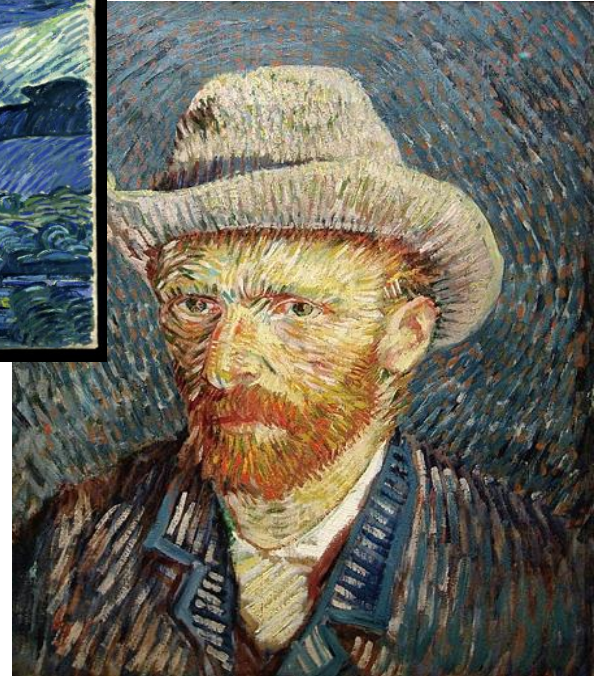


Vincent van Gogh



1. Listen to the song by Don McLean and [watch the slides](#). What feelings are conveyed in the song?

Sadness, quietude, depression, tolerance, longing, balance, calmness, desire, disturbance, friendship, understanding, contemplation, sympathy, turbulence, grief, despair...

2. Read the biographical notes on van Gogh, then listen to the song once again. Find all the references to van Gogh's life in the lyrics and underline them **in blue**.

3. After watching the slides underline all the references to the paintings in yellow.

4. Briefly explain the references to van Gogh's life and works in the margin.

5. Who do you think is the "I" in the song? (Van Gogh himself, a friend, a lover, his brother Theo, Sien, an art dealer, his father or mother?)

6. What do you think is van Gogh's favorite color?

7. Would you like to make any further comments on the song?

VINCENT

by Don McLean

Starry starry night
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 the 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 flowers 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.

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.

Van Gogh

Read the brief biographical notes and highlight important words. Then use this text as your "toolbox" and write a FOUND POEM about Vincent van Gogh.

Van Gogh lived from 1853 - 1890. He was born in Holland as the eldest son of a Dutch pastor. He tried out numerous professions, working as an art dealer, a teacher, a lay preacher and a bookseller before he finally decided to become an artist.

He studied briefly at the Antwerp Academy from 1885-6, before moving to Paris where, under the influence of the impressionists, the colour and mood of his work lightened.

In 1888 he moved to Arles in the South of France. Gauguin visited him there that year and violent disagreements between them provoked van Gogh's first mental crisis. Their disagreement and Gauguin's mockery ended in a physical fight. And van Gogh feeling so guilty about it cut off part of his right ear and gave it to a prostitute.

His subsequent emphasis on expressing his emotional state in his work was to earn him the title Post-Impressionist. He spent some time at an asylum at St. Remy where he suffered from hallucinations of sight and hearing and "lack of strength and courage to live in freedom". In 1890 he moved north to 'Auvers-sur-Oise, where he committed suicide at the age of 37.

Pissarro, the great impressionist, predicted that "this man will either go mad or he will outpace us all," he was to prove right on both counts.

All his life, however, van Gogh remained a solitary and despairing figure, and his self-destructive nature drove him, in his later years, to the brink of madness.

He never got married and the few intimate relationships he had with women ended more or less in catastrophes. He first fell in love with his landlady's daughter in London, he suffered so terribly from this unhappy and unfulfilled relationship that he could hardly work anymore. He was deeply depressed. His second love, Kee Vos, did not believe his fervent vows and left him. Later in his life when he was living in The Hague, he became involved with Sien, a prostitute and set up house with her and her children for a year. He savoured his family life until the day when Theo, his brother, urged him to break up the relationship.

Alone with himself and the world, his only true friend and source of moral and financial support was his brother Theo, who looked after his welfare all his life and who ultimately followed him, just half a year later, to the grave. After completing 70 canvases in 70 days at Auvers, he borrowed a revolver, went for a walk into the fields and shot himself in the stomach. The suicide attempt was, at first, unsuccessful. He lay dying for two days and finally died on July 29, 1890. He had fought bravely with disease, isolation and his own excessively sensitive and ardent nature. The recognition and admiration for which van Gogh had fought so bitterly all his life came only after his tragic death. And the energy that for him was exhausted at Auvers, is happily available to us in hundreds of radiant canvases and extraordinary drawings.

Today he is not only considered the most important pioneer of 20th-century art, but is widely regarded as one of the most significant and best-loved painters in the entire history of art.

Just Passing

A scene
Seen
Is captured
In a painter's
Head
Is captured
Frozen and colourful
Mr. Gogh
Shot his head
To fragments
But the scene
Seen
Remains. *Francis Barker*

The Artist, Arles 1890

Yellow, yellow
Watch the yellow always,
Fascinated, from the corner of your eye.
Its terrible intensity has sting
To bleach the brain, to take the skin
From off your inner eye. To drive you back
Against a buckled wall that echoes yellow, yellow,
Pain. You cannot let it from 'our mind.

Colin Rowbotham