

The Starry Night by Vincent van Gogh

Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1889
- Size: 73 X 92 cm (28.7 X 36.2")
- Location: Museum of Modern Art, NYC
- Period:
- Style: Post-Impressionism
- Genre:
- This painting was painted while Van Gogh was in an asylum at Saint-Remy.
- This scene was outside his hospital window.
- In order to paint it at night, he hung candles from his hat and the canvas in order to see it (no light bulbs!)
- It took him only 3 nights to complete this painting.
- The lights of the night sky are brighter than the lights of the buildings reminding us that we are only temporary compared to the creations of the sky.

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 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 that 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 Element of Design to Teach

- **Texture** is the quality of the surface, for example smooth, rough, shiny or dull. Texture may be defined as being real or implied. Real texture is the actual texture applied to the surface of the artwork that could be really experienced by the senses. For example, some artists employ the use of certain materials such as wood, stone, metal, glass, cloth, thick paint or other materials to give the surface a desired textural quality. Texture may also be implied. An implied texture is drawn or painted on the surface of an artwork to give it the appearance of having certain textural quality.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Texture

- Look at how van Gogh applied the paint. Does it look rough or smooth?
- What about the stars? Do they look shiny or dull?
- Does the sky look peaceful or does it look like it's in motion?
- 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.

Keywords

- Texture, Mood, Color, Movement, Impasto

Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- What do you see in the night sky?
- Does it look like things are moving in the sky? Does it look cloudy or windy to you? Why?
- How do the swirls of paint lead you from one star to the next?
- What do you see in the town?
- What do you think the people in the town are doing at this time?
- Look at the buildings. Do you see any sharp edges or strong lines?
- What is the mood of this painting? Is it peaceful or turbulent or both?
- How might this reflect what was going on with Vincent van Gogh?
- How does art sometimes reflect what the artist is feeling or thinking?
- What colors do you see in this painting? What colors do you see the most?
- Do you see contrasting or complementary colors?
- Squint and look at this painting. Which colors do you notice first? (warm colors move forward; yellow and orange stand out against the cool blues, greens and blacks)
- What is happening in the night in this painting?
- What kinds of lines do you see? What are the lines showing you? (Movement, swirling, blowing, from left to right)
- How does this painting make you feel? (Mood: dreamy, magical, restless)
- Are the lines and lights in the sky made up of long flowing brushstrokes or short little bits of brushstrokes?
- Go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjNGj04DAAI> for a short video on The Starry Night