exploring color:
color theory and application

an introduction to using color theory by Michelle Tabares

Key Terms

color theory - The method and practice of combining colors to create pleasing color schemes.

color wheel - A circular diagram that displays our world's main colors and demonstrates the relationship they have with one another.

contrast - A stark visual difference, often times appears when colors on opposite spectrums are juxtaposed beside one another.

cool colors - Blues, greens and purples. These colors tend to convey calm, quiet and relaxation.

hue - A pure color or gradation of a pure color.

opacity - The level or lack of transparency within a color.

pastel colors - A range of tint that contain a little bit of a base color but main ly feature white. These colors are very light.

primary colors - Red, blue and yellow. These three base colors make up the basis of all the colors that we see.

saturation - The vividness or purity of a base color.

secondary colors - A combination of two different primary colors. These colors include green, orange and purple.

shade - Adding any amount of black to a base color.

tertiary colors - A combination of one primary color and one secondary color. tertiary color names are not standardized but an example of a tertiary color scheme would be teal, indigo and chartreuse.
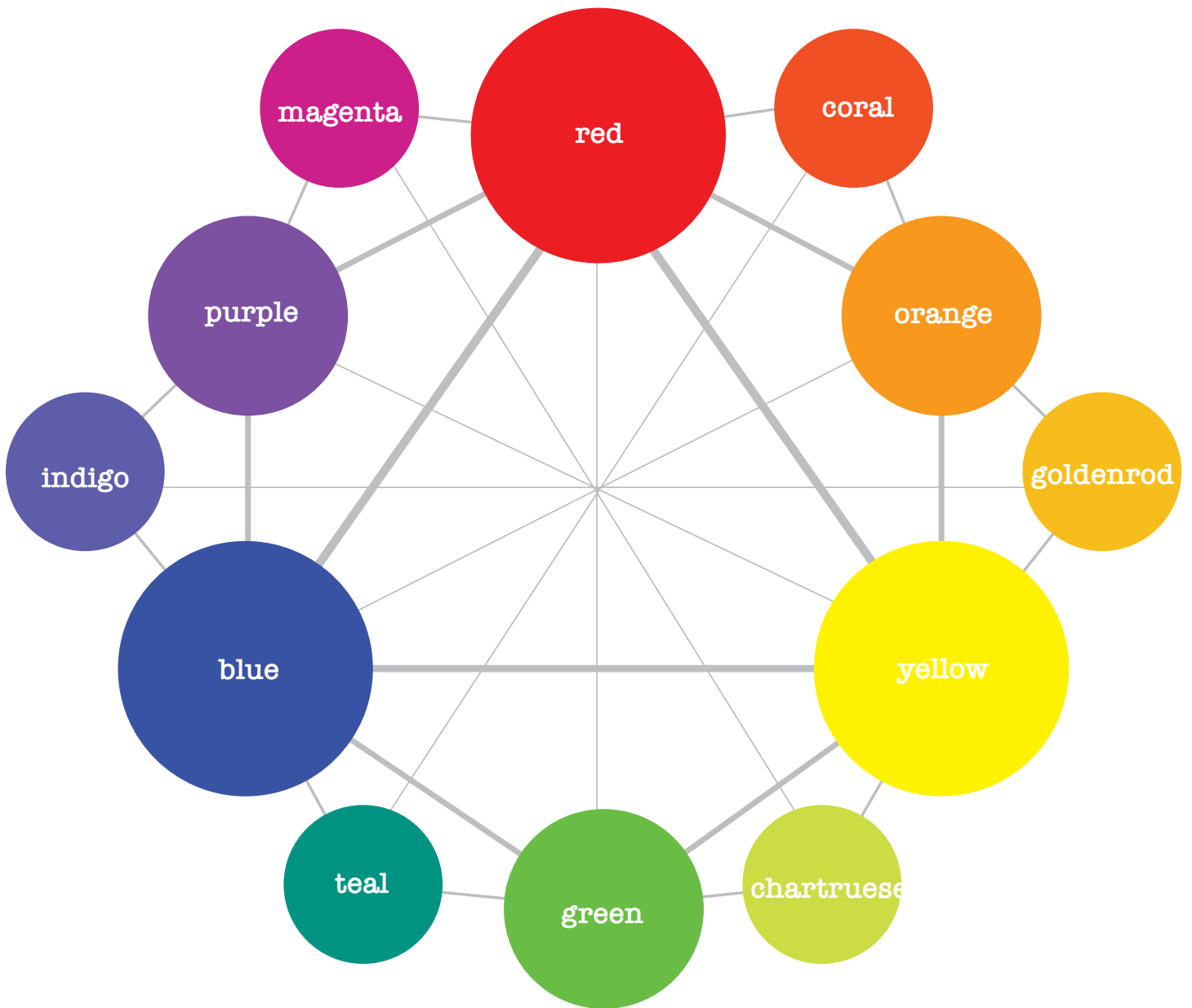
tint - Adding any amount of white to a base color.

tone - Adding any amount of grey to a base color.

value - The amount or range of black or white added to a base color.

warm colors - Reds, oranges and yellows. These colors tend to convey energy, activity and movement.

The Color Wheel

Color Wheel Fill-In

Two of the best ways to commit things to memory:
    1. Repetition
    2. Working with your hands.
I've made the blank color wheel that I filled in from the lesson available for you to color in if you'd like additional practice.

For an extra challenge, try filling in this wheel using only the primary colors! (But make sure you're working with color pencil, crayon or another art tool that mixes fairly easily).

Don't be afraid to make mistakes! You can always print out another and try again.
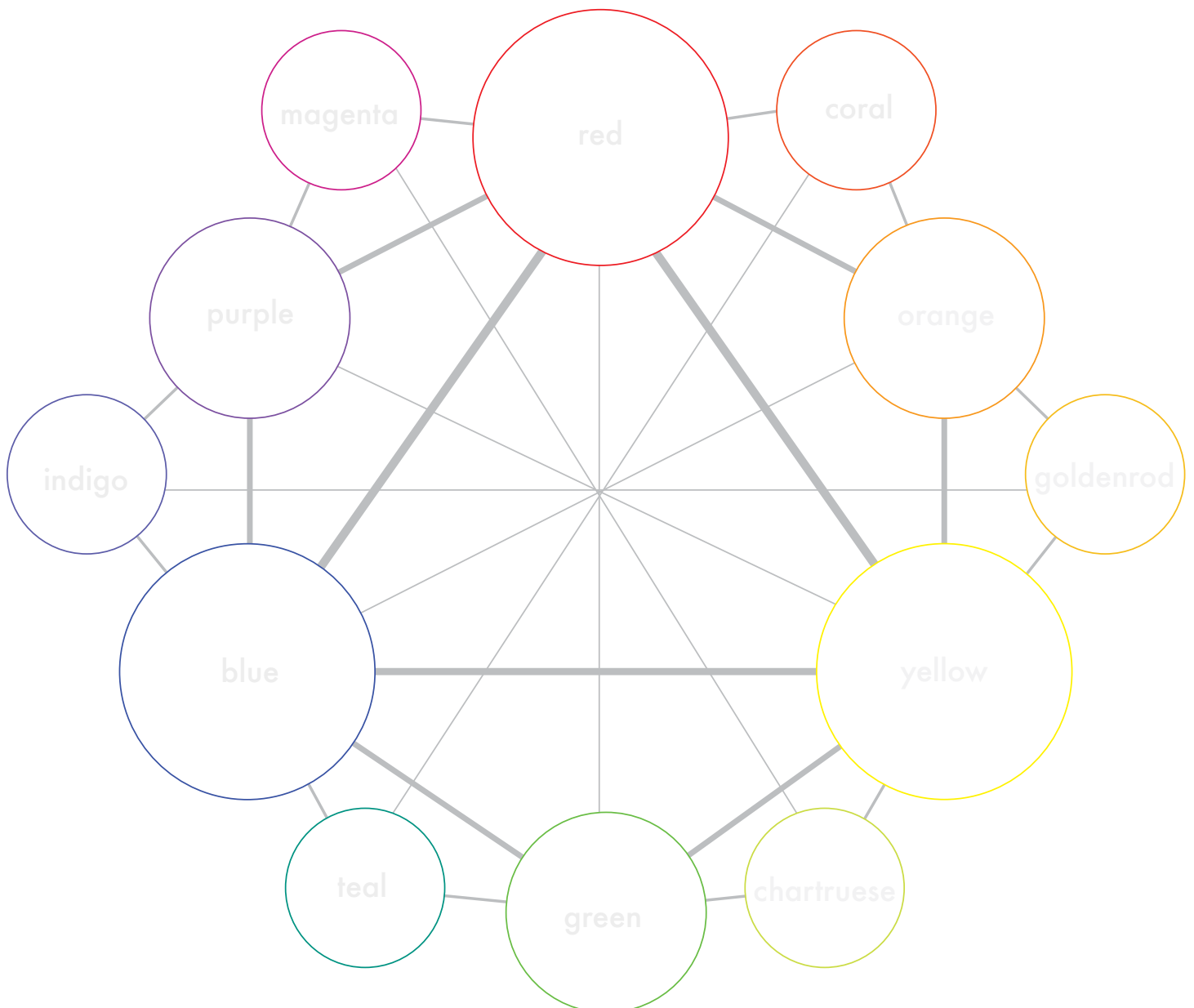
Key Terms

Types of Color Harmonies/Schemes

analogous - Colors that are next to each other on the color wheel, and therefore somewhat similar.

complementary - Two colors that are direct opposites to one another on the color wheel. Also known as 'opposite colors'.

monochromatic - A color scheme made up entirely of tints, shades and tones all within the same color family.

split complementary - A twist on the complementary scheme where the base color is paired with the two colors that sit next to its complement.

tetradic - A color scheme that forms a rectangle on the color wheel.

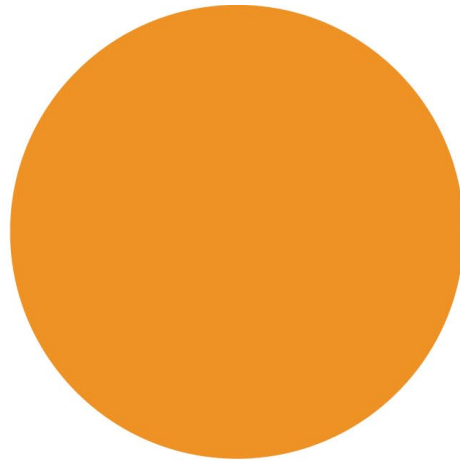**triadic** - A color scheme that forms a triangle on the color wheel.
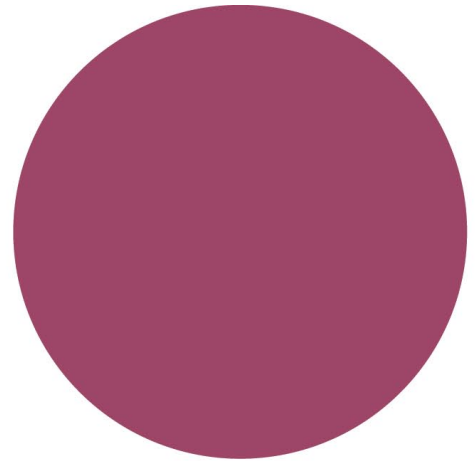
Color Palette

Here is the color palette we made together in class, for those of you who may want to experiment with with this palette or modify it to make new palettes with a different base color. Feel free to try different opacities and different opacity circle colors as well!
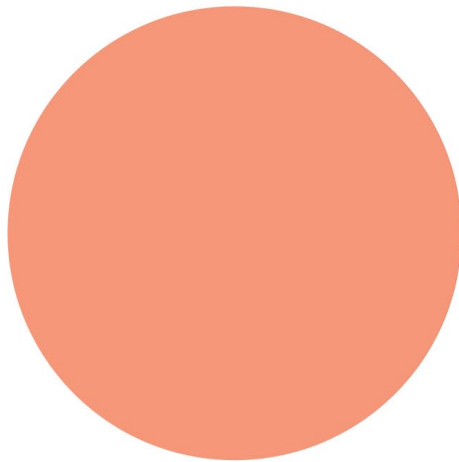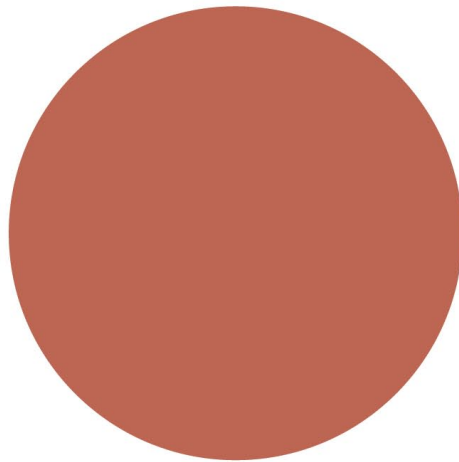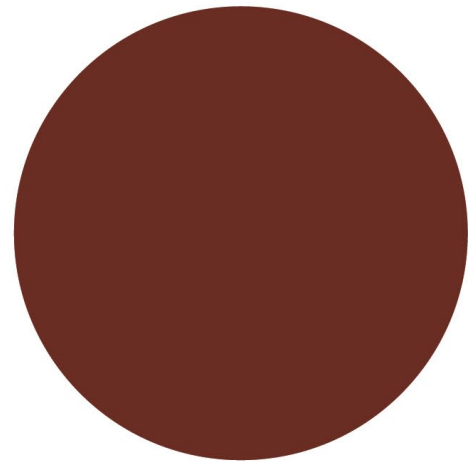
pure red

50% yellow opacity

50% blue opacity

50% white opacity

50% grey opacity

50% black opacity

Color Psychology

color psychology - The science and study of how color can influence and change human behavior.

The Six Principles of Color Psychology
1. Color can carry a specific meaning
2. Color meaning is either based in learning meaning or biologically innate meaning.
3. The perception of a color causes evaluation automatically by the person perceiving.
4. The evaluation process forces color-motivated behavior.
5. Color usually exerts its influence automatically.
6. Color meaning and effect has to do with context as well.

+ Color can affect your mood, emotional and mental state.
  Ex. Inmates that are exposed to the color pink have reduced rates of aggression and hostility, since the color has a pacifying and calming affect on the human brain.

+ Color can encourage physical changes in your body.
  Ex. Studies have shown that when exposed to warm colors this triggers appetite since most foods that exist in the natural world are various warm toned colors. Conversely, since there are very few cool toned colors, blue has an appetite suppressing effect.

+ Some colors have universal interpretations (often due to biological associations)
  Ex. Earth tones such as brown and green tend to some have shared associations that transcend language and cultural differences since human beings from all over the globe have at least some shared experiences and inferences with nature.

+ Colors can also have different meanings depending on the context or culture.
  Ex. Red is considered a mourning color in many parts of Africa, but in India it is considered a bridal color.

Making Good Color Choices

Before you Start

+Take a moment to think about what feelings or message you want to convey through your composition. Do you want the viewer to feel invigorated? Maybe you've had a bad day and you want to channel that negativity into your work. Perhaps your main goal is to create art that will be popular. There's no right or wrong way to feel - but having clarity about your artistic intentions, emotions and goals will not only make your work better overall, but it was also help you choose the colors that are most appropriate for your piece.

+ Consider your color choices before breaking out your art tools. Remember that your favorite color isn't necessarily the best color to use for every project. A bright, sunny yellow may be very eye-catching and appealing in a lot of ways, but it won't make a lot of sense if you're trying to convey sadness or loneliness.

Keep in Mind...

+ If you're still intimidated by the prospect of making color palettes by yourself, it's okay to lean on the color theory principals we learned or make a color palette by choosing a base and using the 50% opacity mixing technique we learned or by using the color harmonies we learned as a guide.

+ Once you get comfortable in a particular medium or using a certain set of colors, don't be afraid to branch out and try different things! Best case scenario, you will find new techniques and tools that you love and worse case scenario, you'll further affirm that your original methods were best for you. A great way to broaden your color skills is by seeing how color can vary depending on your medium.

Tips

+ Try learning how to mix colors with traditional art tools before combining colors digitally. There's something about doing things with your hands that helps your brain retain the information better. I can tell your from personal experience; the learning process will be shorter and a lot less frustrating if you start your color journey with your favorite crayons, markers, pastels or paints.

+ Keep a log or collection of your favorite colors. This collection can be digital or cut out from print media in the style of a collage. You can draw inspiration from this collection the next time you're feeling stuck or overwhelmed. Making your list personal to you will help you form a personal connection to the colors you collect - so feel free to find colors you love from your favorite foods, animals, photos, art, etc. (For example, I love nail polish so I have several Photoshop color collections from all of my favorite nail polish brands)
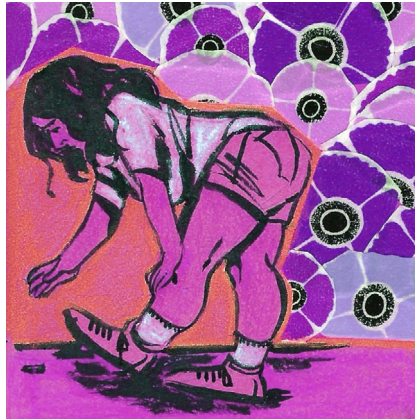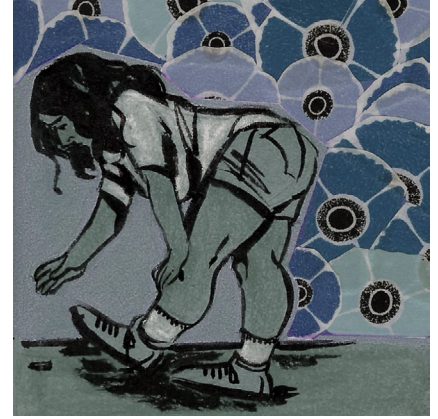
Homework

Main Project
    + **One Composition, Three Ways** - Think of three different moods or themes that you want to convey. Create a simple composition in the medium of your choice and replicate it three different ways applying different colors and representing different aspects of color theory, while reflecting your chosen themes.

   fun   funky   somber

Optional Assignments
    I've included a couple of assignments if you want more of a challenge or just more practice on honing in on your color application skills. I'd love to see the results, so feel free to post them!

    + **No Black or White** - Make a composition using your medium of choice but without any black or white. Think about what colors you could use instead of black; maybe navy blue? Or maybe instead of white you could use a light pink. Be sure to make sure your substitute colors fit within the mood of your composition (Ex. If you're doing a scary, Halloween style composition, a dark blood red would make a better black substitute than a bright blue).

In this digital painting, I used a mid-tone brown instead of black and a dusty, light cream color (seen in the character's eyes) instead of white.
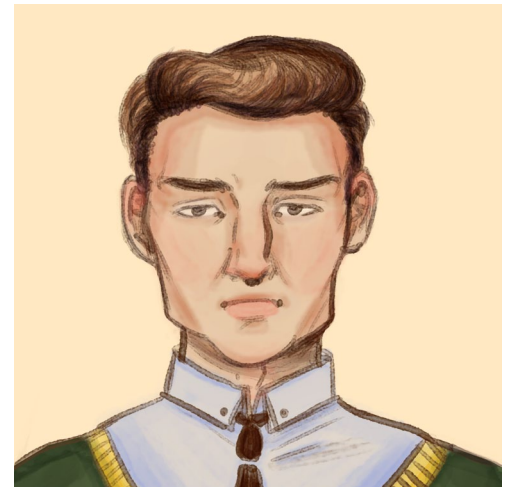
Homework

+ **Palette Based on a Theme** - Apply what you've learned about color theory by making your own palette revolving around a theme of your choosing. Feel free to select a theme that is meaningful to you (a favorite movie or animal, a beautiful sunset you saw recently, etc.) and select colors 5 -10 that not only look good together - but also reflect your chosen theme.
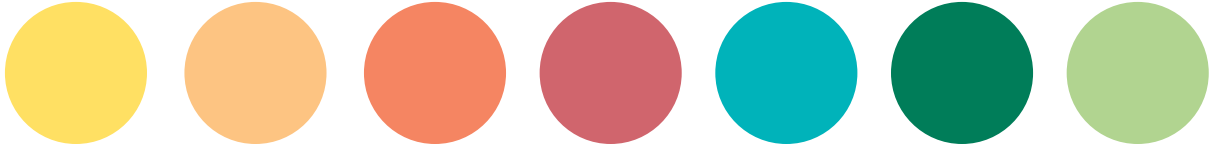
(Ex. I live in Florida, so my Floridian color palette would include the following tropical colors that are commonly seen in the flora, fauna and skies of my area).

+ **Tailor Your Colors For Someone Else** - Pick an audience or group that you want to create a portrait for (Or use the line art provided in this file). You can choose anything from astronauts, wine aficionados to fairy enthusiasts. Select colors that would appeal specifically to members of your chosen group.

(Ex. I choose 'vampires,' so I used a great deal of black and a couple of other Halloween colors and I also decided to make the character very pale and give her red lips and eyes).
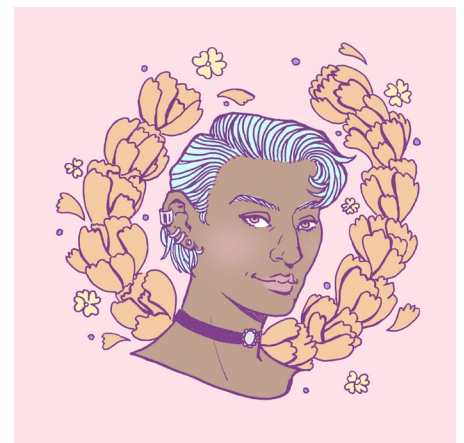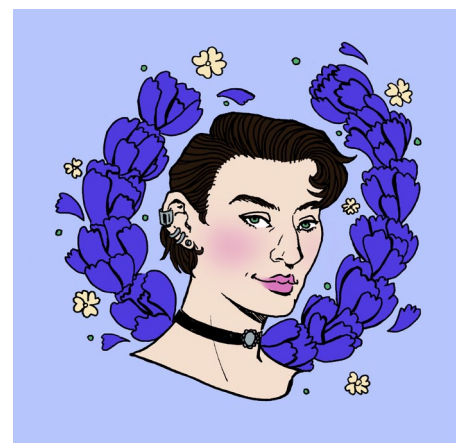
Color Variations

This page takes the lineart that we explored in the video and demonstrates how different color palettes can be used to convey different moods and themes. Take some time to observe how different colors can transform the feel of a composition.

vampire theme

four variations using the 6-color palette we made

pastel colors

cool tones

Lineart for Practice

Feel free to practice your coloring skills with this lineart I've created specially for this class. Please do not post your results on your personal social media accounts since this lineart is strictly for educational purposes only (But feel free to post on the Discussion section!).