



How Come A School Bus is Yellow?

Primary Colors

Once upon a long school time ago, the world had no color. Classrooms, playgrounds, teachers, and students appeared only in black, white, and every shade of gray. The hallway walls were chalky white and the tiled floors gleamed inky black. Light gray grass covered the soccer field, and dark gray climbing structures cast black shadows across the white hopscotch lines.

But everything changed one recess when three third-graders—Red, the top four-square player, Blue, the queen of kickball, and Yellow, the tetherball champ—stepped onto the colorless playground.

The white sun shone brightly in the light gray sky. At the four-square court, Red waited in line for his turn. He quickly moved from square one to the top square, his usual spot at every recess.

He served the gray rubber ball to Samantha in square two. Samantha smacked it straight back to him. This time, Red slugged a line-drive into square one, drilling it right between Hudson's legs.

"Whoa!" cried the third-graders in line. No one had ever seen the rubber ball hit that hard.

Grinning, Red chased the ball across the playground. But when he picked it up, he froze. The ball was no longer dark gray. It glowed with a bright, bold color he had never seen before. Against the dull playground, the color looked beautiful, but also a little scary, exciting but maybe a bit dangerous.

Red showed the ball to his teacher on recess duty. "Look! Look!" he said. "The four-square ball has change!"

The teacher studied the ball. Then she looked up at the blazing sun. "I think this new color came from the sunlight, Red," she said. "When you hit the ball so hard, you split the light. And since you made the color, we'll call it...*red*."

Soon Red discovered something amazing about his red ball. When it touched certain things on the playground those things turned red, too. The ball bounced off Maggie's shoes—*poof!*— they turned red. The ball hit the slide ladder—*bam!*—now that was red as well. A hula hoop turned red, and so did the fire alarm. Before long, the whole playground was covered with bright

splashes of red.

Meanwhile, Blue kicked her gray rubber ball hard against the kickball wall, her strongest kick ever. It bounced straight back to her. But instead of kicking the ball again, she picked it up. The ball had changed. It wasn't a light gray anymore. Now it shone with a bright, joyful color that made her feel happy and calm.

The other third-graders crowded around.

"What a pretty color!" said one.

"I used to like white a lot," said another. "But now this one is my favorite."

The third-grade teacher walked over to see. She smiled at Blue and said, "I think you kicked the ball so hard you split the sunlight. Just like Red did. And since you made this new color, we'll call it *blue* after you."

Delighted, Blue booted her ball against the wall again. This time the wall turned blue. The ball bounced off Gene's pants--*poof!*--they turned blue too. The monkey bars, the basketball court, and Maggie's backpack all changed to Blue's bright new color. The blue was spreading across the playground as quickly as red had.

"The world is changing right before our eyes," said the teacher. "Keep it up, Red and Blue. Keep hitting and kicking your colorful balls."

But that wasn't all. Soon a shout came from the tetherball circle. "Look at the tetherball! It's not white or

black or gray. It's different."

The teacher hurried over. A boy named Yellow held the tetherball still dangling from its string. The ball now gleamed with a color brighter than all the others.

"I didn't do anything," Yellow said. "I just punched the tetherball as hard as I could."

"Like Red and Blue, you split the sunlight," the teacher said. "And since you made this color, Yellow, we'll name it *yellow* in your honor."

But Yellow wasn't as lucky as Red and Blue. His yellow ball just spun around the tetherball pole, and barely touched a thing. His color couldn't spread. As he batted the ball, he watched the playground turn red and blue all around him.

"It's not fair," he grumbled. "All the best stuff is either red and blue, and I'm stuck here hitting my yellow ball in circles."

At last, the ball tapped a pencil sticking out of Amanda's T-shirt pocket. *Zap!* It turned a bright banana-yellow, the same cheerful color most pencils are today.

"That's better," Yellow said. "But I wish my color could spread farther."

Secondary Colors

Around and around the tetherball flew, until Yellow spied something at the end of the string. It had a hook that went through a loop in the yellow ball. All he had to

do was unhook the ball, and he was free to take it anywhere on the playground he wanted.

Joyfully, Yellow skipped to the soccer field with the yellow tetherball under his arm. The gray grass was biggest thing left than wasn't red or blue. But as Yellow threw his ball onto the field, Blue's ball rolled onto the grass at the same time. To the surprise of all, the grass turned a completely new color.

"We'll call it green after Mr. Green, our custodian who mows this grass every week," said the teacher. "Blue mixed with yellow makes *green*."

Yellow was frustrated. Still nothing on the playground had turned his color. He raced over to the white playground door.

"A yellow door would look good?" he said.

But just as he was about to tap it, Red showed up with his ball. *Bonk!* Both balls hit the door at the same time, and the door changed to another new color.

"Let's call it *orange*," said a girl nearby. "Like the gray fruit we get for snacks."

"Red and yellow make *orange*," said a boy.

"That orange door looks way better than a plain yellow one," said Red.

"That yellow ball belongs on tetherball pole, spinning around and around," said Blue.

A short while later, after Red and Blue turned the

sandbox a sixth new color, purple, named after Mrs. Purple the PE teacher, the third-grade teacher blew her whistle to end recess.

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

Yellow trudged toward the tetherball circle, scowling. So far, he'd only managed to turn one jump rope and a climbing pole yellow.

“It’s not fair,” he grumbled. “There’s red, blue, green, orange, and purple everywhere. I need to find something important to turn my color.”

The Contest

An hour later, the ash-gray school bus drove into the parking lot. It parked beside the playground. Next to the blue, purple and orange bicycles in the bright red bicycle rack, the bus looked especially dull and drab.

Red, Blue, and Yellow peered out their classroom window. All three had the same thought.

“I’m going to turn the school bus red,” said Red.
“That’s the color of speed and excitement.”

“The bus should be blue,” said Blue. “Blue is calm and peaceful.”

“A bright yellow would be best,” said Yellow. “That way, everyone would see the bus coming.”

He had a plan. Now was his chance to make something grand at the school his very own color.

“Let's have a contest,” he said, glancing toward his yellow tetherball dangling from the pole. “Since we made our colors by hitting our rubber balls super hard, whoever can hit their ball the hardest this time gets to choose the color of the school bus.”

Red rubbed his hand. Blue stretched her foot. They both nodded. “You're on,” they said together.

As soon as the bell rang to end the day, the three third-graders raced to the playground. Red and Blue grabbed their red and blue balls from the ball closet, while Yellow stood in the tetherball circle.

Blue went first. With a mighty boot, she sent her blue ball soaring straight upward. It flew so high it turned the entire sky blue. The ball kept rising, higher and higher, until it disappeared. Some say it landed in the mountains and turned the snowy peaks blue. Others say it landed in the ocean and turned the waves blue. No one knows for sure.

“Too bad, Blue,” said Yellow. “Now the school bus can't be blue.”

Next, it was Red's turn. He stepped into the four-square court and punched his red ball with all his strength. It sailed away from the school grounds, down the road, and into the next village. There it bounced off a firetruck, slammed into stop signs, and rolled through a rose garden. It continued bouncing through a farm,

turning a barn, tractor, and a field of strawberries bright red. Finally, the ball vanished into a deep canyon, coloring the rocky cliffs a rosy shade of red.

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

Finally, Yellow took his turn. He stood in the tetherball circle and gave the tetherball a mighty smack. It orbited the pole so fast it became a blur. The string grew shorter and shorter until—*thwack!*—the ball struck the pole and began to unwind.

When it came back around, Yellow caught it and unhooked it from the string.

“Victory,” he said. “Time to turn the school bus yellow.”

The students waiting to get on the bus cheered as Yellow tapped his ball against the hood. Instantly, the bus turned a dazzling bright yellow. And from that day on, school bus’s everywhere have remained that very special color.

The Rainbow

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

day.

The students on the bus stared in awe.

“It’s like the blue sky is saying thank you,” someone said.

Maybe that was true. Maybe that’s what the very first rainbow and every rainbow since has been trying to tell us.