All the colours of the rainbow

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

ADVANCED | C1

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1 Match each advanced colour-and-language concept with its meaning.

1 colour symbolism	____	a dependence of meaning on a particular social or historical context
2 colour connotation	____	b system of signs whose meanings follow shared conventions
3 chromatic hierarchy	____	c prioritisation produced by the ordering or prominence of colours
4 linguistic relativity	____	d learned associations through which colours represent ideas
5 basic colour term	____	e theory that language may influence habitual perception or thought
6 categorical perception	____	f simple widely applicable colour word in a language
7 cultural contingency	____	g tendency to perceive continuous variation as distinct groups
8 semiotic code	____	h additional emotional or cultural association carried by a colour

2 Complete the analytical collocations.

categorical | **chromatic** | **colour** | **contingency** | **linguistic** | **semiotic** | **symbolism** | **term**

1 interpret colour _____

2 trace a colour _____

3 establish a _____ hierarchy

4 debate _____ relativity

5 identify a basic colour _____

6 test _____ perception

7 recognise cultural _____

8 decode a _____ code

3 Choose the concept that best captures the distinction.

1 Red representing danger is an example of *colour symbolism / a basic term*.

2 Red suggesting urgency is a *colour connotation / categorical boundary*.

3 One colour dominating a display creates a *chromatic hierarchy / contingency*.

4 Language shaping habitual distinctions relates to *linguistic relativity / symbolism*.

5 A simple native colour word is a *basic colour term / semiotic code*.

6 A gradual spectrum perceived as groups shows *categorical perception / hierarchy*.

7 An association changing across societies shows *cultural contingency / colour-fastness*.

8 A shared system linking colours to meanings is a *semiotic code / colour cast*.

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4 Complete the communication analysis with terms from the box.

basic colour term | **categorical perception** | **chromatic hierarchy** | **colour connotation** | **colour symbolism** | **cultural contingency** | **linguistic relativity** | **semiotic code**

The campaign uses red as a warning through familiar **1** _____. Its emotional **2** _____ is urgency rather than warmth. Red's visual dominance establishes a **3** _____. Yet the association is culturally contingent; this **4** _____ means it may shift across audiences. The palette operates as a **5** _____ only when conventions are shared. Research on **6** _____ asks whether colour vocabulary influences habitual distinctions. A recognised **7** _____ need not divide the spectrum identically in every language, while **8** _____ may sharpen boundaries between named groups.

5 Read the text and answer the questions concisely.

Colour meaning is negotiated

Organisations often treat colour meanings as universal: green means permission, red means danger and white means purity. Such shortcuts can work within a familiar convention but fail across institutions, cultures and situations. Meaning emerges from colour, placement, wording, material and prior experience together. A critical analysis therefore asks who established the code, whose interpretation appears normal and what happens when readers reject or cannot perceive the intended distinction. Redundancy is not merely technical accessibility; it also limits the power of one convention to control meaning.

1 What assumption do organisations often make? _____

2 Where can colour shortcuts fail? _____

3 Name three elements that jointly create meaning. _____

4 Who should a critical analysis identify? _____

5 What two audience problems should be considered? _____

6 Why is redundancy more than technical accessibility? ____

6 Paraphrase using the analytical expression in capitals.

1 The colour's meaning depends on the culture. **CONTINGENCY** _

2 Visual priority is created through colour. **CHROMATIC** _

3 Viewers divide a continuum into named groups. **CATEGORICAL** _

4 The palette communicates through shared conventions. **SEMIOTIC** _

OVER TO YOU

Write a **160-190 word** critical analysis of colour use in a public message, institution, interface or campaign.

[ ] Use at least eight analytical terms. [ ] Question universal interpretations. [ ] Address culture, perception and redundant cues.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Colour-and-language concepts

1 **d** 2 **h** 3 **c** 4 **e** 5 **f** 6 **g** 7 **a** 8 **b**

2 Analytical collocations

1 **symbolism** 2 **connotation** 3 **chromatic** 4 **linguistic** 5 **term** 6 **categorical** 7 **contingency** 8 **semiotic**

3 Conceptual distinctions

1 **colour symbolism** 2 **colour connotation** 3 **chromatic hierarchy** 4 **linguistic relativity**
5 **basic colour term** 6 **categorical perception** 7 **cultural contingency** 8 **semiotic code**

4 Communication analysis

1 **colour symbolism** 2 **colour connotation** 3 **chromatic hierarchy** 4 **cultural contingency**
5 **semiotic code** 6 **linguistic relativity** 7 **basic colour term** 8 **categorical perception**

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 That colour meanings are universal. 2 Across institutions, cultures and situations. 3 Any three: colour, placement, wording, material, experience.
4 Who established the code. 5 Rejection or inability to perceive it. 6 It limits one convention's control over meaning.

6 Paraphrasing - possible answers

1 The meaning shows cultural **contingency**. 2 Colour creates a **chromatic hierarchy**.
3 Viewers use **categorical perception**. 4 The palette forms a **semiotic code**.

Over to you: Answers will vary. Check conceptual precision, cultural critique and accessibility.