

Brightening the Holidays



by Christine Graf

Because red, white, and blue are the colors of the American flag, it makes sense that these are the colors associated with the Fourth of July. But when it comes to other holidays celebrated by Americans, the color associations aren't always so obvious.

Even though the color green has become synonymous with St. Patrick's Day, the holiday's original color was blue. That was the color of the robes worn by Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. He introduced Christianity to Ireland in the 400s, and St. Patrick's Day originated as a holiday to commemorate his March 17 death. The color blue lost much of its appeal among the Irish after it became associated with British

rule of their country in the 1500s. Green, the color of the flags carried by revolutionary groups who opposed British rule, eventually became the color of St. Patrick's Day. It also became the official color of Ireland, the "Emerald Isle," a place known for its lush green landscapes.

It was St. Patrick who introduced the Irish to the Christian holiday of Easter. The holiday's pastel shades of purples, greens, yellows, blues, and pinks represent the coming of spring. These colors are also symbolic of the resurrection or rebirth of Jesus. A dark shade of purple is also associated with Easter. Roman Emperors wore purple robes during the time of Jesus, and according to the Bible, Jesus was given a purple

with Color



Wearing of the green! Celebrants take part in a St. Patrick's Day parade in San Francisco.

robe to wear before he was crucified. While wearing the robe, he was mocked and called "the King of the Jews."

Green and red are the traditional colors of Christmas, another Christian holiday. They are the colors of holly, a plant with green leaves and red berries. Holly was used during Christmas celebrations in ancient Rome. It was there that Christmas was first celebrated in 336. In early Christian tradition, the red berries of holly represented the blood of Christ, and the spiky leaves represented his crown of thorns. The color red was not associated with Santa Claus until 1931 when a Coca-Cola ad pictured Santa Claus wearing a red suit and drinking a Coke.

Before that time, illustrations of Santa often pictured him wearing a green or blue robe.

People of the Jewish faith celebrate Hanukkah. The actual date of the eight-day December celebration varies depending on the Hebrew calendar. Blue and white, the colors of the Israeli flag, are also the colors of Hanukkah. In Judaism, the color white represents purity, honesty, and peace. Blue is significant because the ancient Israelites used blue dye to color the tassels on the corner of their garments. According to the Bible, Moses instructed them to do this. The blue tassels were to serve as a reminder of the Lord's commandments.



Blue and white are the primary colors of Hanukkah.



Black bats and orange pumpkins signify Halloween.

Ugly or not, most Christmas sweaters feature red and green.



Another December holiday, Kwanzaa, is celebrated by many African Americans. The seven-day holiday that begins on December 26 was established in 1966 by a California college professor. He wanted the holiday to unite the African American community and connect them to their heritage. Kwanzaa was inspired by African harvest celebrations, and its colors are black, red, and green. Black represents the people, red represents their struggle, and green represents the hope that comes from that struggle.

The black that is associated with Halloween has a much darker meaning. The holiday evolved from Celtic festivals that took place 2,000 years ago in what is now France, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. The festivals occurred on November 1, a date that marked the end of the harvest season. The Celts believed that spirits of the dead returned on October 31 (the date Halloween is now celebrated), the night before the festival began. As a result, they lit large bonfires and dressed in costumes to ward off ghosts. Black continues to represent the darker side of Halloween. Orange represents the dominant color of fall and has nothing to do with pumpkins. In fact, pumpkins weren't part of Halloween until the mid-1800s. The tradition of carving jack-o-lanterns originated with the Irish who carved them out of potatoes and turnips.

The oranges, yellows, and browns that are the colors of fall are also associated with Thanksgiving. The first Thanksgiving took place in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where these colors would have been on full display.

The main color on display at Valentine's Day is red, the color of love. Legend says the holiday honors Saint Valentine, who was imprisoned for performing weddings for soldiers who were forbidden to marry. That explains the holiday's connection to love. But how exactly did the color red become associated with love? Like love itself, that remains a mystery.



FAST FACTS:

- Legend says that green shamrocks, three-leaf clovers (not four-leaf), were used by Saint Patrick to teach the Irish about Christianity.
- When Henry VIII declared himself king of Ireland in 1542, his official flag was blue.
- Irish immigrants introduced the St. Patrick's Day holiday to the United States in the 1800s.
- The name Kwanzaa comes from a phrase in the African language of Swahili that means "first fruits."
- Singing, dancing, and storytelling are important components of Kwanzaa.
- The Empire State Building's tower has been illuminated in holiday-specific colors since 1976.
- Santa's weight problem developed after the 1931 Coca Cola ad pictured him as being overweight.



The colors of Kwanzaa are black, red, and green.



Red is the dominant color of the Chinese New Year, as it is believed to bring good luck.



Valentine's Day is celebrated with red roses and lots of hearts.