

# COLOR SAYINGS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

Just like English, other languages rely on color metaphors to express emotional states, qualities or events, but the colors attached to each phenomenon can be surprising. For the French, yellow vibrates with tense politeness, green is tinged with raciness in Spain, and the Chinese jealous monster has red eyes, not green (and wears, perhaps, the Scandinavians' black socks of envy). —Jude Stewart

	<p><b>THE RED-EYED MONSTER</b></p> <p>Jealousy in Chinese colors your eyes red (<i>yānhóng</i>, “red-eyed”), a trick likely produced either by crying yourself red-rimmed over longing, or simply from the sanguinary force of your desire, filling you up to the eyelids.</p>	<b>BROWN BLADES</b>	
	<p><b>AUSPICIOUSNESS</b></p> <p>The color of happiness and good fortune, red spills over myriad Chinese rituals, including welcoming a new baby at a red-egg-and-ginger party. One to three months after the baby's birth, parents welcome guests, who bring the baby money or jewelry, and are sent away with dyed red eggs as party favors. Babies and eggs stack up side-by-side, the hollering red Os of their mouths echoing the red eggs in pyramids.</p>	<p>British soldiers had deep feeling for their muskets, often nicknamed “Brown Bill” or “Brown Bess.” Of course, a giddy affection for Brown Bess does not excuse the overeager hunter who “browns”: firing indiscriminately at the darkest spot in a covey of birds, hitting none and scattering all.</p>	
	<p><b>EASILY FOOLED</b></p> <p>The Japanese also focus on a baby's red face as a handy synecdoche for the full package; their word for baby, <i>akachan</i>, translates loosely as “little red one.” Along these lines, when Japanese steal candy from proverbial babies, they describe something all too easily accomplished as “<i>akago no te o hineru</i>”, or “to twist a [red] baby's hand.”</p>	<p><b>ENVY</b></p> <p>Germans go “yellow with envy” (<i>gelb vor Neid</i>), “black with rage” (<i>schwarz mit Ärger</i>), get as “blue-drunk as a violet” (<i>blau wie ein Veilchen</i>), and “beat someone up green and yellow” (<i>jemanden grün und gelb schlagen</i>). Sometimes in that order.</p>	
	<p><b>AS QUEER AS A CLOCKWORK ORANGE</b></p> <p>Anthony Burgess's 1962 tale of ultra-violence takes its name from the Cockney expression, “as queer as a clockwork orange.” In an introduction to the book's 1986 edition, Burgess explained that his protagonist is “a clockwork orange—he has the appearance of an organism lovely with color and juice, but is in fact only a clockwork toy to be wound up by God or the Devil, or the almighty state.”</p>	<p><b>INDIAN MARRIAGE</b></p> <p>When a Hindi woman ties the knot, she “gets her hands yellow” (<i>Haath peelay kar diya</i>), a reference to lavishly decorating the bride's hands in henna for a wedding.</p>	
		<p><b>FORCED-POLITE LAUGHTER</b></p> <p>Jokes about “freedom fries” will, in France, yield you only a queasily polite, obligatory chuckle the French call “yellow laughter” (<i>rire jaune</i>).</p>	

	<p><b>AN ILL-FATED GREEN BOWLER</b></p> <p>Amid the teeming throngs of Chinese businessmen at rush hour, rarely will you see one clutching a green hat to his head. The expression, “to wear a green hat” in Chinese is the same for the word “cuckold,” so Chinese men usually steer clear.</p>	<b>SHAME</b>	
	<p><b>DIRTY OLD MEN</b></p> <p>Green is the color of dirty old men in Castilian Spanish (<i>viejos verdes</i>), and spreads its moldy patina to dirty green jokes (<i>chistes verdes</i>) and dirty green films (<i>películas verdes</i>). For the Japanese, sex is lighter-hued: they watch <i>pinku eiga</i>, “pink porn.”</p>	<p><b>JEALOUSY</b></p> <p>Swedes and Norwegians go “black-sick” (<i>svartsjuk</i>) with jealousy, which the Finnish call “<i>mustankipeä</i>.” When extreme jealousy curdles its way biliously to one's toes, the Finns describe that degree of envy “<i>mustasukkainen</i>,” “with black socks.”</p>	
	<p><b>RUSSIAN HOMOSEXUALS</b></p> <p>Russians consider sky-blue (<i>golubóy</i>) and navy blue (<i>sínij</i>) not as shades of the same color but as entirely separate hues, as distinct from each other as red and orange for English speakers. That distinction runs to sexual orientations, where “sky-blue” is shorthand for gay men, and one can call a lesbian a “pink” (<i>rózovaya</i>). Much like the English word “queer,” these terms were once derogatory but have since been appropriated by Russian gays as a positive badge of identity.</p>	<p><b>LATVIAN BIRTHDAYS</b></p> <p>On birthdays Latvians gather 'round their <i>klingēris</i>, a pretzel-shaped coffee cake, and sing “Have Many White Days” (<i>Daudz baltu dieninu</i>). The practice is reminiscent of a Roman tradition of marking happy days on their calendars with white chalk and darker days with charcoal. The 1835 book <i>Roman Antiquities</i> traces the custom back to the Thracians or Scythians, “who every evening before they slept, threw into an urn or quiver a white pebble, if the day had passed agreeably; but if not, a black one: and at their death, by counting the pebbles, their life was judged to have been happy or unhappy.”</p>	
	<p><b>TO PLAY HOOKY</b></p> <p>Germans ditch school or work with a solid-sounding alibi: they're “making blue” (<i>blau machen</i>). Traditionally, printmakers and dye-workers had to take the following day off when a big job called for blue. The blue dye oxidized during the extra day of drying, improving durability.</p>	<p><b>A TRUE LONG SHOT</b></p> <p>Any hopeless effort in Danish will elicit a shrug and a colorless write-off: “You can shoot a white stick after that” (<i>Skyde en hvid pind efter</i>). The origins of the phrase are obscure, but the likeliest stick appears in the Danish fable of Esben and the Witch. Favored by their father, Esben's 11 brothers ride into the world on white steeds, while Esben has to ride a white stick stripped of its bark. The myth's action starts when one Sir Red tells the King the brothers have the ability to get gold-and-silver-plated doves, a dazzling boar, and a super-sonic lamp. To the brothers' despair, the King wants these items. Esben murmurs a charm over his magical white stick—“Fly quick, my little stick, and carry me across the stream”—upon which he's delivered to a witch's house stocked with all these things.</p>	
	<p><b>OVERINDULGENCE</b></p> <p>What's the color of excess? Germans and French speakers “go blue” when they're drunk, while English speakers kneel on the porcelain into a “Technicolor yawn.” Spaniards who've had too much to eat or drink “go purple” (<i>ponerse morado de hacer/comer algo</i>).</p>		