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Created for the Institute of Medical Illustrators
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Useful tips: Using colour pencil to create shingles (herpes zoster) on dark skin

Purpose of project

To illustrate shingles on dark skin using colour pencils.

Materials: Strathmore Bristol paper 100lb, heavyweight for dry media. Polychromos colour pencils. Putty rubber. Pencil sharpener. Choose a reliable photographic resource and research the condition to gain a good understanding of the key characteristics as it presents on the skin surface. Polychromos pencils are a high-quality coloured pencil product manufactured by Faber-Castell. These pencils are known for their excellent quality, vibrant pigments, and durability. These pencils are oil-based, which gives them a smooth and buttery consistency. This makes them blendable, allowing artists to create gradients and smooth transitions between colours. The pigments in Polychromos pencils are highly concentrated, providing excellent coverage on various surfaces like paper, cardboard, wood, or even fabric. The set offers a wide range of colours, including various shades of primary and secondary colours, as well as specialty colours, metallics, and neutral. They are suitable for both professional artists and hobbyists who seek reliable and versatile coloured pencils for their artwork. However, if you are starting out, use good quality paper over pencil quality. Good paper is essential to get the most out of your drawing, and less expensive pencils are perfectly good and will still give you a good result.

Subject: Herpes zoster (shingles)

Herpes zoster, commonly known as shingles, is a viral infection caused by the reactivation of the varicella-zoster virus, the same virus responsible for chickenpox. After a person has had chickenpox, the virus remains dormant in the nerve tissues near the spinal cord and can reactivate later in life, causing shingles. Typically, the initial symptoms of shingles include pain, tingling, or burning sensations in a specific area of the skin, often along a nerve pathway. A few days later, a rash appears in the same area, forming clusters of fluid-filled blisters (vesicles) that can be itchy and painful. This rash usually develops on one side of the body or face and can last for several weeks.

Photograph credit and reference

Shingles (herpes zoster). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated October 5, 2020. Accessed September 28, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/shingles/index.html> (see below in Appendix A).

Colour grading for skin tones for dark skin

Dermatologists and researchers are recognising the importance of developing more inclusive and representative grading systems to better diagnose, assess, and treat skin conditions in individuals with diverse skin tones. The advancements are aimed to mitigate biases in diagnosis and treatment while ensuring that healthcare professionals receive appropriate training to effectively recognize and manage skin conditions across all skin types. The most current methods defining dark skin tone for use in medicine is as follows. Dr Ellis Monk, an Associate Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, conducted research in the field of social inequalities, with a specific focus on issues related to race and ethnicity resulting in The Monk Skin Scale. The Monk Scale has been adopted for multiple use-cases from measuring skin tone in nationally representative surveys focusing on inequality, health, and aging to artificial intelligence and machine-learning. The scale has been adopted by Google and Meta/Facebook to ensure more robust and equitable AI systems, particularly in the area of computer vision, seeking to update products that reference and use skin tone, including darker tones. (See below in Appendix A).

How to depict inflammation on dark skin

Inflammation on dark skin can present differently compared to inflammation on lighter. Some key points to note about inflammation on dark skin include:

Different Presentation: Redness and inflammation may appear less pronounced or more difficult to detect on darker skin. This can sometimes make it harder to identify inflammation or early signs of certain skin conditions. Inflammation can appear as a darker red, purple, blue.

Hyperpigmentation: Inflammation, whether due to shingles, acne, eczema, insect bites, or other causes, can lead to post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH) in individuals with darker skin. PIH is characterised by dark spots or patches that develop after the inflammation has healed. These spots can persist for a long time and may take longer to fade compared to lighter skin tones.

Drawing inflammation in dark skin: Study the patient, or photograph carefully, and consider the choice of colour palette by comparing the pencil against the photo for example. At the same time understand the condition, areas where there is inflammation, is it localised, spread out, is there swelling, is the area demarcated and obvious or does the area of inflammation fade away to normal skin?

Appendix A

