

# Café Terrace At Night by Vincent Van Gogh

## Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1888
- Size: 31.8 X 25.7 inches
- Location: Kroller-Muller museum Otterlo, Netherlands
- Place of Creation: Arles-sur-tech, France
- Style: Post-Impressionism
- Genre: Urban scene or cityscape
- This painting was the first in a trilogy of starry night paintings by van Gogh
- This café is still open in Arles, and is now called the Café van Gogh.

## Artist Facts

- Born March 30, 1853 Netherlands (The Netherlands in its entirety is often referred to as Holland.)
- Died July 30, 1890 (age 37) France
- Spoke Dutch, German, French and English
- As a child he was serious, quiet, and thoughtful. His family was involved with art and religion. Van Gogh worked at an art gallery at age 16.
- He originally planned to be a minister. He took a temporary post as a missionary until he was dismissed for "undermining the dignity of the priesthood".
- He did not start painting until his late twenties at his brother Theo's suggestion.
- He was a prolific artist creating over 900 paintings and 1100 sketches and drawings in a little over a decade. Van Gogh is known for painting numerous self-portraits, cityscapes and peasants.
- Van Gogh's work is noted for its bold color, emotional honesty, texture, and rough beauty.
- He loved paint and he used a lot of it. He was happiest when he was painting.
- Van Gogh was troubled with mental illness and anxiety, and spent some years in an insane asylum. Some of his most famous paintings come from his time there.
- Van Gogh wrote many letters to his younger brother, Theo, who was an art dealer. This is where we get much of our information about van Gogh. Theo often supported Vincent both financially and emotionally.
- Van Gogh neglected his health with poor eating habits, overworking, smoking and drinking. He was known to use his food money to buy paint.
- He died at age 37 from a gunshot wound (generally believed to be self-inflicted or an accident.)
- At the time of his death his works were largely unknown and very largely unappreciated. Fame did not come in his lifetime, but now he is known as one of history's greatest painters.
- Vincent's beloved brother, Theo, died six months after Vincent from poor health (probably due to syphilis).
- Some of van Gogh's paintings have sold for over \$100 million dollars.
- The famed portrait with Van Gogh's ear covered in a bandage occurred while he was living with other artists in Arles. This portrait was sold in the 1990's for \$80-90 million.

- Legend holds that van Gogh cut off his ear lobe and gave it to a woman at a brothel named Rachel. Others claim the fellow artist Gauguin (who was known for his skills with a sword) cut it off due to a tumultuous relationship between the two. The painting shows that his right ear is bandaged, but van Gogh painted using a mirror and it was actually his left ear that was cut.

### Key Principle of Design to Teach

- **Contrast:** Often artists will juxtapose elements within an artwork to create tension or set a part of the work off from another for emphasis. This can be done by using opposing elements in close proximity (such as light and dark or large and small). The viewer's eye is naturally drawn to the area of contrast.

### Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Contrast

- What colors do you see in this painting? Blue and Orange are complementary colors so they are on opposite sides of the color wheel. The contrast of the two colors draws your eye to that place – which is the center of the painting.
- Do you see light or dark in this painting? The point where light meets dark is the area of emphasis because of the contrast between the values.
- Squint your eyes. What is the first thing you see? The cooler, dark areas move backward and the warm, lighter areas move forward.
- Does this painting seem mostly light or dark? What colors did the artist use to create a dark value? A light value?
- Blue is a cool color and orange is a warm color. The contrast creates visual interest for the eye.

### Keywords

- Contrast, Emphasis, Color, Perspective, Texture, Line, Repetition

### Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- What time of day is it in this painting? How can you tell?
- Follow the lines in this painting. What do they point to? (The horse and carriage, which is headed back to the café.)
- What is the mood of this painting? Does it seem peaceful or chaotic?
- Would you like to eat here? (You actually could. This café is still open in Arles, and is now called the Café van Gogh.)
- What is the texture of the cobblestone street? Rough or smooth?
- Do you see people in this painting? What are the people doing?
- Where else do you see light in this painting? (windows)
- Are the tables in the back smaller than the ones in front? Why? (Perspective)
- Can you see where the artist applied paint very thickly? (Texture)
- The stars in the sky are shaped like circles. Van Gogh repeats this shape several times in the painting. Can you find where? (The tables and the cobblestones)