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4-H Handicraft Guide: Color and Design

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To begin a study of color, let’s first make a color wheel (see diagram). Use crayons or paint and a piece of white paper.

Start with the primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. Next, place the secondary colors: orange, green, violet. The intermediate colors can then be added as shown.

Color has dimensions, just as a block of wood has length, breadth, and thickness. These dimensions are warmth or coolness, (the hue or name of the color); lightness or darkness, (the value of the color); and brightness or dullness (the intensity of the color). These three qualities are present in every color. Tints are made by adding white to a color. Shades are made by adding black.

Use your crayons, chalks, or paints to practice making tints and shades. Make some color schemes. There are a number of guides to use in deciding which colors to use. Some of the most common color schemes are:

- **Complimentary**: Colors directly across from each other on the color wheel. Some or all may need to be subdued to obtain harmony.
- **Analogous**: Colors next to each other on the color wheel. Include only one primary color. The colors should differ both in value and intensity.
- **Monochromatic**: A one-color scheme, using different values and intensities.

The neutrals—black, white, and gray—may be used in any harmony. With these guides in mind continue to experiment with making color schemes and color designs.

We all have favorite colors but we should remember that no color is ugly. If used in the right place and in the right amount, every color is beautiful. Colors must suit the purpose for which they have been chosen. They must be combined so as to enhance one another. Look at examples of good art and study their color schemes. Look at different color schemes in magazines and see if they are analogous, triad, etc. Note how the same hues are brightened and darkened—sometimes in the same pictures or designs.

We must use good principles of design in the use of color. A feeling of rest or balance is essential for good color arrangements. This principle underlies the “Law of Areas,” which is: “Large areas of color should be quiet in effect, while small amounts may show strong contrasts. The larger the amount used, the quieter or less intense the color should be, and the smaller the amount, the more striking the contrast may become. These contrasts may be due to a decided difference in hue, in value, or in intensity.”

Some people are gifted with artistic abilities which make designing very easy for them. Many other people must learn how to make good designs. Designing is a process of organizing a collection of units into a pleasing arrangement. These units are sizes, shapes, and colors.

Let’s consider some of the basic principles of design. These apply to color as well as line.
Balance or Rest
When you sit, stoop, or walk, you shift your weight, but you are still balanced. When we arrange shapes, sizes, and colors, they too must be balanced. The sizes, shapes and colors may be arranged in a number of different ways, but each arrangement must show balance.

Proportion
This refers to the relationship between parts. The Greek oblong is considered a standard of good proportion. The sides are two parts to three. Spaces in an object may differ. If an object is to be divided into two parts, a pleasing effect is created by making the line a little more than one-half and less than two-thirds the distance from either end. Note the difference created by the line spacing in the following rectangles.

Rhythm
This shows easy related movement. The eye easily follows an organized pattern in the design. Rhythm can be indicated through continuous, or easily connected lines; repeating shapes; or steadily enlarging or diminishing sizes.

Emphasis
This is the center of interest, or the most important thing in the design. From the point of emphasis your eye should go to other details. Simplicity is the most important factor in emphasis.

Harmony or Unity
This is the most important principle in design. All of the objects or ideas in a harmonious design have a "family resemblance." The principle of harmony has five aspects: line and shape, size, texture, idea, and color.

Contrast
Variation in size, shape, and color must be considered in making a pleasing design.

Purposes of Designs
There are many kinds of designs, each for various purposes. Some of the most common are:

- Decorative Designs. Used for beautifying articles.
- Commercial Designs. Especially for advertising (note magazine ads, etc.).
- Creative Designs. Developed through individual ideas. Methods of decoration and selection of materials combine in producing useful and beautiful things.
- Industrial Designs. Small devices to mighty machines.
- Architectural Designs. Buildings, homes, churches, etc.
- Styling. Adapting beautiful designs to useful objects, as automobiles.

Designs are usually developed or selected on the basis of a motif (mo-teef), or a particular idea or theme. Some motifs are:

- Products of nature, as leaves, animals, flowers, etc.
- Geometrical figures, squares, circles, etc.
- Holidays, birthdays, Christmas, etc.
Initials and Monograms.

Abstractions, and many others.

When planning a design, ask yourself if it will "fit" the plan and purpose you have in mind for it. Is it for fun, for decoration, hard use, accessory, etc.? When planning a design consider also the qualities of materials. The grain and color of wood, the kinds and types of metals, plastics, clays, glazes, etc. Remember that simplicity is the key to beauty.

HOW TO BEGIN MAKING A DESIGN

First we must make what is called a structural design. This is the basic outline of the design and should be beautiful in itself. Suppose you are going to make a border-type design for a wooden box. Let's let the motif be geometrical designs. Take a piece of paper and sketch out a general idea on paper of the exact size of the box. Decide on the width of the border and how far from the edge to place it. (Remember what was said about proportion?) After deciding on the width of the border and distance from the edge, we should consider how we will break up the border into smaller areas. We now have a basic structural design from which we can work to make the decorative design. Follow the steps in the illustrations shown below. Work out some of your own designs using this same method.

Always keep in mind what you are decorating. Different designs fit different objects.

Round or tall objects need different designs than flat, square ones. If you are making a round tray, decide on the motif and then arrange the design so that it is pleasing from all angles. You don't always see the same side of a tray, do you? Suppose you put a boy on the tray. He would be standing on his head half of the time—or more. Let's sketch a design for a round tray. It could be painted on wood or etched on metal. This time we'll use a motif from nature—leaves and flowers. We could have a border design or a center design.

DETERMINE AREAS. SKETCH DESIGN ON TRAY. TURNED UP ON THE METAL TRAYS.)
Remember the proportion—don’t let the design overpower the tray; and don’t let it get lost by being too small.

You need only look about to see that the world is filled with color and design. When you begin to create your own designs and to use colors, you will probably find talent you didn’t know you had. You will find it very satisfying and very enjoyable to express your own ideas in color. It is like having a technicolor dream.


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