

TOTEM POLE COLOURS

Today, an artist can go to a store and buy the paint colours they need for their work. A long time ago, however, this was not possible. Totem pole colours were traditionally made with pigments or dyes from items found in nature. It would have taken a lot of work for indigenous people of the past to experiment with different items and find out what worked best to colour the cedar wood of totems.

The colours were very bright at first, but faded after a while. Winter weather and rain caused the colours to fade. This means that if you see a totem pole today

that does not have colour, it could be very old and the colours may have faded away.

Depending on the indigenous group the colours used had slightly different meanings, but there were some pieces in common for most of the indigenous groups of the northwest coast of Canada.



Colour	Made From	Meaning
White	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clay - eggshells - seashells 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symbolizes the sky and heavy - stands for peace, purity, and sharing
Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - roots - berries - red clay - bark - beets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symbolizes blood - stands for bravery and war
Black	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coal - wild grapes mixed with animal fat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - stands for power, strength, and success
Yellow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flowers - moss - berries - bark - organs of a buffalo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symbolizes the sun and light - stands for intellect and determination
Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flowers - berries - moss - algae 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symbolizes the earth, the hills, and trees - stands for nature, harmony, and healing
Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sunflower seeds - duck manure - clay - flowers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symbolizes waters (rivers, lakes, ocean) and also the sky - stands for happiness and trustworthiness
Purple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - berries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symbolizes the mountains - stands for appreciation and honor