



Vincent van Gogh

Picture Study

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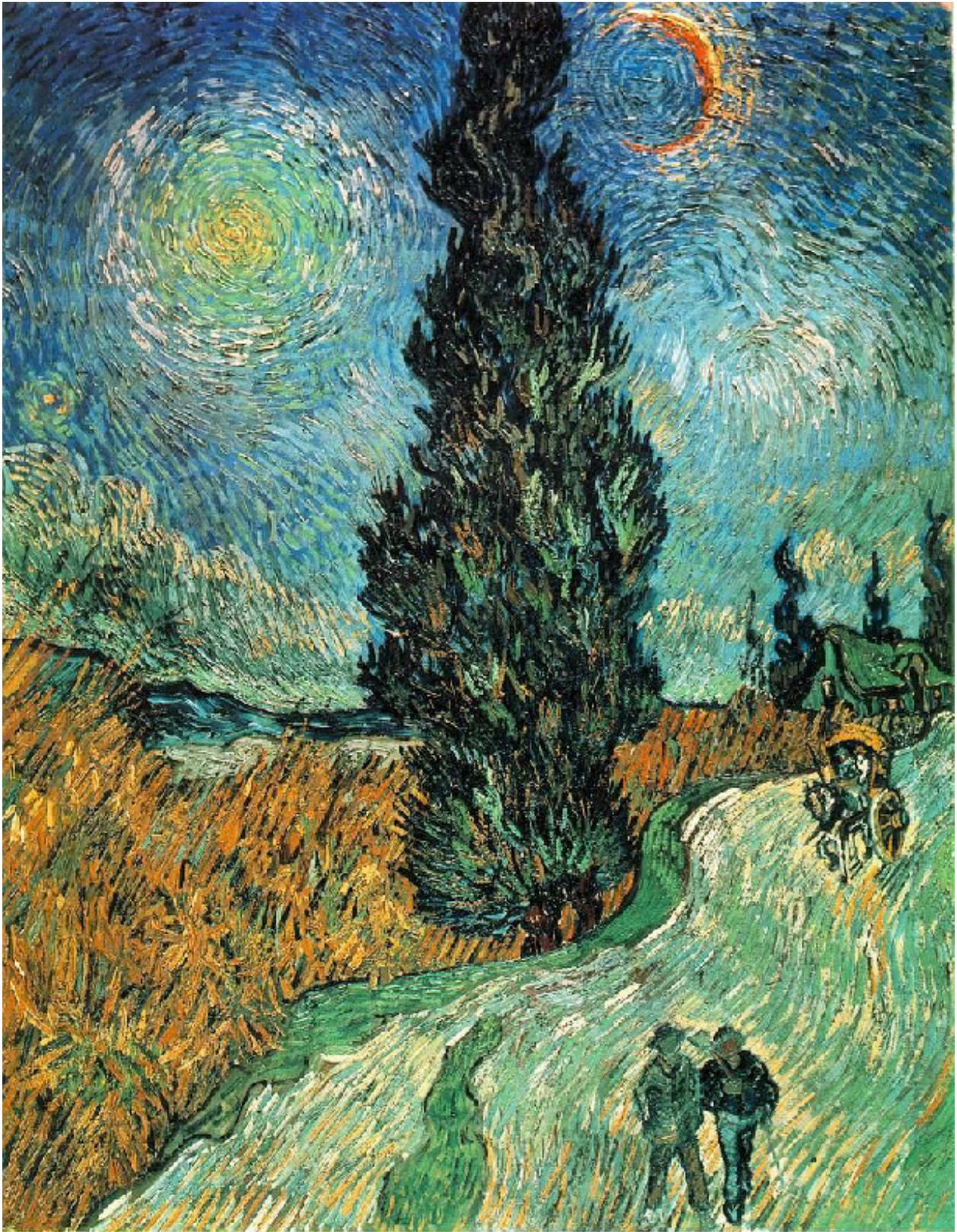
The Starry Night
Vincent van Gogh, 1889



The Harvest, Arles
Vincent van Gogh, 1888



Road with Cypress and Star
Vincent van Gogh, 1890



Bridge at Arles
Vincent van Gogh, 1888



Bedroom at Arles
Vincent van Gogh, 1888



Sunflowers

Vincent van Gogh, 1889



VINCENT VAN GOGH

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) was born in Holland, the son of a Dutch Reformed pastor. His mother taught her children to paint and to draw, and encouraged their love of nature. Educated first at home and then at boarding school in the Netherlands, Vincent left school at the age of fifteen due to family financial needs. He began work as an art salesman in his uncle's galleries at the Hague and later in London. There he fell in love with his landlady's daughter. When she did not return his love, Vincent became depressed. He grew restless and disillusioned with the world of art. Around age twenty-three, he began to believe he was called to Christian ministry. He worked for a time as a missionary in a poor mining town in Belgium. This proved to be too much for him emotionally, as he was deeply distressed and overwhelmed by the extreme poverty of the people he served. The mission board removed him from his position when he gave away all of his possessions, including his clothes, to the impoverished miners.

At the insistence of his brother Theo, who remained his closest friend and confidante all of his life, Vincent eventually came to see that he was truly called to be an artist. He studied at the Royal Academy of Art in Brussels and then returned home. The dark paintings of this period reflect a troubled mind; his family grew concerned about his mental stability. Following a quarrel with his father, he finally left home in 1881 and eventually ended up in Paris, where his brother Theo was the manager of an art gallery. There he met Pissarro, Monet, and Gauguin, under whose influence Vincent began to use lighter colors in his work and to paint with the short brushstrokes of the Impressionists. In 1888, he and Gauguin moved to Arles to found a school of art. All of the paintings included in this booklet are from the Paris and Arles years of his life.

Today, an original Vincent Van Gogh painting is worth millions and millions of dollars. Yet during his lifetime, Vincent was dependent on his brother's financial support. He was a brilliant artist, but a very troubled man. A famous story is told of Vincent actually cutting off his own ear in a fit of madness. Several of his most famous paintings, including *The Starry Night*, were painted from his cell in a mental institution. Finally, at the age of 37, he took his own life.

ARTIST BIO NOTES

These notes are provided to aid the teacher's own background research on the artist and his or her works. This is not meant to be presented to students as a list of facts and dates. When you first introduce the artist, tell students where the artist fits into the timeline of history, and where the artist lived and worked. Add a few more details with each new picture, but the information you share should be short and simple unless your students ask questions or wish to know more. Keep the main focus of your Picture Study time on observation and narration of the details of the picture.

Note: if a footnote appears with a fact that is not a direct quote, the fact comes from ONE source only.

LIFE AND CHARACTER

- ◆ 1853, born in the Netherlands to a Protestant pastor. The firstborn of six

children.

- ◆ 1869 (age 16), began work in his uncle's art dealing firm.
- ◆ 1873, transferred to London.
- ◆ 1875, transferred to Paris.
- ◆ 1876, grew tired of art dealing and left the firm. Activities afterward included working in a school, briefly studying theology, and training to become an evangelist.
- ◆ Vincent never became an evangelist, for he was dismissed by the church for being too radical: on a missions trip to a mining town, Vincent felt such compassion for the miners that he gave all his possessions away and chose to live in extreme poverty.
- ◆ 1880, returned to the Netherlands after deciding to become an artist.
- ◆ 1886, moved to Paris to live with his brother.
- ◆ 1888, grew tired of city life and moved to Arles in southern France.
- ◆ That fall, Vincent convinced his friend Paul Gauguin, whom he had met in Paris, to live and paint with him.
- ◆ Vincent began showing signs of mental illness while living with Gauguin. After finding out that Gauguin might leave, Vincent cut off part of his own ear. Vincent spent time in a hospital and then voluntarily moved into an asylum. He continued to paint, including a self-portrait in which he has a bandage on his ear.
- ◆ 1890, moved back in with his brother in Paris
- ◆ 1890, shot himself in the stomach and died two days later. Theo passed away 6 months later. The two are now buried side by side.
- ◆ Vincent never married.
- ◆ Vincent was a man driven by passionate feelings. He felt ardent compassion for miners and gave away all his possessions. He was filled with happiness when Gauguin agreed to live with him and crushed when Gauguin decided to leave. The same passions that inspired his famous artwork also hastened his death.

TRAINING AND CAREER

- ◆ As a boy, his mother taught him watercolor painting and encouraged his love of nature.
- ◆ Worked in an art dealing firm from 1869-1875.
- ◆ 1880, with the encouragement and financial support of his brother Theo, Vincent decided to pursue a career as an artist. He studied drawing at Brussels Academy.
- ◆ 1881, moved to The Hague and gained formal instruction from his artist cousin Mauve. Studied with other artists and visited museums.
- ◆ 1885, desired to learn more and went to the Antwerp Academy in Belgium. Only stayed for three months.
- ◆ 1886, moved to Paris where he encountered Impressionism. Met with other artists in Paris, including Renoir and Paul Gauguin.
- ◆ 1888, moved to Arles. Entreated his friend Paul Gauguin to live and paint with him.
- ◆ Painted up until his death in 1890.
- ◆ Short career: 1880-1890.
- ◆ His younger brother Theo was his biggest supporter/encourager. Supported him financially.
- ◆ Though he had some formal training, van Gogh mainly developed his style by viewing art, mingling with other artists, and letting his passions inspire his paintings.

ART STYLE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- ◆ Considered one of the greatest Dutch artists of all time.
- ◆ Types of art: landscapes, figures, self-portraits, and still life.
- ◆ Noted for his imaginative use of color and spacial perspective (see *Bedroom at*

Arles).

- ◆ Vincent began with somber colors in his early paintings. He moved to brighter colors after meeting and working with Impressionists in Paris.
- ◆ Displayed impressionistic techniques: vibrant color and broken brushstrokes
- ◆ Employed pointillism: “the theory or practice in art of applying small strokes or dots of color to a surface so that from a distance they blend together.”¹
- ◆ Influenced Expressionism: “a theory or practice in art of seeking to depict the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse in the artist.”²
- ◆ Influences: Millet (peasant life), Japanese art, Eugène Delacroix, Rubens (using color to create a mood).
- ◆ Unlike other artists, he painted for a short time with great speed (painted for one decade and produced over 900 pieces of art).
- ◆ Sold one painting while alive. Now his art is of the most recognized world-wide.
- ◆ Van Gogh is considered the perfect example of the popular idea of the mad, starving artist.

ARTWORKS

- ◆ *Sunflowers*: Van Gogh creating 4 paintings of sunflowers intending to decorate a room in his home in Arles.
- ◆ *Bedroom at Arles*: Van Gogh painted his bedroom in his Arles' home while eagerly anticipating the arrival of Gauguin.
- ◆ *Bridge at Arles*: van Gogh created 9 different paintings and drawings of this bridge.
- ◆ *The Harvest, Arles*: van Gogh contrasted the primary colors of blue and orange to reflect summer.
- ◆ *Starry Night*: Painted while in an asylum. accurate astronomically for end of May, 1889 - bright nebulae, extra bright Venus were accurate, moon phase -

¹ Merriam-Webster online dictionary.

² Ibid.

would be what he saw from his cell. Since there was a wall just outside his cell, he had to invent the landscape. American recording artist Don McLean (famous for hit “American Pie”) wrote a song entitled “Vincent” in honor of Vincent van Gogh. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVprz0nm0Y4>

HOW CAN I BE A PAINTER LIKE VAN GOGH?

- ◆ Study the paintings of several artists and find what styles you like.
- ◆ Paint with some of your friends and learn from how they paint.
- ◆ Paint with small, broken brushstrokes.
- ◆ Paint the same thing from different angles.
- ◆ Paint with imagination: try using creative colors and skewing objects to create a unique perception of what you observe.

ARTIST BIO LINKS

<http://www.vangoghgallery.com/misc/biography.html> (long, good detail and resources)

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/gogh/hd_gogh.htm (long, good detail)

http://www.wga.hu/bio_m/g/gogh_van/biograph.html (medium, good detail)

<http://vangoghexperts.com/van-gogh-biography/> (medium, pictures interspersed)

PICTURE SOURCES

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent_van_Gogh_-_De_oogst_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent_van_Gogh_-_De_oogst_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent_van_Gogh_-_Road_with_Cypress_and_Star.JPG

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent_van_Gogh_-_Road_with_Cypress_and_Star.JPG

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bedroom_of_Van_Gogh_in_Arles.jpg

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent_Willem_van_Gogh,_Dutch_-_Sunflowers_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg