

# Fun Facts About Color

BY ALISON CAPORIMO

## Why Soccer Balls Are Black-and-White

Turns out the sports staple was made for TV. For the 1970 World Cup in Mexico—the first of its kind to be broadcast live on television—Adidas created the iconic black-and-white paneled ball, intended to catch the eyes of viewers better than a single-colored one would as it moved across black-and-white TV screens. The black pentagons also helped players and referees recognize the swerve and flight of the ball.

## Why the Purple Heart Is Purple

When the Continental Congress forbade George Washington from promoting soldiers during the American Revolution, the revered general got crafty. On August 7, 1782, he established the Badge of Military Merit: a purple cloth or silk heart to be worn over a soldier's left breast and signify an elevated status. While it's hard to know why Washington opted for that hue, the history behind the color purple's regal reputation dates

back to the 15th century BC, when ancient Mediterranean clothiers created the shade from sea snail secretions in a long and expensive process. The result: Only royalty could afford purple clothes.

## Why Surrender Flags Are White

Some believe the peacemaking symbol comes from the bland garb of ancient times. Soldiers and civilians alike had white clothes handy, and since they were highly visible against neutral backgrounds, the clothes could be waved to easily convey passivity.

## Why Taxis Are Yellow

If you hailed a New York City cab in 1905, a car painted red and green would screech to a halt before you. So how did the color change from two-tone to bumblebee-bright? In 1907, Albert Rockwell created the first yellow taxi cab, with an innovative 15-horsepower engine, at his car company in Connecticut. Legend has it that his wife suggested



the cars be painted yellow, and it's been that way ever since. By 1909, yellow taxis were zipping around New York City, courtesy of Rockwell's cab company.

## Why Bubble Gum Is Pink

Fate would have it that hot pink dye was readily available at the Fleer

Chewing Gum Company when employee Walter Diemer experimented in 1928 with a new gum recipe—as he liked to do in his spare time. The 23-year-old created a less sticky and more flexible formula that resulted in bigger bubbles. He poured pink dye into the batch, and America's favorite oral fixation was born.

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## Why Money Is Green

Why don't ATMs spew purple bills? Because of long-lasting dye. When paper notes were introduced in 1929, the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing opted to use green ink because the color was relatively high in its resistance to chemical and physical changes. Also, at the time, green pigment was available in large quantities for quick printing.

## Why Karate Belts Are Black

There are a lot of myths surrounding the martial arts' most prestigious designation. The most likely story, however, claims that white belts used to be dyed to a new color upon a student's advancement to a higher level. Hence the increasingly darker order: white, yellow, orange, green, blue, purple, brown, red, and black.

## Why Prison Jumpsuits Are Orange

Shows like *Orange Is the New Black* have colored the perception of everyday prison garb. To set the record straight: Some say that prisons started putting inmates in orange uniforms to make them easy to spot while in transit or in public. As for day-to-day uniforms, it depends on the prison. California outfits its male prisoners in denim jeans and jackets and blue chambray shirts, while the federal maximum security prison in Florence, Colorado, issues khaki trousers and tops.

## Why First-Place Ribbons Are Blue

Some scholars say we have an old nautical award to thank. In the 1860s, the Blue Riband—a pennant flown from a ship's mast—was a prize given to the passenger ship making the fastest transatlantic crossing. Scholars speculate that over time, the spelling *blue riband* was changed to *blue ribbon*, serving as a symbol of general excellence.

## Why a Matador's Cape Is Red

Bulls charge at the sight of red, right? Wrong. Bulls are color-blind. Thus, a fighting bull is likely enraged by the cape's quick movement instead of its color. So why the bold hue? Some say it helps mask one of the more gruesome aspects of a bullfight: splatters of the animal's blood.

## Why Wedding Dresses Are White

The classic white dress came from a European fashion trend. In 1840, England's Queen Victoria donned a white lace gown to marry Albert of Saxe-Coburg. At the time, brides were married in any color—even black was popular. The Queen's choice, however, quickly inspired other brides to opt for white. In the early 19th century, *Godey's Lady's Book* issued its blessing: "Custom has decided that white is the most fitting hue for a wedding." **R**