



## INTRODUCING VINCENT VAN GOGH

Dutch 1853-1890 (GOE)

### ADVANCED LEVEL

#### PROPS

AUDIO: Music - “Vincent” by Don McLean

CARD: Artist Name – Date

PRINT – Large Van Gogh Poster

#### VOCABULARY

Self-Portrait, Brushstrokes, Spiral, Texture, Warm/Cool Colors

#### SLIDES

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Artist Name/Date                                      | 13. Close-up: Sunflowers                    |
| 2. Vincent Sheet Music                                   | 14. Gauguin’s Armchair/ Van Gogh’s Armchair |
| 3. Self-Portrait   | 15. Self-Portrait: Bandaged Ear             |
| 4. Close-up: Self-Portrait                               | 16. Peach Trees in Bloom                    |
| 5. The Starry Night                                      | 17. Close-up: Peach Trees                   |
| 6. Close-up: Starry Night                                | 18. The Red Vineyard                        |
| 7. Hospital in Arles                                     | 19. Warm/Cool Colors                        |
| 8. Sketches of Hands                                     | 20. Portrait of Dr. Gachet                  |
| 9. Potato Eaters   | 21. Photo of Dr. Gachet                     |
| 10. Close-up: Potato Eaters                              | 22. Wheatfield with Crows                   |
| 11. Self-Portrait Paul Gauguin/<br>Yellow House in Arles | 23. Self-Portrait at Easel/Vocabulary       |
| 12. Sunflowers   |   |

#### 1. SLIDE – ARTIST NAME/DATE

### MOTIVATION

#### 2. SLIDE – VINCENT SHEET MUSIC

Do you like to listen to music? Do you listen to the lyrics? What are lyrics? (WORDS TO THE SONG) Sometimes lyrics tell a story. Today you will hear a song about a famous artist, Vincent van Gogh, who lived over 100 years ago. After you’ve heard all about our artist’s life and viewed his artwork, the lyrics will make sense to you, and you will understand what the song’s composer is telling you about Vincent’s life and art.

You will hear several important lyrics from the song that apply to works of art you will be seeing. Let’s begin our discovery of van Gogh by looking at one of the many self-portraits by Vincent.

### DEVELOPMENT

#### 3. SLIDE – SELF-PORTRAIT

What was van Gogh feeling when he painted this SELF-PORTRAIT? (WORRIED, SAD, DEPRESSED, TIRED) Does Vincent look like an older man here? (YES) Even though all those lines in his face look like wrinkles and make him look older, he was in his 30’s and too young to have those wrinkles.

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### **4. SLIDE – CLOSE-UP: SELF-PORTRAIT**

Van Gogh was interested in how we saw color, so he showed all his BRUSHSTROKES and colors, without smoothing them out like other artists of the time.

The lyrics of the song include van Gogh's most famous painting, *Starry Night*. Let's take a look at Vincent's favorite painting.

### **5. SLIDE – THE STARRY NIGHT**

What word best describes this painting, peaceful or exploding? (EXPLODING) When you normally think of a starlit night, would you visualize it like this? (NO) Neither would I. You will hear this line in the lyrics of the song, "*How you suffered for your sanity.*" What does that phrase mean? (TROUBLED, CONFUSED, MEDICAL PROBLEMS)

Van Gogh painted this while he was in a hospital. Some historians believe he suffered throughout his life from a disease that was a rare form of epilepsy. This illness made it very difficult for him to get along with others. His behavior made others think he was strange. He would periodically fly into uncontrollable rages against himself and others.

### **6. SLIDE – CLOSE-UP: STARRY NIGHT**

As he looked out of his hospital window at the stars, he painted what he felt with wild, swirling brush strokes. Look closely at the direction of the swirls. Another word for these swirls is SPIRAL. A spiral is like a circle that keeps on going around and around. Some swirl to the right, some swirl upwards. This way the lines balance each other, and keep our eyes in the center of the picture, instead of swirling off the canvas. Perhaps Vincent was also feeling like he was being pulled in all directions. He wanted so desperately to be a successful, self-supporting artist with a circle of artist friends. But in reality he was all alone in a hospital, confused about what was wrong with him, unable to sell any of his paintings, and without a single friend to visit him and give him hope.

No artist before van Gogh had shown the force of a starry night. He saw the stars as a scientific phenomenon. He saw great suns whirling in space, not a peaceful scene at all. The next time you look at a starry night, try to think of it as van Gogh did.

### **7. SLIDE – HOSPITAL IN ARLES**

Van Gogh painted many pictures while he was in the hospital. Since he didn't have models or friends there to sit for portraits, he painted himself. He painted many lonely scenes of the hospital grounds, the hallways, and the fields around the buildings. Most of the paintings and their colors reflect how van Gogh was feeling at that time.

Do you get frustrated when you try to draw something for the first time, and it just doesn't look right?

### **8. SLIDE – SKETCHES OF HANDS**

Van Gogh and other famous artists have had that same problem! Even a very talented artist doesn't usually just sit down and complete a masterpiece on his first try.

Here are some sketches by van Gogh when he was preparing to paint figures of people. He studied them and sketched them for one whole winter. Can you tell me what kinds of hands these are? Are they hands of royalty? (NO, HANDS OF WORKERS) Next you will see the finished painting for which he sketched all of those hands.



**9. SLIDE – POTATO EATERS**

Do you think he sketched and studied more than just hands for this painting? (YES) The title of this painting is *Potato Eaters*. What kind of life do you think these people led? (PEASANTS, FARMERS, POOR, HARD-WORKING) Yes, van Gogh painted this to show the hard life of a peasant farmer in Holland, where van Gogh was born. He wanted to show that the hands of these people eating potatoes were the same hands that dug up the potatoes in the fields.

What colors did he use to paint this? (EARTHTONES OF BROWNS, DARK COLORS, HIGHLIGHTS OF YELLOW, BLUE) If he had used all bright colors, would the feeling be the same? (NO) As we investigate more of van Gogh's paintings, you will see that he used color to express how he felt about the subject he was painting. He expressed emotions through color.

**10. SLIDE – CLOSE-UP: POTATO EATERS**

Look closely at the faces of the people. Do they look like they are carved out of wood? (YES) Van Gogh used this technique to show what a rough, rugged life they led.

Before van Gogh became an artist, he trained to become a minister. He traveled around his native Holland ministering to peasants who led very hard lives. But he was shy and found it hard to talk in front of people, so after a short while, he regretfully gave up this work. That's when he decided to devote all his time to art.

**11. SLIDE – SELF-PORTRAIT PAUL GAUGUIN/YELLOW HOUSE IN ARLES**

Do you have a friend named Paul? Vincent met a fellow artist he admired very much. His name was Paul Gauguin (*go-GAN*). When Vincent lived in the south of France he invited Paul to visit and stay with him. When Gauguin accepted the invitation, Van Gogh was so excited to have another artist to paint with, he did something special to get his cottage ready. What do you think he did? (ANSWERS WILL VARY) Before company arrives, some people clean house and might even buy flowers to decorate a table. But van Gogh painted flowers instead. He painted several canvases of one of his favorite flowers that just happened to be growing in a field near his cottage. They come in his favorite color of yellow. Can you guess what flower that is?

**12. SLIDE – SUNFLOWERS**

**13. SLIDE – CLOSE-UP: SUNFLOWERS**

If you guessed sunflowers, you're correct. Notice the unusual place where Vincent signed his name...right on the vase. Most artists sign their names in the corners, but Vincent chose a more prominent place. To make sure you notice the vase, what did he do to it? (OUTLINED IT WITH A THICK RED LINE) When Paul Gauguin came to stay, he complimented van Gogh on these flower paintings, but that was probably the last nice comment he made. Sad and lonely van Gogh needed a friend more than anything, especially one who also enjoyed painting. But, unfortunately, his friend was bossy and self-centered. He would constantly criticize van Gogh's paintings, and that led to frequent arguments. Van Gogh painted something of Gauguin's. Can you guess what it might be?

**14. SLIDE - GAUGUIN'S ARMCHAIR/VAN GOGH'S ARMCHAIR**

Did you guess he chose a chair to paint?! Which one is Gauguin's? (WITH CANDLE) Doesn't it seem like Gauguin should be seated in it? Twice van Gogh painted an empty chair, first Gauguin's, and then his own. Does it give you the feeling of loneliness to see an empty chair? (YES) The two men were arguing constantly when Vincent painted this. It shows how lonely and unhappy he felt, because they weren't communicating with each other.

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Another important lyric from the song is: “*They would not listen, they did not know how.*” Van Gogh felt his friend wasn’t listening to him, and he felt lonely when he painted Gauguin’s chair. What time of day does the picture show? (NIGHT CANDLES LIT) What clues tell you Gauguin is near or has recently left? (BOOKS LEFT ON SEAT OF CHAIR, CANDLE BURNING)

Van Gogh and Gauguin continued to argue constantly. Their violent disagreements finally led to a tragedy. Van Gogh tried twice to attack Gauguin. Gauguin was able to escape, but to punish himself for his attack against his friend, van Gogh cut off part of his own ear.

### **15. SLIDE – SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BANDAGED EAR**

Here is the self-portrait van Gogh painted after that attack. Do you see his bandaged ear? (YES) What words would describe how van Gogh was feeling? (UNHAPPY, DEPRESSED, NERVOUS, TIRED) Notice the colors he chose. Do the colors blend together and make you feel calm? (NO) Do the colors contrast and help set the mood of tension and unhappiness? (YES) Listen again to a lyric from the song, *Vincent*, “*weathered faces lined in pain, soothed beneath the artist’s loving hand.*” Could those words refer to this portrait? (YES, POSSIBLY)

### **16. SLIDE – PEACH TREES IN BLOOM**

I want you to look closely at the TEXTURE in this painting, titled *Peach Trees in Bloom*. Texture is how something feels when you touch it. Van Gogh painted a lot of texture into his paintings for us to see. He didn’t carefully blend his paint into the canvas. He left it thick to create texture, so we could feel it with our eyes.

We’re going to pretend we’re in a museum featuring the work of van Gogh. We enter a room, and our eyes are immediately drawn to this painting. We want to discover how he created all that texture, so we walk right up for a close up view. Keep your eye on the right-hand side of the painting, about in the middle where the fence is.

### **17. SLIDE – CLOSE UP: PEACH TREES**

Now we can really see the texture and the colors! Doesn’t it look different? That’s why it’s so great to see original paintings in museums, because they look so different and beautiful up close. How did van Gogh create so much texture in this painting? (BRUSHSTROKES, THICK PAINT, COLORED LINES) Looking this closely we clearly see his techniques.

Look at how he used thick white paint to show the soft white flowers. He often applied this paint to the canvas with a palette knife instead of a brush. Many museums around the world protect their van Gogh paintings by covering them with glass, so the paint won’t chip off. Notice the fence. Did he use more than one color? (YES) He used brushstrokes of several colors to show us a fence that has been out in the sun, wind and rain for a long time, so it would be very rough if we could touch it. But van Gogh knew our eyes could tell texture without our hands feeling it.

Listen to this line from the song *Vincent* and try to figure out what it means, “*portraits hung on empty halls, frameless heads on nameless walls.*” Can anyone interpret that lyric? (NOBODY LIKE HIM OR BOUGHT HIS PAINTINGS) Van Gogh painted over 1700 works of art in his last ten years. He worked feverishly, and many times would not stop to eat or sleep until he had finished a painting. He would then collapse from exhaustion. He sold only one painting during his lifetime.

### **18. SLIDE – THE RED VINEYARD**

This is the only painting he ever sold for about \$80. The sister of a German artist purchased it. These are farm workers picking grapes in the field. What colors jump out at you? (RED, YELLOW, ORANGE) These are the colors of autumn when these grapes were harvested. Are they WARM?



### **19. SLIDE – WARM/COOL COLORS**

Most of us notice WARM COLORS like red, yellow, orange first in a painting. They are exciting and dramatic. The COOL COLORS of blue, green and purple are calm, peaceful colors.

### **20. SLIDE - PORTRAIT OF DR. GACHET (GA-SHAY)**

It was only after he died that van Gogh's work became popular. In fact, his paintings now sell for millions of dollars. You are now looking at one of the most expensive paintings that has ever been sold. In 1990, a wealthy Japanese businessman purchased this painting at an auction in New York City for almost \$90 million. That's 90 with six zeros after it.

Look at this painting of van Gogh's doctor and friend and interpret the lyrics, "*weathered faces lined in pain, soothed beneath the artist's loving hand.*" Raise your hand if those words seem to fit the portrait, also. (YES) What do the colors express in this painting? (SADNESS-TONES OF BLUE) Gachet was also an artist, and also suffered from mental problems. How does van Gogh show this in the painting? (WORRIED, EMPTY LOOK IN EYES, USE OF TONES OF BLUE, RESTING ON ELBOW AS IF TIRED OF LIFE)

Let's compare Vincent's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* with a photograph of his friend.

### **21. SLIDE - PHOTO OF DR. GACHET**

Raise your hand if you see a similarity between the portrait and the photo. (YES) What is the same? (DROOPY EYES AND MOUTH, SHAPE OF FACE AND FEATURES) What is different? (POSE, CHIN, ETC.)

Van Gogh never felt much love or acceptance from the people around him, except for a loving brother, Theo (*Tay-o*).

### **22. SLIDE – WHEATFIELD WITH CROWS**

Finally, one day, while in a field where he frequently painted, he died at the young age of thirty-seven. Van Gogh was in a small village outside of Paris on a starry, starry night when he died.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **23. SLIDE – SELF-PORTRAIT AT EASEL/VOCABULARY**

Now that you know about Vincent van Gogh's troubled life and have seen his paintings, I will play the entire song of, "*Vincent*" and all the lyrics will have more meaning for you.

### **PLAY MUSIC - "*Vincent*" by Don McLean**

Show all slides while playing music, stopping with self-portrait. (PowerPoint program Click on music bell icon on the MEET THE MASTERS logo slide. Music will play through repeat of all images that follow logo slide.)

LYRICS: "*Starry, starry night. Paint your palette blue and gray. 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. Now I understand what you tried to say to me. How you suffered for your sanity. And 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 reflecting 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. Now I understand what*



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*you tried to say to me and how you suffered for your sanity and how you tried to set them free. They would not listen, they did not know how. Perhaps they never will.*

*For they could not love you. But still your love was true. And when no hope was left inside of that starry, starry night, you took your life as lovers often do. But I could have told you, Vincent, the 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 strangers that you've met. The ragged men in ragged clothes, the silver thorn of a bloody rose, lie crushed and broken on the virgin soil.*

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