



How Come Our School Bus is Yellow?

by Douglas Evans

Primary Colors

Once upon a long, school time ago, the world had no color. The sky, the trees, the classrooms and playgrounds, even the school buildings themselves, appeared only in black, white, and every shade of gray. Hallway walls stood chalky white, and the tiled floors gleamed like polished ink. Pale gray grass covered the soccer field, while dark gray climbing structures cast black shadows across the white hopscotch courts.

But everything changed one morning recess when three fifth-graders—Red, the school's top four-square player, Blue, the queen of the kickball wall, and Yellow, the undefeated tetherball champ—stepped onto the colorless playground.

The white sun shone brightly in a light gray sky. At the four-square court,

Red stood in the top square. This is where he spent most of every recess. He served the dark gray rubber ball to Samantha in square two. She smacked it straight back. But this time, Red slugged a line-drive into square three, and the ball skipped right between Hudson's legs.

"Whoa!" cried the kids waiting in line. No one had ever hit the rubber ball that hard.

Grinning, Red chased the ball to the far side of the playground. But when he picked it up, he froze. Its surface had changed. It now glowed with a bright color no one had ever seen before. Against the drab playground, it looked cheerful yet a bit scary, warm but also dangerous.

Red showed the ball to the duty teacher. "Look! Look!" he said. "The four-square ball! It's different!"

The teacher studied the ball, then squinted up at the sun. "I think this new color came from the sunlight," she said. "When you hit the ball so hard, you must have split a light beam."

"But I thought light was just white," said Red.

The teacher smiled. "Turns out it's more than that. And since you created this new color, Red, that's what we'll call it...*red*."

Soon, Red discovered something remarkable about his red rubber ball. Whenever it touched certain things on the playground, those things also turned red. The ball bounced off the swings—*poof!*— they turned red. It hit the spiral slide—*bam!*—red again. A hula hoop turned red, and so did the fire alarm. Before long, the entire playground was splashed with bright bursts of Red's new color.

In the meantime, Blue kicked her rubber ball against the kickball wall. This was her strongest kick ever. It bounced straight back, and she stopped it with her foot. The ball had changed. It was no longer gray but a joyful new color that made her feel happy.

The other kids crowded around.

“Pretty!” said one.

“It’s my favorite color ever,” said another.

The duty teacher walked over and studied the ball.

“Just like Red’s color,” she said. “I believe you kicked the ball so hard, you split the sunlight.”

She handed the ball back to Blue. “And since you made this color, we’ll call it *blue* after you.”

Delighted, Blue booted her ball against the wall again, and the wall turned blue. The ball bounced off Jean’s pants, and they turned blue, too. It hit the monkey bars, the basketball court, and Maggie’s backpack, and they all changed to Blue’s new color. The color blue spread across the playground as fast as red had.

“The world is changing right before our eyes,” said the teacher. “Keep going, Red and Blue. Keep hitting and kicking your colorful balls.”

That wasn’t all. From the tetherball circle, Yellow shouted, “Look at the tetherball! It’s not white or black or gray. It’s different.”

The duty teacher rushed over. Yellow held the tetherball still dangling from its string. Its surface gleamed with a color brighter than the others.

“I didn’t do anything,” Yellow said. “I just punched the ball as hard as I

could.”

“You split the sunlight just like Red and Blue,” the teacher said. “And since you created this color, Yellow, we’ll name it *yellow* in your honor.”

Yellow, however, wasn’t as lucky as Red and Blue. His yellow ball only spun around the tetherball pole. It touched nothing, so his color didn’t spread. As he kept slugging the ball, he watched benches, tables, backpacks, and playground equipment turn red or blue.

“It’s not fair,” he grumbled. “All the best stuff is Red and Blue’s colors by now, and I’m stuck here, batting my yellow ball in circles.”

Secondary Colors

At the next recess, Yellow stood alone in the tetherball circle while Red and Blue raced around the playground, turning even more things red and blue. Around and around he batted the tetherball, until something caught his eye. At the end of the string was a hook slipped through a loop on the yellow ball. That was it! All he had to do was unhook the ball, and he could take it anywhere he wanted.

At once, Yellow carried his ball to the soccer field. The dull gray grass was the largest thing left, neither red nor blue. But as he tossed his yellow ball onto the field, Blue kicked her ball across it at the same time. To everyone’s surprise, the grass didn’t turn blue or yellow. It turned a brand-new color.

“How delightful,” said the duty teacher. “We’ll call this color green, after Mr. Green, our custodian who mows the grass each week. Who could have guessed? Blue mixed with yellow makes green.”

Blue scowled at Yellow. “Take your ball back to the tetherball pole where it

belongs,” she said.

“That ball's only supposed to go in circles,” added Red.

Yellow clenched his jaw. He stormed over to the white playground door.

“A yellow door would look good?” he said.

But as he tapped his ball on the door--*bonk!*--Red's ball struck it, too. The door changed to yet another new color.

“Let’s call it *orange*,” said a girl nearby. “Like the fruit I had for a snack.”

“Red and yellow make *orange*,” said a boy.

Poor Yellow. No matter what he tried to touch with his yellow ball, Blue and Red always got there first or at the same time. The gray leaves on a tree and the bushes along the side of the school turned green. The black basketball and the basketball loop? Orange.

To make matters worse, Red and Blue tagged the ball shed together, changing it to a sixth new color. They named it *purple* after Mrs. Purple, the P.E. teacher.

By the time the duty teacher blew her whistle to end recess, the only yellow items on the playground were a banana peel and a Number 2 pencil under the blue and red jungle gym.

“What a colorful recess we’ve had,” said the teacher. “Yellow, don’t forget to return the tetherball to the pole.”

Yellow trudged toward the tetherball circle.

“There’s red, blue, green, orange, and purple everywhere,” he grumbled. “I must find a way to turn something important to my color.”

The Contest

An hour later, an ash-gray school bus drove into the parking lot. It parked beside the playground. Next to the green and orange bikes in the purple bike rack, the bus looked especially dull.

Red, Blue, and Yellow spotted the bus outside their classroom window. All three had the same idea.

"I'll make the school bus red," said Red. "My color stands for strength and love."

"The bus should be blue," said Blue. "Blue is the color of happiness and joy."

"A bright yellow bus would be better," said Yellow. "That way, kids could see it coming, even at dawn or dusk!"

He had a plan. This was his chance to outshine Red and Blue.

Yellow looked toward the yellow tetherball dangling from the pole.

"Let's have a contest," he said. "Since we created the colors by hitting and kicking our rubber balls extra hard, whoever hits or kicks their ball the hardest this time gets to color the school bus."

Red and Blue nodded.

"You're on," said Red.

"I'm in," said Blue.

As soon as the bell rang to end the day, the three fifth-graders raced to the playground. Red and Blue grabbed their rubber balls from the ball shed, while Yellow headed for the tetherball circle.

Blue went first. With a mighty kick, she launched her blue ball straight

upward. It flew so high it turned the entire sky blue. The ball kept rising until it vanished from sight. Some say it landed in the mountains and turned the snowy peaks blue. Others believe it splashed into the ocean, coloring the waves. No one knows for sure.

“Too bad for you, Blue,” said Yellow. “Guess the school bus can’t be your color now.”

Next, it was Red’s turn. He stepped into the four-square court and slammed his red ball with all his strength. It soared off the school grounds, bounced down the road, and into the next village. There, it bounded off a firetruck, banged into stop signs, and rolled through a rose garden. It continued through a farm, turning the barn, a tractor, and a field of tomatoes bright red. At last, the ball disappeared into a deep canyon, painting the rocky cliffs a rosy shade.

“Good hit, Red,” said Yellow. “But now the school bus can’t be red either.”

Finally, Yellow took his turn. He stepped into the tetherball circle and gave the tetherball a mighty smack. It whirled around the pole so fast it became a blur. The string grew shorter and shorter until—*thwack!*—the ball struck the pole and started the other way around. When the string unwound to its full length, the ball and string wrapped around the pole a second time, until--*thwack!*--the ball hit the pole again. Around and around it spun, one way and then the other, until Yellow finally caught it mid-twirl and unhooked it from the string.

“I win,” he said. “I guess going around in circles isn’t a waste of time after all. Time to turn the school bus yellow.”

A line of kids was waiting to board the bus. They cheered as Yellow tapped

the hood with his ball. Instantly, the bus turned a dazzling sunshine yellow. And ever since, school buses everywhere have stayed that bright, easy-to-see color.

The Rainbow

That colorful school day ended with a spectacular sight. As the yellow bus rolled out of the school parking lot, a tall, shimmering arch appeared above the playground. It glowed with bands of every color Red, Blue, and Yellow had created that day—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, light purple, and deep purple.

The kids on the bus stared in awe.

“It’s like the earth is saying thank you for the colors,” one of them said.

And maybe that’s what the very first rainbow--and every rainbow since--has been telling us.