

A Classroom Guide for *sky color*

A Message from Peter H. Reynolds

Sky Color is the third installment of my Creatrilogy, which also includes *The Dot* and *Ish*. I'm thrilled that these books have found their way into the hands of educators, but even happier that people have understood that the messages go well beyond art. All three stories provide encouragement for children — and grown-up children — to explore, develop, and protect the bravery required to discover one's voice and express it in a unique way. It takes courage to do that unfettered by self-doubt or unproductive feedback.

Sky Color is about developing perspective, examining the world from varying points of view, thinking outside the box, and pushing oneself to the next level. The star, Marisol, is very confident in her artistic ability, but she comes to an important revelation after she is inspired to move beyond learned conventions by observing the world more mindfully.

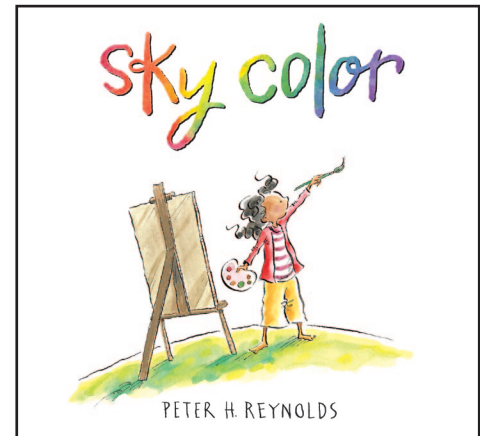
Sky Color's story comes from a very personal experience that I had after graduating from college. I considered myself a pretty good artist at that point, but my next-door neighbor Aldo Servino, an amazing artist from Italy who had recently moved to the U.S., gave me a wake-up call that changed my life. Aldo taught me that I needed to "unlearn" some of the things I'd learned in art school. He really did take the blue paint from me when we were painting murals together in Harvard Square. I still remember his voice, with his melodic Italian accent: "Blue is the only color we *won't* be using today!" Then he swirled many unusual colors together — brown, green, yellow, purple — and proceeded to create a magical skyscape in front of me.

Aldo was right, of course. The sky **can** be many colors. I just needed to observe the world more mindfully and tap into my imagination to conjure up a version of the sky — or sea, or landscape, or anything — that conveyed the emotion and spirit that would move people to feel something. The most important lesson I learned from Aldo was not about art at all, but the realization that even when we think we've "arrived," there's always something more to learn, and in some cases "unlearn." We must push beyond our preconceived ideas and be open to seeing the world with fresh eyes.

I hope the suggested activities in this guide will serve as a springboard for you and your students to explore and celebrate creative self-expression — and to be brave enough to share your voices with the world.

Wishing you a most creative journey,

Peter H. Reynolds



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Apple Color

Before reading *Sky Color* to your class, pass out crayons and paper and ask students to draw and color an apple. Move this along quickly, since the point of this exercise is to get kids to give their knee-jerk response to the prompt. Don't answer any "Am I doing this right?" questions. Be sure to have students sign their work. In my experience, you'll find that most kids will have created a red apple with perhaps a green leaf or two. Put the drawings in a big envelope and seal it up.

At some point after you've finished reading the story, pose this simple question: "What color is an apple?" Most kids will immediately blurt out "RED." When I do this exercise, I quietly wait a few seconds with eyebrows raised and a smile. Students will gradually launch into a much more expansive list of colors: yellow, green-speckled, and so on. Watch as they smile and laugh at their own "aha!" moment. It's a beautiful thing.

Now pass out more paper, crayons, watercolors, and art supplies. Ask the students to take another try at drawing an apple. Encourage them to share their ideas as they create their new version of an apple. If you have some imaginative kids who decide that an apple could be polka-dotted or plaid, applaud them for it. That's a creativity breakthrough. An artist's apple can be any color he or she chooses!

If you're short on time or don't have the paper and crayons handy, skip the drawing before and after and just ask the question. It still makes the point!

As a science experiment that ties into this activity, ask kids to bring in real apples and see how many different colors they can be. Photograph the apples, including close-ups of the apple skin. Cut the apples in half and examine the colors of each apple's interior. A quick response might be that an apple is white inside, but when kids observe more closely (a trait of a good scientist), they will most likely notice a green or yellow tinge. Have them look at the color of the seeds, and ask them to observe what begins to happen as the sliced apple is left exposed. It becomes beige and brown. Document this process with more photos—and invite kids to write in journals—to describe the apples' changes in color. Leave the apple for a few weeks and have kids notice the colors again. You can even compile the images into a slide show and share them with the world!

Sky Journal

Marisol notices how the sky changes color as the sun sets, and how the sky isn't blue at all during the night or on a rainy day. Following her example, have your students use the reproducible included with this guide to keep a sky journal, in which they track the colors of the sky at various intervals. They can simply write about what they see, or they can take or draw pictures. Students may want to approach this project in different ways, such as taking a series of sunset photos or photographing the sky every five minutes. You can adapt this activity for observations over a week, month, or year. The key here is to encourage mindfulness about the myriad color possibilities that are beyond basic blue sky.



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Color Mix

How many colors are there in the world? How many colors are visible with the human eye? What are the three primary colors? What happens when we mix colors? What are secondary colors? This topic provides an opportunity for rich discussion and exploration.

Get students to drop three drops of tempera paint on a piece of paper — one red, one blue, one yellow. Ask the children what colors they will get if they mix the colors together. Feel free to guide the children in mixing two primary colors together to get a secondary color. Students can also try adding white paint to experiment with various shades of colors. Challenge them to create their own color and give it a name. Try using watercolors mixed with tea — two of the media used to create *Sky Color*!

Ocean Color

After reading *Sky Color*, ask students to talk about the color of the ocean. The discussion will help kids move beyond the expected (“the ocean is blue”) and explore the notion that the ocean — and other bodies of water — can be many different colors. A murky river leading into an ocean will cause blooms of brown coloration. A stormy sea can churn up the sea bottom, making the water appear grayish. As a class, try to find photos, drawings, and paintings of different bodies of water: oceans, lakes, rivers, puddles, a glass of water, and so on.

Ask students how this activity is similar to Marisol's *Sky Color* dilemma. Have they discovered lots of different colors? Did they find any examples of an artist's interpretation of water to be surprising? Why? If water is actually colorless, how can it appear to have so many colors? Try using a computer program such as ArtRage to mix colors that would be appropriate for water. An extension might be to connect with kids in another part of the world and find out what color the water is near them. This exercise is another way to expand students' thinking about the potential limitations of conventions and to enjoy the power of creative exploration and mindful self-expression.

Searching for Sky Color

For a delightful treat, encourage your students to visit www.flickr.com and type “sky color” into the search field. Students will be greeted by a dazzling array of photos of the sky — and interestingly, most of the photos show skies that are not blue! Ask students to try to name some of the vibrant and subtle colors in the photos, such as fuchsia, gold, lavender, and scarlet. You can also ask students whether certain photos remind them of something else. They may respond with some unique observations, such as, “That sky looks like what you see when you bite into a peach” or “That sky reminds me of leaves changing color in the fall.”

Class Mural

In *Sky Color*, the students are asked to paint a mural for the school library. Begin this activity by asking the class what a mural is. Ask for examples that students may have seen or heard about.

Together, brainstorm a theme for your own mural. The mural could tie into whatever curriculum topic you are currently studying (such as the seasons, the solar system, or ecosystems), or it could deliver critical messages that move beyond the curriculum — social justice, anti-bullying, encouraging creativity, and so on. Use a long roll of paper — either butcher paper or white artist paper works well. Divide the class into groups and assign them various sections to work on. This activity not only allows students to experience *Sky Color*'s story in a personally relevant way; it also encourages communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity — the 4 C's considered to be the most important of the twenty-first-century skills framework.



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Posters for a Cause

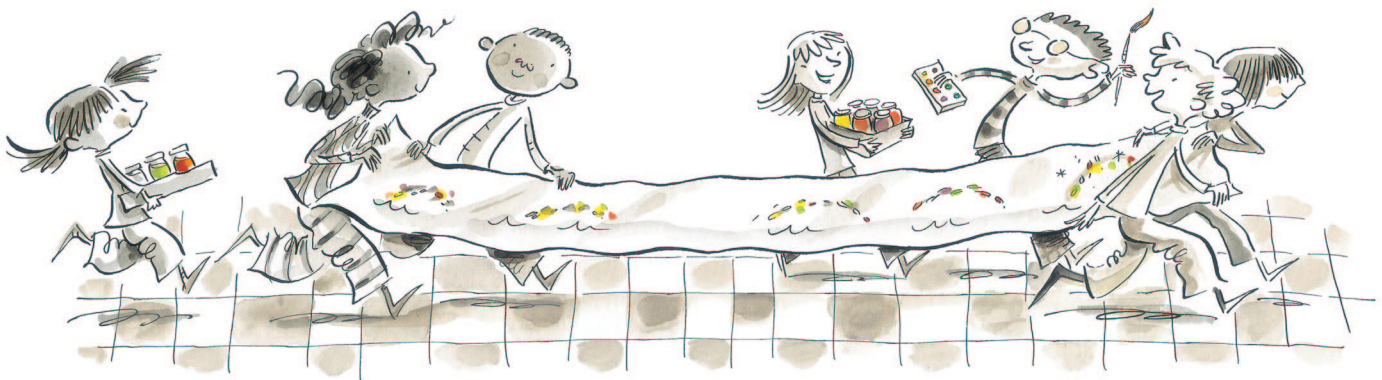
Marisol is an artist who is not afraid to hang her art in galleries and share her ideas. She paints posters to share her beliefs and uses them to fight for causes that concern her. Discuss this concept with the class. Find something that they feel passionate about. Perhaps it's a global issue such as saving the planet, fighting hunger, or preserving the rain forests. Or it could be something localized, such as getting more books for the school library or raising money for art supplies. Decide on a topic, and assist students in creating a series of posters to hang around the school or neighborhood. You may want to partner with the PTA to turn this activity into an actual fundraising event.

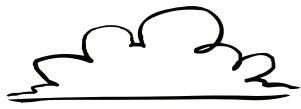
Color of the Day

Host a weeklong series of "Color of the Day" events to celebrate a different color each day. Have children come to school dressed in the color of the day and eat a food of that color as well (be sure to follow your school's policies for classroom snacks and food allergies). This is an opportunity to discuss the health benefits of "eating the rainbow." Celebrate the color throughout the day by playing various games and activities, such as a color treasure hunt in which you have the children search for items matching the color of the day, then collect the gathered objects in one place and notice all the differences in that one color. Another idea is to use only the color of the day when writing or drawing, such as a red marker or crayon for the whole day on Red Day. Challenge the class to paint pictures using various shades of that color.

I Feel Colorful

Ask children if they've ever heard someone say that he or she "feels blue." What does that mean? How does a color describe how a person might feel? Explain that sometimes a person who is jealous is called "green with envy." Brainstorm various moods and emotions and ask children to describe what color they would identify with that mood. Does excited equal fuchsia? Does calm equal yellow? Then challenge children to use the attached reproducible to draw and write about their mood and the colors that best represent it.





Sky Journal



MORNING

AFTERNOON

EVENING

Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			

I Feel Colorful



Today my mood is _____.

The color (or colors) that best fits my mood is

because _____.

This is me in my colorful mood:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thick black border, intended for a drawing of the person in their colorful mood.