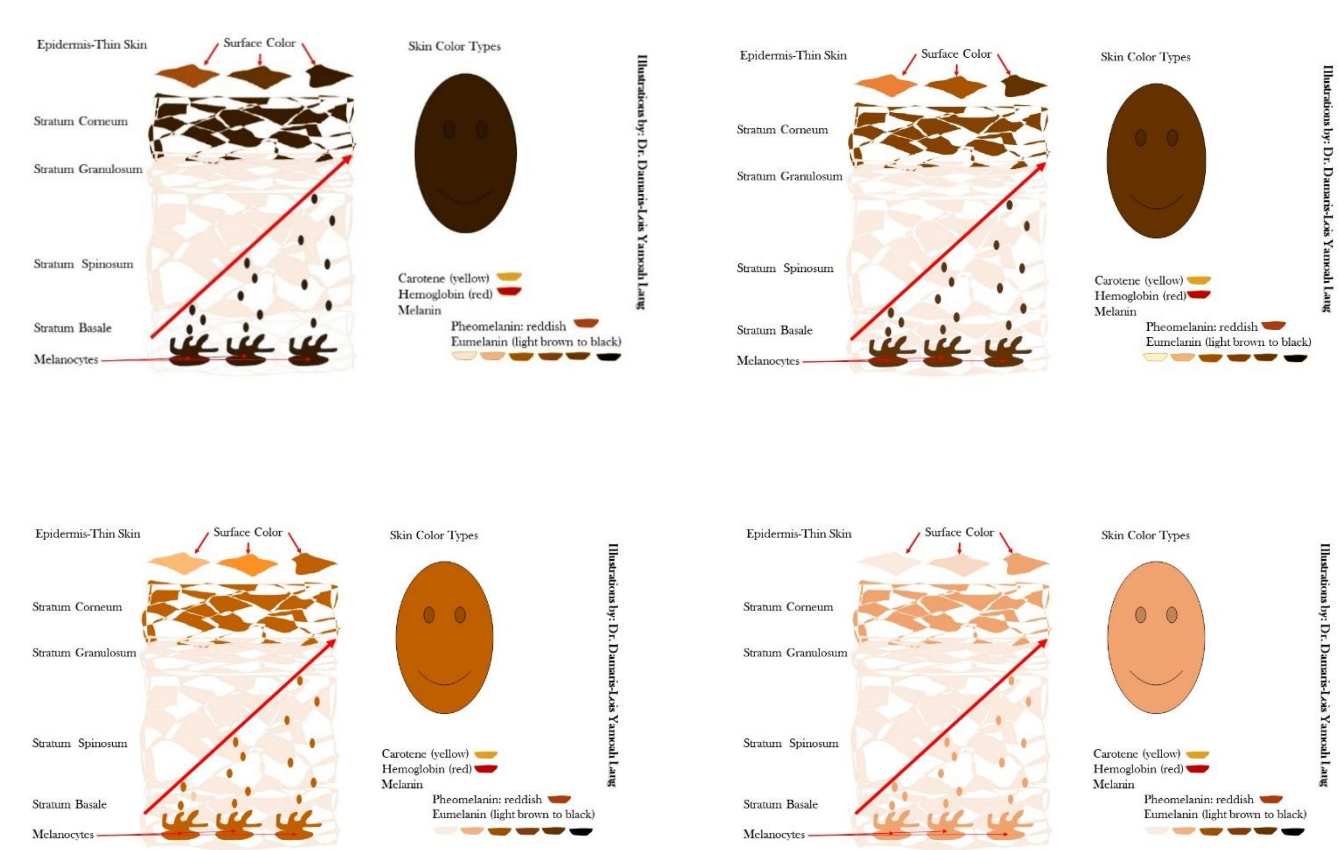


# The Story Beneath Skin Tones

**Background:** When discussing skin color, we mainly refer to melanin, the pigment that specialized melanocytes produce. These melanocytes send melanosomes upward through the layers of our skin, and the higher they travel, the more visible our pigmentation (eumelanin: very light brown to very dark brown and pheomelanin: red) becomes. This movement is illustrated here, showing how melanin expresses itself based on how far those melanosomes rise toward the skin's surface, guided by DNA instructions. People often referred to as "Black" or "people of color" are those whose melanin makes it all the way to the top layer, giving rise to the rich, visible hues we associate with deeply pigmented skin. Nevertheless, that does not mean people labeled “white” lack melanin. They do, but the melanin does not always reach the surface similarly. Sometimes, it stays in the lower layers. When exposed to sunlight, this melanin is activated as a natural defense to protect the DNA in skin cells. In some people, this causes tanning; in others, it shows up as freckles; in some, the skin turns red because the blood vessels near the surface respond instead.

Here is the powerful part: freckles are like windows into someone’s melanin story. Light-skinned individuals often reveal the hue of their melanin through their freckles, and when you compare these freckles to the deeper melanin tones of darker-skinned individuals, something remarkable happens—you can see the spectrum of shared biology across all shades.



# Finding Your Melanin Twin or Pigment Partner

**Introduction:** This activity—matching freckles and skin tones—offers a powerful look into the real spectrum of human melanin. It is not about categories like “Black” or “White,” but the rich, biological color codes woven into every person’s skin.

**Activity:**

1. Look at your own skin tone.
2. If you are a person of color, find someone who’s not, and match your skin tone to one of their freckles.
3. If you are not a person of color, find someone who is, and match one of your freckles to their skin tone.
4. Once matched, you have found your Melanin Twin or Pigment Partner—a shared shade across different bodies.

**Takeaway:** The irony of melanin is that what seems to divide us on the surface actually reveals how deeply connected we are beneath it.

**Celebrate:** Showcase the connection. It is a bold, beautiful way to say that our differences tell a shared story. We are one human race, with many hues and one shared biology. Skin color is not a dividing line—it’s a shared story.

