Pigments & Paints

Helpful words and phrases:

Pigment - a colorful substance, typically in powder form and often one which can be mixed into a paint.
Ochre - a color stone, a mineral-based earth pigment.
Streak Test - if a colorful rock rubbed on a hard rock leaves behind a streak of color, it is likely an ochre or mineral pigment stone.

Binder - a sticky substance, often a gum, that can help a paint become cohesive and adhere to a surface like paper or fabric.
    Gum Arabic - gum from Acacia Senegal, keeps color over time.
    Local Binders - consider pinion or ponderosa pitch, may change color over time.
Water - all water is different, what is the water you are working with like? Where is it from?
Mortar - a vessel in which pigments can be crushed.
Pestle - a tool that can break up or crush pigments.
Grinding Stone - a hard, flat rock used to grind pigment from ochres. I often like to work directly with a grinding stone as place
    to mix and work with paints.
Paint/ink - pigment + water + binder

Mixing a paint:

A little at a time

1. Dissolve a pinch of powdered gum into a small jar of water
2. Add a bit of your water/binder mixture to your palette stone and use the wet area to grind away a bit of pigment from your ochre (this will help avoid dust).
3. Add more water/binder to your pigment until it reaches desired consistency.
4. Work with your paint!

Making a paint cake

1. Place a relatively soft ochre in your mortar along with enough water to make it damp and a pinch of gum.
2. Tap the ochre with your pestle until it begins to break apart.
3. When the pieces get small like rice, switch from pounding to grinding with your pestle in a circular motion, adding water as necessary to keep the mixture smooth.
4. Continue grinding until the paint is smooth, you can test it by rubbing a bit of the pigment between your fingers next to your ear and listening for graininess.
5. Once fully ground, add water/gum until desired consistency is reached and pour into a vial or empty palette.

Resources to check out:

Early Futures - www.earlyfutures.com
Kauae Raro Research Collective - www.kauaeraro.com
Native Paint Revealed - www.nativepaintrevealed.com
Pigments Revealed International - www.pigmentsrevealed.com
Beam Paint - www.beampaints.com
The Art of Soil - www.theartofsoil.com
“Book of Earth” by Heidi Gustafson
“Primary Sources: A Natural History of the Artist’s Palette” by Phillip Ball