look of a landscape.

First, let's talk about color! What colors do you see in the painting below? Is there more than one of each color, blue...light blue? List as many colors as you can find:



Edouard Manet, *The Grand Canal, Venice*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 23 1/8 x 28 1/8 in. Gift of the Electra Havemeyer Webb Fund, Inc. 1972 69.15.

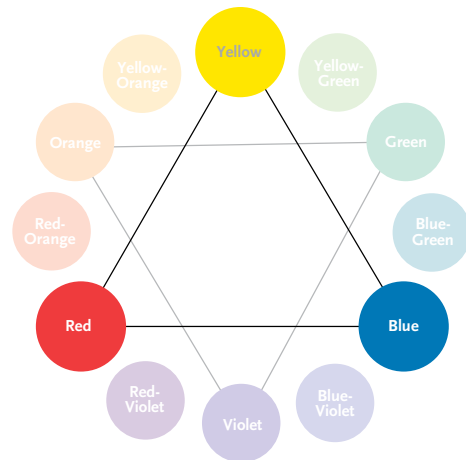
Color as Expression: Level 1

Now, it's your turn to play with color!

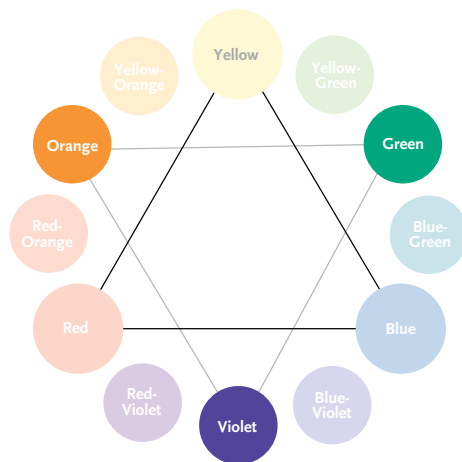
There are three kinds of color groups to the right for you to look at. For this activity, all you will need are a box of crayons and *The Grand Canal, Venice* coloring sheet:

To begin:

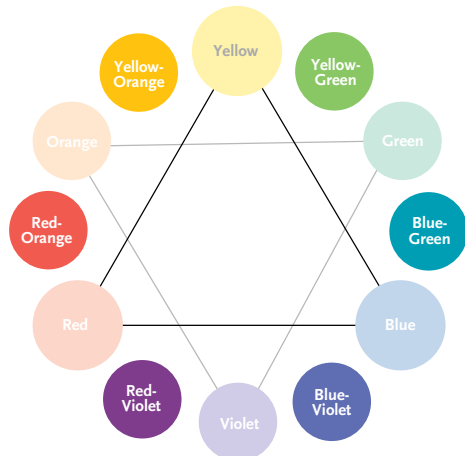
- Grab a box of crayons and dump them out onto a table
- First, organize the crayons into single color groups...reds together, blues together, greens together, and so forth
- Second, arrange the crayons into the three color groups we learned about, using the examples to the right to help match the colors
- Use each of the color groups to color one panel of *The Grand Canal, Venice*. Which colors do you like best?



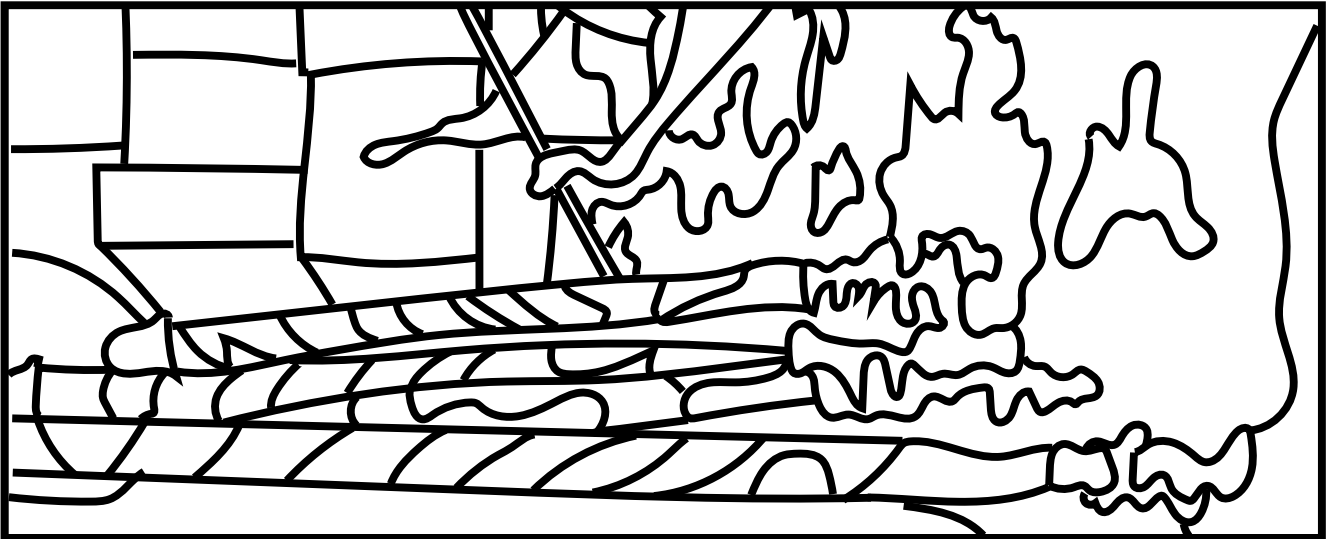
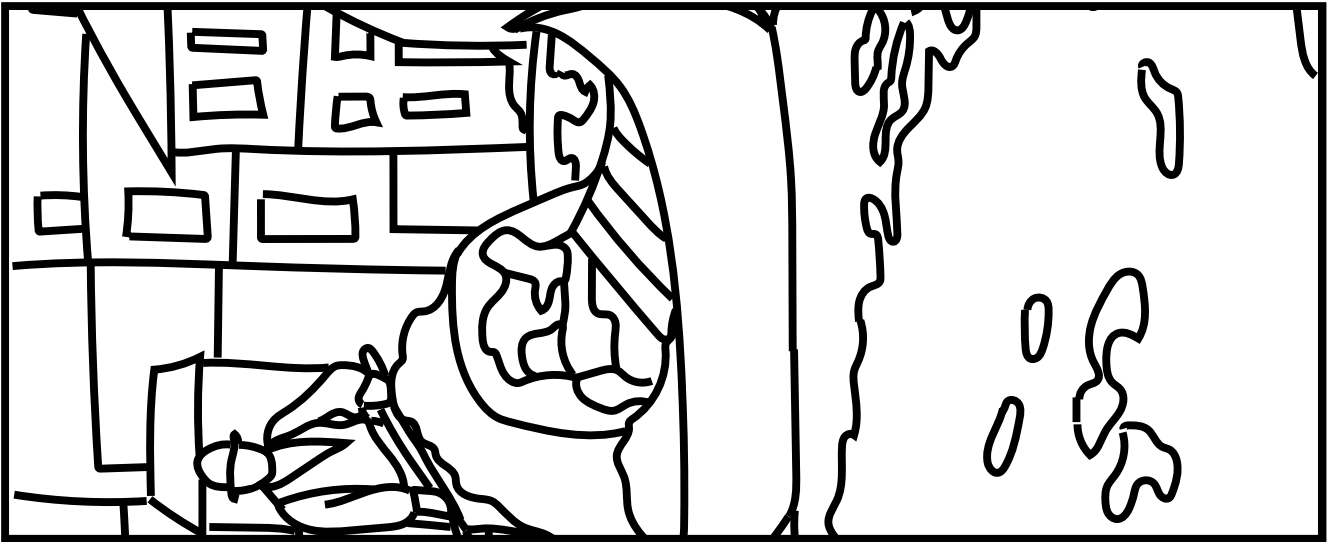
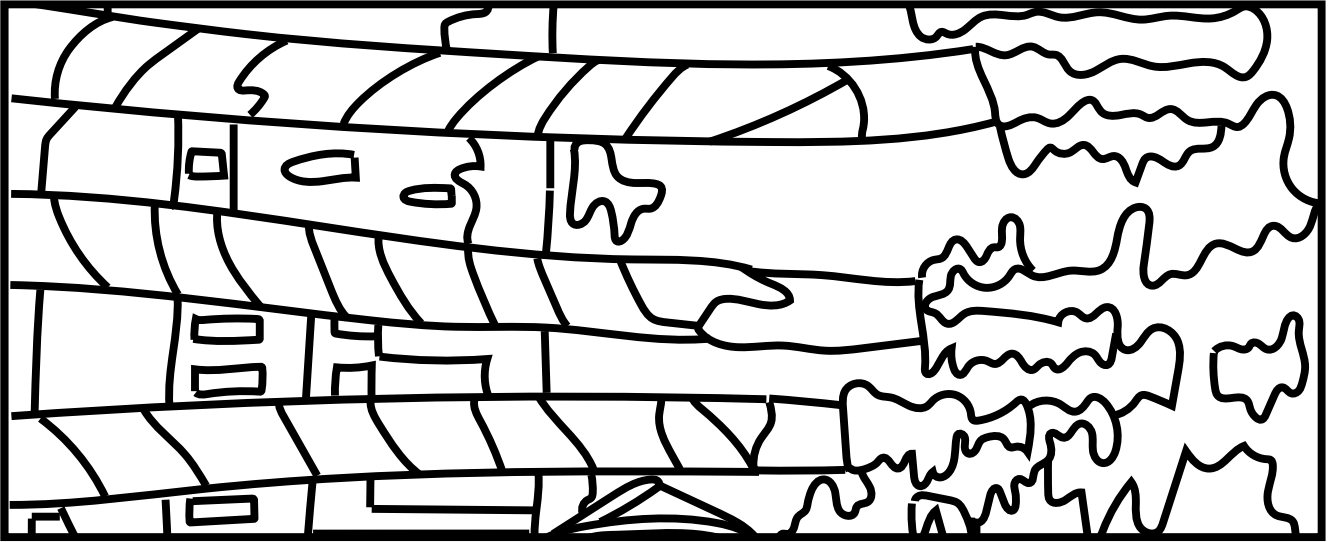
Primary Colors: yellow, blue, and red



Secondary Colors: green, violet (purple), and orange



Tertiary Colors: yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet, red-orange, and yellow-orange



Edouard Manet, *The Grand Canal, Venice*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 23 1/8 x 28 1/8 in. Gift of the Electra Havemeyer Webb Fund, Inc. 1972.69.15.

Color as Expression: Level 2

List all the colors you see in this work of art:



Edouard Manet, *The Grand Canal, Venice*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 23 1/8 x 28 1/8 in. Gift of the Electra Havemeyer Webb Fund, Inc. 1972 69.15.

Step 1

Using the list of colors you found in *The Grand Canal, Venice* and the color groups found on the Color Resources page, what type/s of colors do you think Manet used most? (Use the color wheels as a guide.) *Answer at the end of the lesson!*

Three things to know about the colors you just listed:

- Color is a way that we describe an object based on the way that it reflects or emits light.
- Your eye can see different colors because a part of your eye called the retina is sensitive to different wavelengths of light.
- Humans are “trichromats,” meaning our retinas have three different kinds of cells that can receive color. Those cells are called cones.

Step 2

Now it's your turn! Recreate *The Grand Canal, Venice* using colors different than those used by Manet. While Manet used oil paints, use any available art materials, including:

- Paint and brushes, colored pencil, markers, or crayon
- Paper or canvas
- Water for diluting paint and/or cleanup

Begin selecting or mixing colors—don't forget about white and black—to create a color palette for your version.

Sketch out the main components in your work—the gondola, the poles in the water, and the buildings in the background.

Select colors from your palette for different features and begin applying color to paper or canvas. Bring your Venetian canal to life!

*Answer: Manet used mostly blue, white and yellow for *The Grand Canal, Venice*.