

BLUE THE DETACHED COLOR

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In a few weeks, a warm-hearted woman in a Winnebago will tell Schmidt that he is a sad, sad man.

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lue can be a tranquil pond or a soft blanket of sadness. It is quiet and aloof. Year after year, our color investigations show that in a blue environment, people become passive and introspective. It's a color to think to, but not to act. Think **Hamlet**. Director Lasse Hallstrom is a master at creating a sense of longing—of something left unfinished—with a grayed blue. Think of **The Cider House Rules** or **The Shipping News**. Both have a pervasive sense of melancholy—what the dictionary calls “a gentle sadness.”

There's a great story about Knute Rockne, the famous Notre Dame football coach, who, back in the 1920s, painted his visitors locker room blue and won every game season after season. Theory is, he totally spaced out his opponents with blue and fired up his own team with red. True or not, it's a great illustration of another of the influences of blue. Blue is the quintessential color for powerlessness. Take one look at the gray-blue of Kevin Spacey's office in **American Beauty** and you know he is a powerless man.

A saying like “true blue,” however, is not a visual concept. It doesn't stem directly from how the color affects us viscerally. It comes from an idea. For example, we can depend on the sky being blue; therefore, blue is synonymous with loyalty and dependability. Don't fall into that trap. Even a very pale blue has an amazing ability to influence our emotional reactions to what is happening on screen. In fact, as the films in this section will show, it can set the tone for the entire movie.

Steel blue and dark indigo are colors least associated with the sensual and most associated with the intellect. Governesses and maiden ladies wear dark blue. It's the color worn by Charlotte Gainsbourg in Zeffirelli's **Jane Eyre** and by Emma Thompson in Ang Lee's interpretation of Jane Austen's **Sense and Sensibility**.

Hallstrom's **Chocolat**, on the other hand, uses an intense turquoise blue as an exotic presence that, because it's combined with green,

visually warms the conservative forces in a tiny village. In our explorations of blue-green/turquoise, we found it to be a color that inspired openness and interaction. In the presence of blue-green, students happily chatted away and actually lost their concept of time. In the presence of a paler, cooler blue, they wanted to be quiet and still.

Because of its tendency to effect inertia, blue is rarely used as a dominant color. In **Billy Elliot**, however, an intense blue is used to signal a cold determination of a father who tries to keep his exuberant son under his control. The son's defining color is yellow. The cold blue and the hot bright yellow in the Elliot kitchen set up a kind of visual warfare that mirrors the arc of the story.

Blue can have seemingly contradictory traits because it's the coldest color in the spectrum. The slightest change in that color, therefore, can completely alter how you respond to it. Perhaps blue, statistically, is everyone's favorite color because each person thinks of it in a different way. It is also why you need to make certain that the blue you choose will create the response you want. Don't just describe it. Test it on your "audience" and then decide.

Think About This:

**Feeling blue
isn't turquoise.**

