

I.C. "XIII Aprile" SOCI

Scuola Secondaria di primo grado

Classes 3A, 3B

CLIL
through
ART

School year 2017/18

Vincent Van Gogh

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1 Read the following passage:

Vincent Van Gogh

Biography

A key figure in the world of Post-impressionism Vincent Van Gogh also helped lay the foundations of modern art. A troubled man, he experienced many uncertainties and rejections in his early life, particularly where female love interests were concerned. Religion played a huge role in van Gogh's life and many of his paintings carry religious undertones. Van Gogh did not experience great success during his lifetime, selling just one painting but after his death his work was revealed to the world and he is now regarded as one of the greatest artists that ever lived.

Early Years

Van Gogh was born in Holland in 1853 and was one of six children born to Anna Cornelia Carbentus and Reverend Theodorus van Gogh, a protestant minister.

A quiet and serious child, van Gogh showed no real interest in art. At the age of 16, he found a job at the Hague gallery, run by French art dealers Goupil et Cie. After several transfers that took him to London and Paris, he lost interest in becoming a professional art dealer, despite the fact that three of his brothers had entered into the profession. With a growing interest in religion van Gogh decided to follow in his father's footsteps and found a job as a missionary in a small Belgium Province, where he worked with a group of miners.

This period in his life was very important as van Gogh could relate to the miners of Borinage and their way of life and this experience, together with pressure from his brother Theo, convinced van Gogh that he wanted to make an impression on the world and so he set out to become an artist. Van Gogh's brother Theo was a highly influential figure throughout his life, supporting him both emotionally and financially. In his lifetime, Vincent van Gogh wrote over 800 letters and most of these were to Theo, his brother and closest friend.

By the end of 1881 van Gogh was taking lessons from Anton Mauve, his cousin by marriage. He also started a relationship with Sien Hoomik, which Mauve disapproved and this led to the two falling out.

Middle Years



The Potato Eaters

Becoming increasingly frustrated, Vincent ended his relationship with Hoomik and feeling uninspired, he moved back in with his parents to continue practicing his art. It was then that he was introduced to the paintings of Jean-François Millet and he imitated Millet's style a lot in his early works. Van Gogh had the desire to paint figures and in 1885 he completed **The Potato Eaters** which proved a success at the time. Believing he needed focused training in art techniques, van Gogh enrolled at The Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp and was impressed by the works of Rubens and various Japanese artists, and such influences would impact greatly on van Gogh's individual style. In 1886 Vincent van Gogh relocated to Paris and immersed himself in the world of Impressionism and Post-impressionism. He adopted brighter, more vibrant colours and began experimenting with his technique. He also spent time researching the styles found in the Japanese artwork he had discovered a year earlier. Paris exposed van Gogh to artists such as Gauguin, Pissarro, Monet, and Bernard. He befriended Paul Gauguin and moved to Arles in 1888 and Gauguin joined him later. Van Gogh started to paint sunflowers to decorate Gauguin's bedroom and this work of art would later become one of his most accomplished pieces, *Sunflowers*.

Advanced Years



Starry night

It was towards the end of 1888 that van Gogh's mental illness began to worsen and one day he had an argument with Gauguin so he threatened him. Later that day at home, Vincent cut off part of his own ear with a razor and he was temporarily hospitalized. Upon returning home he found Gauguin leaving Arles, and thus his dream of setting up an art school was crushed.

Van Gogh committed himself to an asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence at the end of 1888 and his paintings from his time there were brimming with activity. It was in the asylum that he painted **Starry night** and used a swirling patterns; it became his most popular work and is one of the most influential pieces in history.

Van Gogh left Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in 1890 and continued painting, producing a number of works - nearly one painting per day. Despite his creative achievements, the artist thought of his life as terribly wasted, and a personal failure. On July 27, 1890 he attempted suicide by shooting himself in the chest and died two days later, aged 37.

Van Gogh's dear brother Theo was devastated by his loss and died six months later. Theo's widow took Vincent van Gogh's works to Holland and published them, and it was an instant success. His work went on to influence Modernist art, and today Vincent van Gogh is regarded as one of history's greatest painters.

Now cover the text and try to remember. Answer the following questions:

1. Who was V. Van Gogh?
2. When did he decide to become a painter?
3. What was Theo's job?
4. Why was the period in Paris important?
5. What was "The Potato eaters"?
6. Where did Van Gogh paint "Sunflowers"?
7. What did he do in 1888?
8. What was his particular way of painting he used while he was in Arles?
9. Who did he live with in Arles?
10. What was their relationship like?
11. Where was he when he painted "Starry night"?
12. When and how did he die?
13. When did he become so famous?
14. Where are most of his masterpieces?
15. Do you think his brother influenced him? How?

Pair work: Ask the questions to your friend.

Van Gogh's technique: impasto

Impasto is a painting term that refers to the use of thickly undiluted paint that appears almost three-dimensional on the canvas.

*Van Gogh used visible **brushstrokes** on the finished painting.*

The appearance of an impasto painting is greatly impacted by the lighting in the room. Due to the raised surface on the canvas light is reflected and shadows are created based on the natural light in the space.

*Van Gogh was a pioneer in using the impasto technique. He used it not just to add dimension to his painting but to add emotion and movement. We see this movement in the **swirling** clouds of Starry Night.*

The same colours and images could have been created with a traditional painting technique but the movement and emotion of the painting would be missing.

2 VOCABULARY

Find the words in the text and choose the right meaning, a or b.

art dealer *a. a person who buys and sells art works*

b. a person who paints

moved *a. went on holiday*

b. went to live in another place

argument *a. a topic of conversation*

b. an angry conversation

swirling *a. going in circles*

b. delicate

razor *a. a kitchen utensil*

b. a tool for cutting your beard

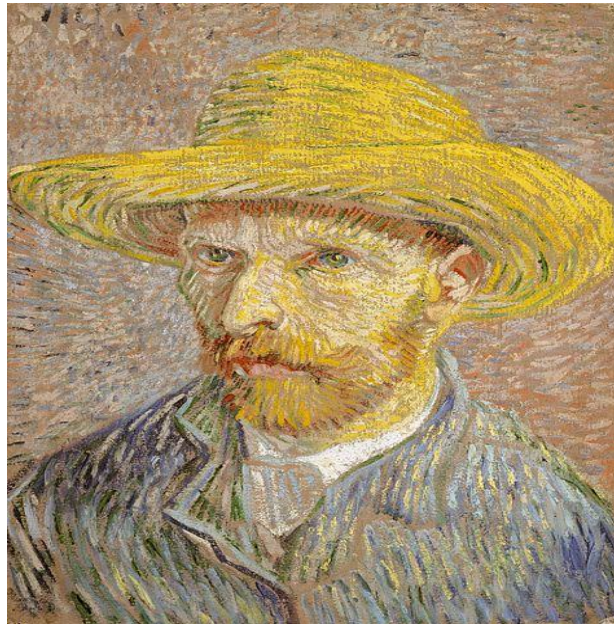
brimming *a. to fill or be full to the point of overflowing*

b. to carry something

brushstrokes *a. the strong marks made on a surface by a painter's brush.*

b. a way of cleaning

③ Fill in this grid:



<i>Name</i>	
<i>Born</i>	
<i>Died</i>	
<i>Nationality</i>	
<i>Jobs</i>	
<i>Main masterpieces</i>	
<i>Subjects</i>	
<i>Art Movement</i>	

④ *Pair work: match the following cards to the definition cards:*

<i>HOLLAND</i>	<i>PAINTER</i>	<i>POTATOES</i>
<i>LETTERS</i>	<i>PARIS</i>	<i>THEO</i>
<i>AMSTERDAM</i>	<i>BEDROOM</i>	<i>SUNFLOWERS</i>
<i>BRUSH</i>	<i>ARGUMENT</i>	<i>CUT OFF</i>
<i>HOLLAND</i>	<i>PAINTER</i>	<i>POTATOES</i>
<i>EAR</i>	<i>BANDAGE</i>	<i>SHOT</i>
<i>GAUGUIN</i>	<i>INTENSE</i>	<i>VIOLENT</i>

<i>This "H" is the country where Van Gogh was born</i>	<i>This "P" was Van Gogh's job</i>	<i>This "P" is what they were eating in Van Gogh's first important painting</i>
<i>This "L" is what Van Gogh wrote to his brother</i>	<i>Van Gogh lived with his brother in this "P"</i>	<i>This "T" is his brother's name</i>
<i>In this "A" there is a famous museum dedicated to Van Gogh</i>	<i>This "B" is the room he painted while he was living in Arles</i>	<i>This "S" is the name of a painting of yellow flowers</i>
<i>This "B" is the instrument Van Gogh painted with</i>	<i>This "A" is the thing he often had when he was living with Gauguin</i>	<i>This "C" is what Van Gogh did to his ear</i>
<i>This "E" is the part of the body that he cut off</i>	<i>This "B" is a sterile protection for a cut. He put it on his ear</i>	<i>This "S" is how he killed himself</i>
<i>This "G" is the name of the artist Van Gogh briefly lived with</i>	<i>This "I" describes the colours in Van Gogh's paintings</i>	<i>This "V" describes the arguments he had with Gauguin</i>

The sunflowers

5 Read the passage and fill in the grid:



<i>Artist</i>	
<i>Title</i>	
<i>Date</i>	
<i>Technique</i>	
<i>Current location</i>	
<i>Place of realisation</i>	
<i>Room to be put</i>	

This is one of four paintings of sunflowers dating from August and September 1888. Van Gogh intended to decorate Gauguin's room with these paintings in the so-called Yellow House that he rented in Arles in the South of France. He and Gauguin worked there together between October and December 1888.

Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo in August 1888, 'I am hard at it, painting with the enthusiasm of a Marseillais eating bouillabaisse, which won't surprise you when you know that what I'm at is the painting of some sunflowers. If I carry out this idea there will be a dozen panels. So the whole thing will be a symphony in blue and yellow. I am working at it every morning from sunrise on, for the flowers fade so quickly. I am now on the fourth picture of sunflowers. This fourth one is a bunch of 14 flowers ... it gives a singular effect.'

The dying flowers are built up with thick brushstrokes. The impasto evokes the texture of the seed-heads. Van Gogh produced a replica of this painting in January 1889, and perhaps another one later in the year. The various versions and replicas remain much debated among Van Gogh scholars.

⑥ *Song: Vincent (Starry, starry night) by Don McLean*

"Vincent" is a song by Don McLean written as a tribute to Vincent Van Gogh. It is also known by its opening line, "Starry Starry Night", a reference to Van Gogh's painting *The Starry Night*. The song also describes different paintings done by the artist.

McLean wrote the lyrics in 1971 after reading a book about the life of the artist. The following year, the song became the number one hit in the U.K. and No. 12 in the U.S.

In 2000, PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, USA) aired *Don McLean: Starry, Starry Night*, a special concert that was filmed in Austin, Texas.

Paint your palette blue and grey
Look out on a summer's day
With eyes that know the darkness in my soul.
Shadows on the hills
Sketch the trees and daffodils
Catch the breeze and the winter chills
In colors on the snowy linen land.

And now I understand what you tried to say to me
How you suffered for your sanity
How you tried to set them free.
They would not listen they did not know how,
Perhaps they'll listen now.

Starry starry night
Flaming flo'rs that brightly blaze
Swirling clouds in violet haze
Reflect in Vincent's eyes of China blue.
Colors changing hue
Morning fields of amber grain
Weathered faces lined in pain
Are soothed beneath the artist's loving hand.

And now I understand what you tried to say to me
How you suffered for your sanity
How you tried to set them free.
Perhaps they'll listen now.

For they could not love you
But still your love was true

And when no hope was left in sight on that starry starry night.
You took your life as lovers often do;
But I could have told you Vincent
This world was never meant for one as beautiful as you.

Starry starry night
Portraits hung in empty halls
Frameless heads on nameless walls
With eyes that watch the world and can't forget.
Like the stranger that you've met
The ragged men in ragged clothes
The silver thorn of bloody rose
Lie crushed and broken on the virgin snow.

And now I think I know what you tried to say to me
How you suffered for your sanity
How you tried to set them free.
They would not listen they're not list'ning still
Perhaps they never will.

Read the song and find some references to Van Gogh's paintings:

Flaming Flowers:

Swirling Clouds:

Field of Amber Grain:

Weathered Faces:

7 Draw or paint one of Van Gogh's works and translate in English one of the letters to Theo that explains the painting, his mood and attitude. Place the translated letter next to the picture.

Describe it to the class.