

A Colorful Discussion Topic from Wiser Now



Thoughts on Blue

Notice that I said “Thoughts on blue” rather than “Blue Thoughts” because the latter has a connotation of sadness, or worse, devilishness. (To turn the air blue is to swear and curse.) If you ask a person to “Name a color, any color,” most people will answer red, but if you ask people to name their *favorite* color, blue is by far the most popular (and its popularity increases as people increase in age). That is perhaps not surprising when you consider how often it is referred to. For example:

- People: Bluebeard the pirate, The Blue Man Group
- Plants: bluebell flowers
- Pests: bluebottle flies
- Food: blueberries and blue cheese – a rich food with (literally) moldy blue veins
- Birds: bluebird of happiness and blue jay of crabbiness
- Clothes: blue jeans
- Music: the blues (sad) and bluegrass – lively, foot-stomping: essential elements are a fiddle and a banjo



Then there are the:

- People who talk a blue streak, meaning endlessly
- People who do something until they're blue in the face, meaning pointlessly because it will never happen, even if they turn blue from lack of breathing
- Ideas that hit us like a bolt from the blue, like lightning
- Grandchildren who are our “blue-eyed darlings” no matter what color their eyes are. (The phrase – which is often coupled with “fair-haired boy” – means the person can do no wrong in our view no matter what the reality.)

And for good measure, here are the origins of a few more bluesy expressions:

Blue chip stocks derive from the game of poker in which the blue chips have the highest value. The stock – or any other asset – is therefore something of reliable value.

Blue collar workers are those whose manual labor requires durable clothing, the color of which has often been blue (including shirts, jeans, overalls and jump suits). Bluecoats were traditionally soldiers or sailors who dressed primarily in blue, but “men in blue,” typically refers to policemen.

Speaking of sailors, those who said they were caught “between the devil and the deep blue sea” may have been referring to the seam between the deck planking and the topmost plank of the ship's side which is called “the devil” and would presumably need occasional recaulking, a job that involved hanging over the side. Others reject that idea and say it simply means “caught between a rock and a hard place.” But while we’re thinking nautically:



A bluenose in the dictionary is said to be a prudish or puritanical person, but how that came about is unclear (although it seems to have once referred to the Tories or Loyalists who fled to Canada during the American Revolutionary War). Nova Scotians now proudly identify themselves as bluenoses in reference to the name of the famous racing schooner that was built there. Once upon a time, however, it seems to have been associated with a type of blue-tipped potato that

was commonly eaten by the poor. But the most colorful story I read said that fisherman’s wives used a cheap blue dye on the wool mittens they knit for their spouses. After days at sea with nothing to wipe their runny noses with but the back of their hands, the fishermen would return to land with tinted schnozzles.

Talk about it

- Do you like the color blue or certain shades of blue? If so which ones and in what (i.e., clothing, decorating, flowers)?
- Did you learn anything new from this article? If so what?
- Can you think of other expressions or words that involve blue? If so, what are they?
- For some people blue is soothing and calming, and for others it’s a sad color. What mood does it invoke in you? Does tropical turquoise invoke a different mood than ice blue or navy blue?



- Many of nature’s flowers come in shades of blue or purplish blue, but do not have blue in their name. For example, asters, hyacinths, irises, lilacs, forget-me-nots and lavender. Are any of these especially appealing to you?