TRANSPOSING COLOR COLOR
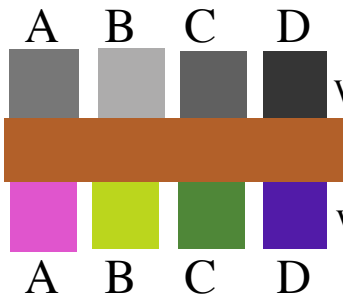
A B C D

Which gray matches the value of the brown bar?
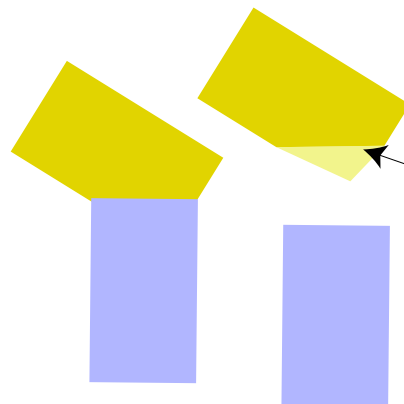
Which hue matches the value of the brown bar?

A   B   C   D

Music has a scale which ranges from the lowest audible sound to the highest. The musician can play a series of notes which differ in range in any key. This transposing from one key to another changes all of the notes, but maintains the intervals between notes. Similarly, the artist can change the hue of a color without changing the value.

The trained eye can discriminate among some 240,000 different colors. This includes all the tints, tones and shades of a given hue. In addition to its hue, each color has a value. Determining the value of a color is not a simple task. If, in the above pre-test you picked "A", you show a good sense for a color's value. The brown swatch is darker than gray "B" and lighter than gray "D". It is the same value as Green "C". If you question the teacher's choice, you're not alone. Albers notes this mistrust in his book.

Albers' format allows us to compare values as one would view an equation. Using the example below, the equation would read: The upper pink value is to the upper brown value = the inner turquoise value on the pink = the teal gray value on the brown. If these value contrasts are consistent, throughout, the criteria will be met.
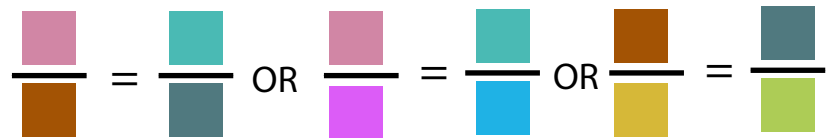
Exercise 1. Pick two colors out of the color pack which are of the same value. (This has nothing to do with whether the color is more intense in chroma, as we saw with the intense magenta and the toned brown swatch above.) Compare your choices with other students until you're convinced you have matching values.
Critique: The class will first screen the pairs which are least alike in value, followed by close, but still different valued hues. All final judgment will be made by the teacher. The graduate students at Yale consistently realized a 60% failure on their first try, so don't be overly discouraged if you share some failures in your quest to distinguish color value.
Exploitation: Identify your problem and try again......and again......and....

$$\frac{\quad}{\quad} = \frac{\quad}{\quad} \text{ OR } \frac{\quad}{\quad} = \frac{\quad}{\quad} \text{ OR } \frac{\quad}{\quad} = \frac{\quad}{\quad}$$

Assignment: Create a simple composition consisting of 4 different warm colors of varying values. Arrange them according to the example. Transpose these colors into 4 cool colors or neutral grays without changing their relative values.

HELPFUL HINT: When all else fails, you might try the Albers trick of placing a corner of one color over the other. After staring at these overlapping colors for 15 seconds in a bright light, pull the top color off and keep your eyes on the spot where the color once overlapped. If the afterimage is lighter than the background color, it means that the overlapping color was darker in value. The reverse is true if the afterimage is darker. Refer to the example at the right.
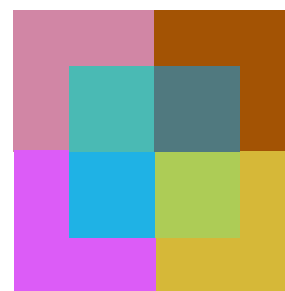
Afterimage
The afterimage is always the opposite hue and value of the original. In this example the afterimage appears lighter and yellow, suggesting that the lavender is a darker value.

Helpful Hints
Compare both the value contrast of the background colors with those of the foreground. For example, the top pink is how much lighter than the brown. Is this contrast equal to that of the inner green and gray squares?

Between what two colors is the contrast greatest? Which two background colors are closest in value?