

Bedroom in Arles by Vincent van Gogh

Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: end of September 1889
- Size: 57.5 x 74 cm
- Location: The third version, formerly in the possession of Van Gogh's sister Wil and later acquired by Prince Matsukata, entered the French national collections in 1959, following the French-Japanese peace settlement, and is on permanent display in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
- Style: Post-Impressionism
- This painting was the third of three paintings in a series (see the Bedroom in Arles Series information sheet in this packet). The three paintings are distinguishable by the paintings on the wall. It is believed that the portrait on the left is a self-portrait of van Gogh.
- He redid some of his "best" compositions in smaller sizes for his mother and sister. Bedroom in Arles was one of them.
- Van Gogh painted this while staying at the Yellow House in Arles. Paul Gauguin stayed with van Gogh for a short time at the Yellow House. The door in the back left of the painting opened up into Gauguin's room.
- The door in the front right opened up into the main living areas of the house that included stairs and an upper floor.
- The window looked out over public gardens.
- Arles is pronounced Ah-rr-l: "rr" indicates a roll in the back of your throat if you can manage it, but an American r is clear enough.

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 began drawing and painting as a young child, and he 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 (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 after a quarrel with Gauguin. Van Gogh gave the severed piece of ear to a woman at a brothel named Rachel. Others claim that fellow artist Gauguin (who was known for his skills with a sword) cut it off during a quarrel, but that they covered up the truth by claiming van Gogh cut off his own ear. A self-portrait 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 Technique to Teach

- **Perspective** is a technique of visually suggesting a feeling of depth in a flat presentation, by using points or lines that disappear at the vanishing point in relationship to pictured objects as the objects recede. Color can also be used, along with lines, to create perspective. The closer the image is, the more detailed it will appear and the larger it will be.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Perspective

- What is a vanishing point? (It is the point on the artwork that all the lines begin at, meet, end, or vanish at.)
- Where is the vanishing point in this painting? (Near the center of the painting at the bottom right corner of the window, above the chair and just left of the hooks with clothes hanging on them.)
- Place paper strips or strings on the paper to help students see the lines and how they all meet at the vanishing point. (Tops of the bed posts, legs of the chair in the front, and frames all point toward the vanishing point.)
- Talk about how the items in the front of the room are bigger than those in the back of the picture, but in real life they are of course the same size. (For example the two chairs are a set, but one is larger than the other to show perspective.)
- Have a student come forward and help you create a rug using perspective that would fit on the floor. (Put a paper on the middle, bottom part of the painting. Have lines come down from the vanishing point and trace them to create the left and right sides of the rug. The top and bottom lines will be straight, horizontal lines. Quickly cut out the rug and tape it on. Ask students if it looks like it could be an actual rug in the room. Flip it upside down to show them how "wrong" it appears when it is out of perspective.)

Keywords

- Perspective, Vanishing Point, Line, Texture, Mood, Color, Movement, Impasto

Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- What is the mood of this painting? Blue is a calming color. While it is great for a bedroom, it would not be great for a place like a hospital where patients are trying to have the energy to get better.
- How does art sometimes reflect what the artist is feeling or thinking? (van Gogh's painting were definitely affected by his moods...)
- What colors do you see in this painting? What colors do you see the most? Warm or cool?
- What kinds of lines do you see? (The lines in the floor create a wooden texture. There are lines in the bed and doors. Lines create the corners of the room and the windowpane.)
- How does this painting make you feel? (Mood: dreamy, magical, restless)
- Look at how van Gogh applied the paint. Does it look rough or smooth?
- Van Gogh loved paint and he applied it thickly using a technique called Impasto (see Impasto sheet in packet). Let the students touch a canvas with paint so they can know what it feels like.
- Use a mirror to help students understand the idea that the right ear was bandaged, but that it was actually van Gogh's left ear that was cut. (See self-portrait in this packet.)