

Vincent van Gogh
(Pronounced: Go)
1853-1890

Vincent Van Gogh was born on March 30, 1853, in Holland. His father was a pastor and the family lived modestly. Van Gogh was the eldest child in the family consisting of several younger brothers and sisters. As a young boy, he displayed signs of unusual character that often worried his parents. Often times Van Gogh was very unsociable and undisciplined. He had a younger brother, Theo, who was four years younger than him. They were very close early and through his entire life. Theo was always very supportive of Vincent, and it was Theo who first encouraged Van Gogh to become a painter.

When Van Gogh was sixteen years old, in 1869, he obtained a position in the Goupil (pronounced Goopee) firm of art dealers, where his uncle was employed. While Van Gogh worked at Goupil, packing and unpacking paintings and books, he had the opportunity to visit many museums and read many books. Van Gogh also worked for several years in the Goupil's London branch and then in their Paris branch. He became intensely involved in religion, and when he lost his job in Paris, he returned to London to work as lay preacher in a church school.

After spending a short time with his parents, Van Gogh decided to move to Amsterdam to study theology. He wanted to become a pastor and especially help those who were very unfortunate. When Van Gogh failed to pass the theological examination, he began to train as a missionary. He was sent to work in the Borinage, a coal-mining district, helping the poor miners there. In the Borinage, Van Gogh gave away everything he owned. He slept on dirt floors, wore no socks, and made his clothes out of old sack-cloth. Even though Van Gogh was very weak and thin from exhaustion and hunger, he took care of the tired and sick coal miners. Other clergymen thought he had gone too far in his zeal to help the poor and sick, so Van Gogh was dismissed from his job.

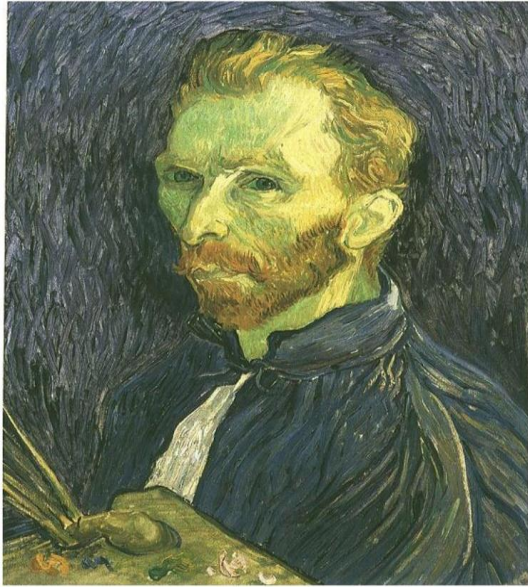
Sad because he had failed as a preacher and missionary, Van Gogh turned to drawing and painting. He was helped and encouraged by his brother, Theo, who was now working for the Goupil art firm.

Van Gogh studied the works of many artists such as J.F. Millet, Rubens, and several Japanese artists, including Hokusai. He drew the coal miners of Borinage, landscapes of cornfields, vases of flowers, and many self-portraits. He tried to study art very seriously at the Academy of Art in Antwerp. In 1886, Van Gogh moved to Paris to live with Theo.



Cafe Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles, at Night, The, September, 1888

There he met many of the Impressionist painters. He and Paul Gauguin (another famous artist) became friends. Vincent was poor his entire life and had to rely on friends at the art store, his brother and other artists for supplies and money. He created over 30 portraits in his life. Van Gogh did not have money to pay models to pose for portraits nor did he have many people commissioning him to do portraits, so Van Gogh painted his own portrait. Van Gogh did not see portrait painting as merely a means to an end; he also believed that portrait painting would help him develop his skills as an artist. This is amazing because there was no photography so he had to rely on mirrors and his memory to create his own portrait.



Self Portrait done in late August, 1889

Van Gogh firmly believed that to be a great painter you had to first master drawing before adding color. Over the years Van Gogh clearly mastered drawing and began to use more color.

Show Print - **Le Rocher** (it is in black and white) I cannot find it on the internet but I do have it in the cabinet.

In time, one of the most recognizable aspects of Van Gogh's paintings became his bold use of color. In 1888, Van Gogh moved to Arles in the south of France. His intent was to have an artistic community live there. Gauguin came to live with him for a short while. He begged the other artist that he met in Paris to come also but only Gauguin came. While in Arles, Van Gogh was very productive. He rented a small house, painted it yellow, and named it the *House of Friends*. There he worked at his paintings all day long. In the fifteen months he lived in Arles, he produced over two hundred paintings. He equated happiness with the color yellow. When you see it - you know he was happy.

When he was preparing Gauguin's room he started painting a series of Sunflowers. After one painting, he loved it and continued. He painted a total of twelve of these canvases, although the most commonly referred to are the seven he painted while in Arles in 1888 - 1889. The other five he had painted previously while in Paris in 1887.



Sunflowers

While Van Gogh was very happy in Arles, he was also beginning to suffer from bad hallucinations. Gauguin and Van Gogh got into an argument and Van Gogh, in a state of epilepsy and possible dementia, cut off his own ear.



Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear



Because he was becoming more and more mentally unbalanced, Van Gogh agreed to be hospitalized. Even when Van Gogh was in the hospital, he continued to paint.

Starry Night is probably the most famous print that Van Gogh painted. It inspired Don McLean to write a song and as a person studying Van Gogh you should know what it means. First of all Starry Night was painted while Van Gogh was in an asylum at Saint-Remy. He was not able to paint picture from an actual view point, it is strictly from his mind. There are references of many of his prints: Starry Night, Sunflower Series, The Potato Eaters. Van Gogh only sold one painting in his life. He attempted suicide by shooting himself in the chest, which ultimately led to his death 2 days later. Through his art and letters that he left – it is truly known that Van Gogh was never understood the way that he felt was accurate.

When I think of van Gogh I remember a few things

-he loved the color Yellow. When you see it you know he was happy.

-he painted very thick. A lot of times he would use blue and to turn it to gray he would stick the paint brush in his mouth to water it down.

-and of course – the whole ear incident.