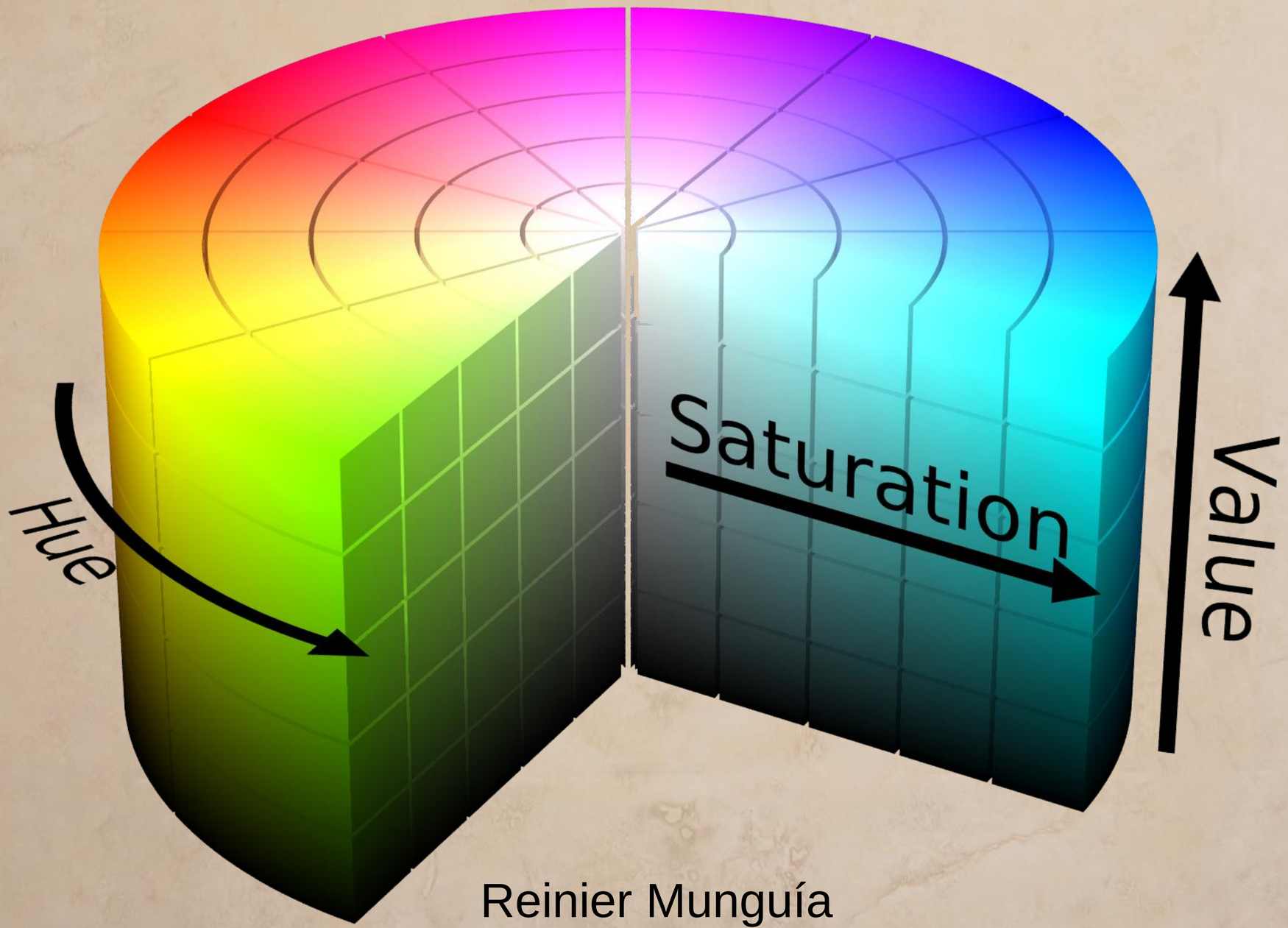
COLOR THEORY

for Photographers



Reinier Munguía

COLOR THEORY

Definition:

- Color theory is the study of colors and their relationships, which helps photographers create visually harmonious and impactful images.

Why It Matters:

- Color affects mood, composition, and storytelling.
- Understanding color theory allows photographers to control the emotional response of their audience.

Color Psychology & Emotions

- Warm Colors (Red, Orange, Yellow): Energizing, attention-grabbing, associated with warmth and excitement.
- Cool Colors (Blue, Green, Purple): Calming, serene, and often linked to professionalism or calm environments.
- Practical Application: Use warm colors to create excitement in action shots, or cool tones for peaceful, tranquil scenes.



THE COLOR WHEEL

A Substractive Model

Primary Colors:

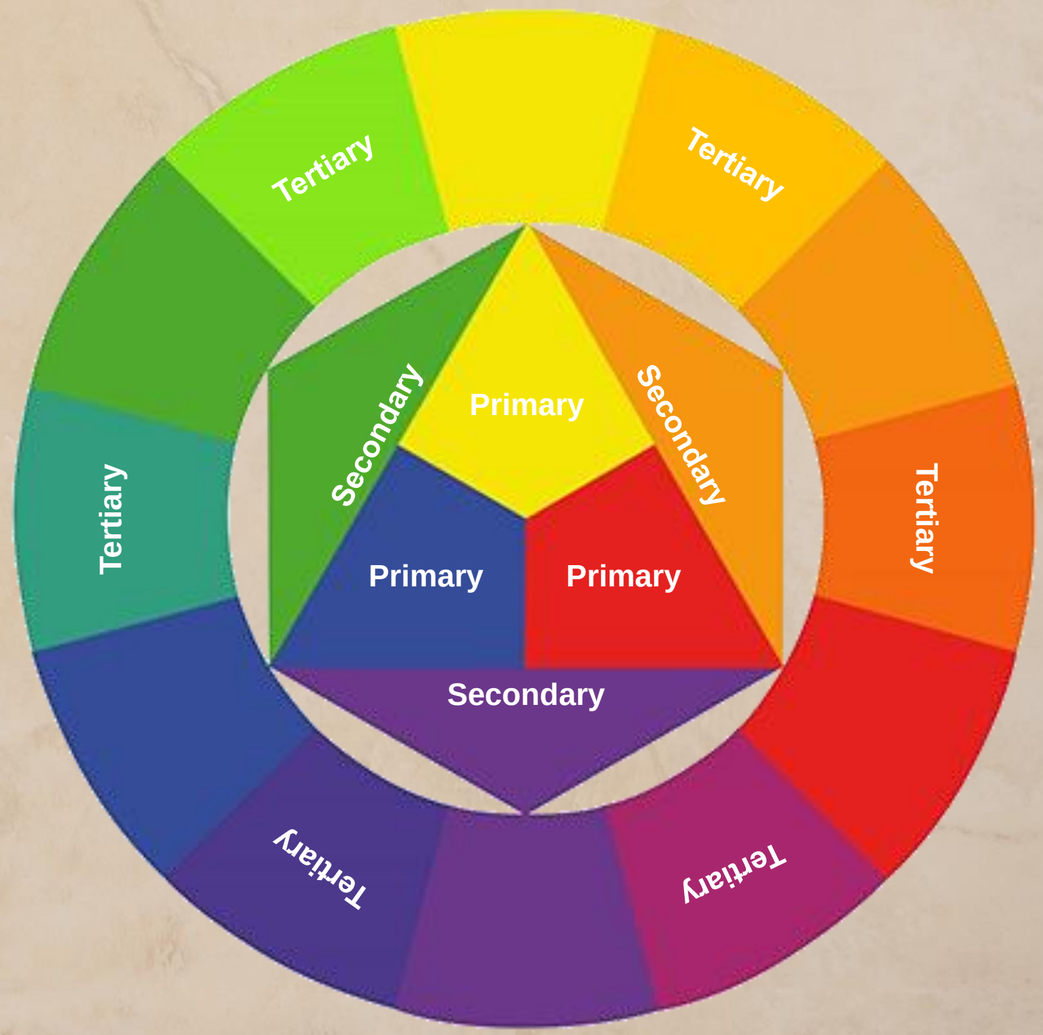
Red, Blue, Yellow

Secondary Colors:

Green, Orange, Purple

Tertiary Colors:

Red-Orange, Yellow-Orange Red-Purple,
Blue-Purple, Blue-Green, Green- Yellow



Hue, Tint & Shade



Hue



Tint

Add White



Shade

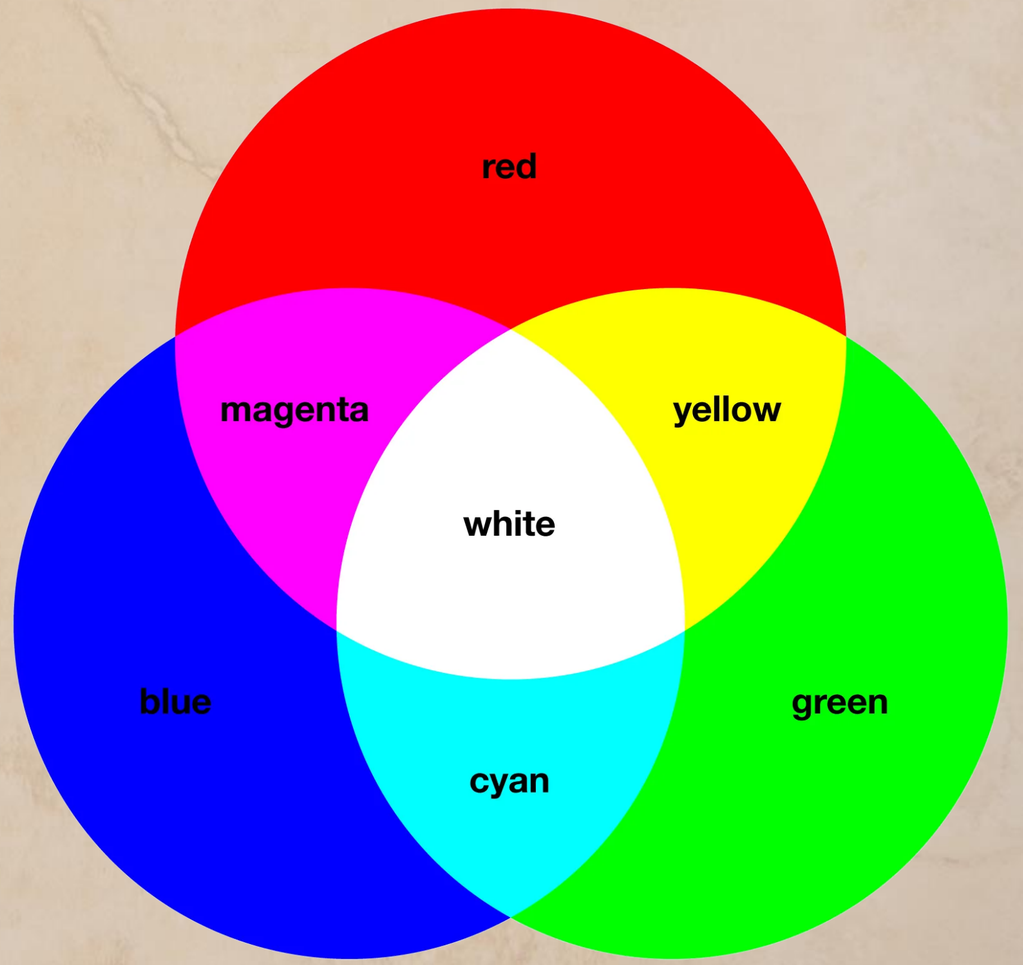
Add Black

Colors are all hues plus white and black

RGB COLOR MODEL

An Additive Model

The RGB color model is an additive color model in which the red, green and blue primary colors of light are added together in various ways to reproduce a broad array of colors.



Hue

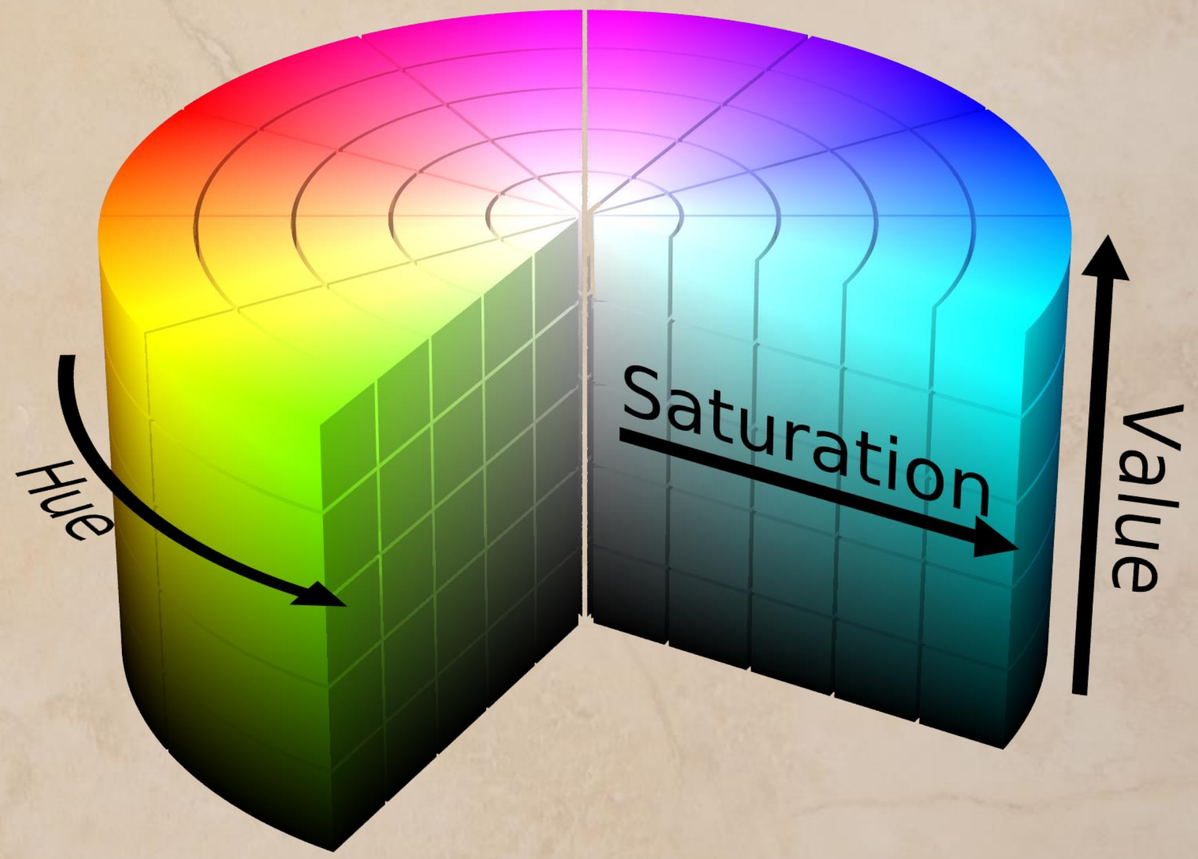
The color's dominant wavelength, or the basic color on the color wheel. Examples of hues include red, yellow, and turquoise.

Value

The color's brightness or luminosity, and how close it is to white or black. A higher value means a brighter color.

Saturation

The color's intensity or purity. A high saturation color is vivid and intense. Decreasing the saturation makes the color look grayer until it becomes pure gray.



Color Temperature in Photography

Kelvin Scale:

- Warm Tungsten lighting: ~2000K-3000K
- Cool (Daylight: ~5000K-6500K

Adjusting White Balance:

- Achieving accurate color representation.



Daylight/Flash 5500k

Tungsten 3200k

Monochromatic Color Schemes

- Definition: A single color and its variations in hue, saturation, and brightness.
- Why Use It: Focuses attention, enhances mood, and simplifies composition.
- Example: A black-and-white portrait accentuates emotion by removing distracting colors.



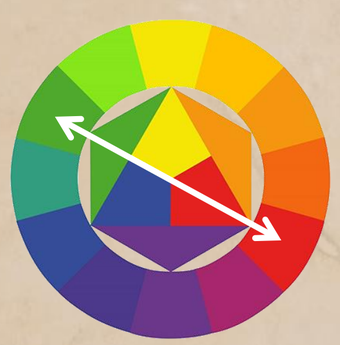




Color Contrast & Depth

Color Contrast:

Using contrasting colors (e.g., warm vs. cool) to create visual interest and separation between subjects.





Depth Perception:

- Normally warm colors appear closer, cool colors recede.
- Use this to create a sense of depth and layers in landscapes or street photography.

Homologous vs Analogous



Colors are close to each other on color wheel



Colors are opposite to each other on color wheel

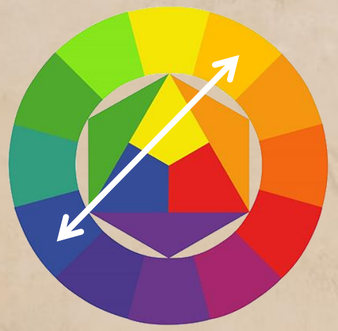
Homologous vs Analogous





The 60/30/10 rule of color

- 60% Primary
- 30% Secondary
- 10% Accent







This rule is a design guideline that helps create balanced color palettes by using different proportions of colors:

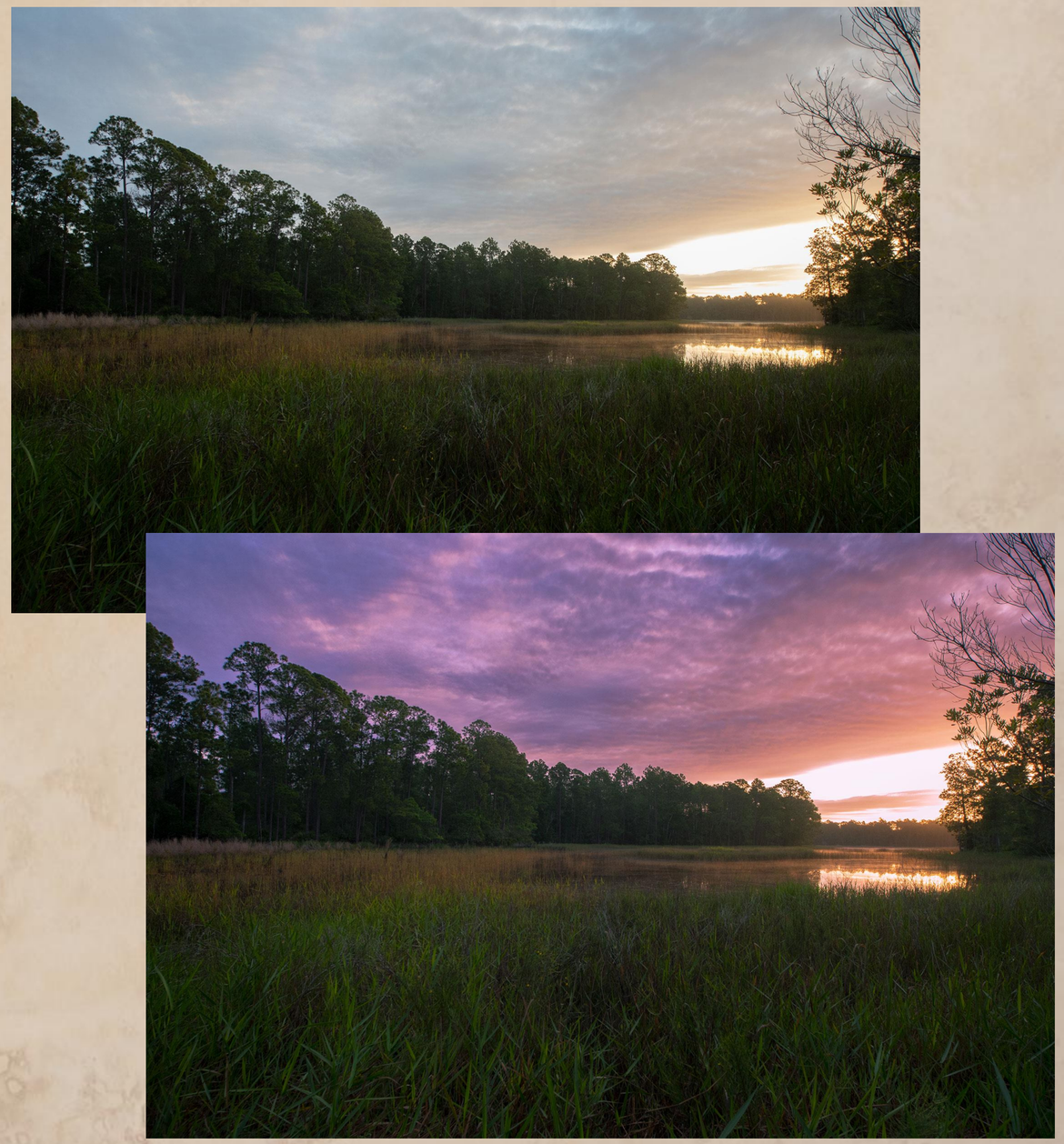
Color Grading in Post

Definition:

Adjusting colors during editing to enhance mood and story.

Popular Techniques:

- Teal and Orange: Enhances skin tones and contrasts against backgrounds.
- Desaturation: Removing color for a minimalist, moody effect.
- Split Toning: Adding different tones to highlights and shadows to create unique color effects.



Color in Storytelling

- Symbolism: Different colors evoke specific emotions (red for passion, blue for sadness).
- Consistency: Maintaining a consistent color palette in a photo series helps in storytelling.
- Case Study: Famous photographers who use color as a narrative tool

- Steve McCurry's vibrant portraiture





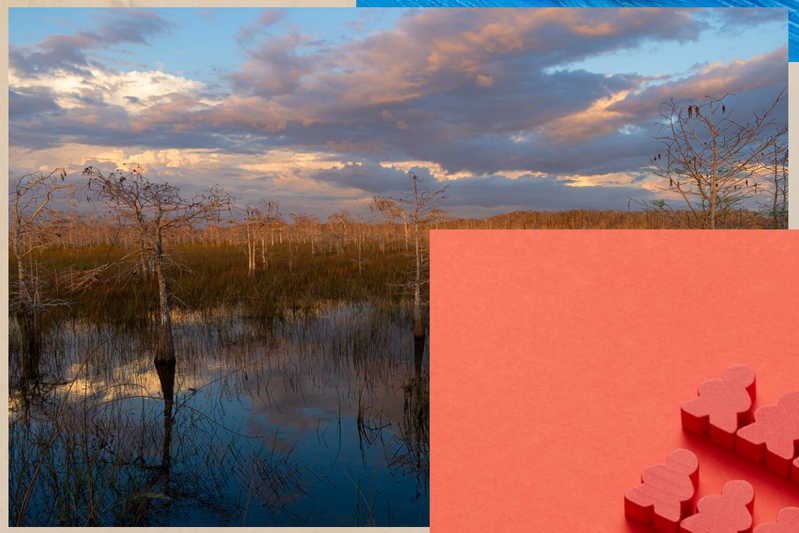
Practical Applications

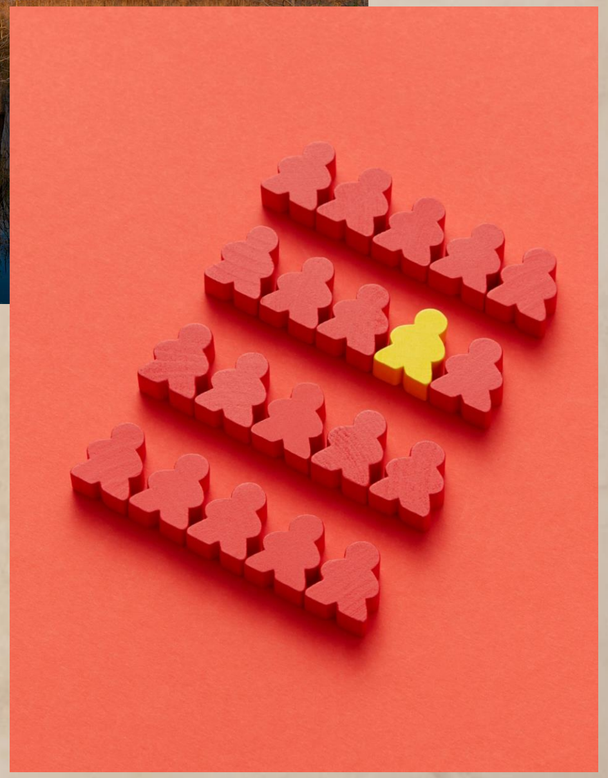
- Planning: Visualize the color palette before shooting. Use color schemes that align with the mood or story of your photo.
- Lighting: Control color temperature through artificial lights or by adjusting your white balance in camera.
- Post-Processing: Use color grading tools like Lightroom or Photoshop to fine-tune the mood and harmonize colors in your images.

Tips

- Use Bold Colors
- Use Pastel Colors
- Use Monochromatic Colors
- Highlight a Colored Subject
- Feature One Dominant Color
- Use Complementary Colors
- Experiment with Color Temperatures
- Use Colors to Evoke Emotions







QUESTIONS?

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