

Temperaments in a Nutshell

By Cyndie Kimball

A picture of the temperaments, in a nutshell (from my understanding of them):

Sanguine - associated with air, spring, yellow - the dominant thread of childhood. Sanguines are either socially aware or become superficial. Strengths: friendship is their forte, they bring sunshine to any room with their eagerness and smiles, their motto seems to be "let's have fun and be happy." Weaknesses: they can tend to flit from one thing to another without finishing, they can be fickle, they can be nervous or less than serious.

Choleric - associated with fire, summer, red - the dominant thread of adolescence. Choleric can become selfless leaders or destructive dictators. Strengths: movers, doers, shakers, leaders. Weaknesses: can destroy as well as build with their energy, can become tyrannical, "my way is right."

Melancholic - associated with earth, fall, violet - the dominant thread of middle age. Melancholics can be either considerate/understanding or they can become incapacitated with the weight of the world on their shoulders. Strengths: thinkers, ponderers, deeply empathic, loving and kind. Weaknesses: sure that everyone is out to get them, their motto seems to be "why bother, it is too difficult or it won't be as fun as last time."

Phlegmatic - associated with water, winter, blues - the dominant thread of old age. Phlegmatics can be reliable/faithful or lazy. Strengths: reliable, "stick-to-it-ness", organized, impart a deep sense of well-being. Weaknesses: lazy, stuck, great procrastinators especially if they can stay comfortable, stubborn.

Most of us have a mixture of all of these - with perhaps one more dominant and one receding to the far background. Sometimes it is easy to see what temperament your child has a leaning towards - other times it is quite difficult especially if they have two somewhat differing dominant ones. A task of adulthood can be to determine your own dominant temperament and strive to work towards the strengths rather than allow the weaknesses of your given temperament to take over. It is also important to bring your dominant temperament into balance with the other temperaments. I have found it helpful to use the temperaments as just another tool, another piece of the equation when working with myself or my children keeping in mind that it isn't the only thing that shapes me or my children.

The first lecture I attended on Waldorf Education was by Rene Querido on the Temperaments in the Waldorf classroom. I left that lecture flying high, talking non-stop, and "knowing" that this was for us. One of the little stories I vividly remember from that lecture may help to clarify more humorously the various temperaments.

The teacher in first grade brings an apple to class one day.

There is a secret in every apple! He tells a story about the star and the apple.

Then he cuts the apple to reveal this secret to the class.

The choleric are intrigued and want to immediately cut open every apple.

The melancholics sit quietly and ponder:

"How did the star get in there?"

"Why is the star there?"

The sanguines will flit about the room excitedly, commenting on this wonder to all in the room.

And, the phlegmatics will wonder aloud

"When will we start making the apple sauce?"

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<http://www.cyndiekimball.com/2007/12/temperaments-in-nutshell.html>