VINCENT VAN GOGH
1853-1890

“In my opinion, I am often rich as Croesus – not in money but rich – because I have found in my work something which I can devote myself to heart and soul, and which inspires me and gives meaning to my life.”

Vincent Van Gogh

Grades 3-5 PowerPoint Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVES

HISTORY: Places an artwork in its art historical context.
Students will examine how Van Gogh developed an art style all his own, which was influenced by the Impressionists and was a reflection of his own self-expression.

CRITICISM: Informed talk about art.
Students will be able to describe what **impasto** is and how Van Gogh used it to create **texture** in his paintings.

AESTHETICS: Questions the nature, value and beauty of art.
Students will discuss reasons people may place a high monetary value on a piece of art.

PRODUCTION: Creating art.
Students will create a picture using **impasto** to create **actual texture** in their artwork.

VOCABULARY

**Note to volunteers** The vocabulary words will be in **bold italics** throughout the lesson. They will be defined within the text of the lesson and do not need to be presented separately. The definitions used under this section of the lesson are very detailed and are intended for adults.

**Actual texture**: the surface feel of an object, which stimulates a tactile response when actually touched.

**Impasto**: the **texture** produced by the thickness of paint in a painting.
**Line:** *lines* are marks with length and width (its width is very small compared to its length) on a two-dimensional surface, or they are the perceived edges of things in two or three-dimensional space.

All *lines* have physical properties that include measure, type, direction, location and character.

- Measure refers to the length and width of *line* - long or short, wide or narrow.
- Type includes *lines* that are straight, curved or angular.
- Direction refers to the basic direction a *line* takes – horizontal, vertical, diagonal. (Direction is important because it controls the movement of our eye.)
- Location refers to the placement of *line* - soaring, plunging, high or low.
- Character is related to the medium with which *line* is created. Chalk may create a soft, blurred *line*, while pen and ink creates a precise, firm *line*.

**Line and Texture:** When groups of *line* combine to produce a flat or two-dimensional effect, pattern results. If the result stimulates our sensation of touch by degrees of roughness or smoothness, the effect may be termed *texture*.

**Expressive qualities:** *Line* may be described by general states of feeling such as somber, energetic, nervous, calm, heavy etc. Generally vertical *lines* denote stability, rigidity. Horizontal *lines* convey calm, peace, boredom, and endurance. Diagonal *lines* may convey unease, tension, instability, and curiosity. Curvilinear *lines* may convey ease, continuity, peace, and relaxation.

**INTRODUCTION**

Read the children’s book **CAMILLE AND THE SUNFLOWERS – A STORY ABOUT VINCENT VAN GOGH** as an introduction to the artist.

**HISTORY**

**Note to volunteers** Many students may know of Van Gogh as the artist who “cut off his ear”, but it is not the one thing we would like them to take away from this lesson. If a student brings up the subject, an appropriate response would be to tell them that Van Gogh did cut off a part of his earlobe once when he was very upset. He often did not know how to deal with his feelings, especially when he was angry or upset.
**SELF PORTRAIT IN FRONT OF EASEL**  1888, OIL, 25-5/8” x 20-1/8”
Born in Holland 150 years ago, Vincent Van Gogh was very good at art from the time he was a young boy. But as he grew older, he couldn’t decide what he wanted to do for a living. He tried selling art like his brother, teaching, and he even tried to become a minister like his father. He wasn’t happy doing any of these things. When he was 27 years old, he decided he would become an artist, even though he didn’t have a clue how to paint!

**POTATO EATERS**  1885, OIL, 32-1/4” x 44-7/8”
Vincent spent his first years as an artist taking a few art lessons, but mostly learning about art on his own. He painted and drew pictures of the peasants near where he grew up. This painting shows a family who worked in the potato fields, eating their meal. His first paintings looked dark and kind of sad, like this one.

Five years later, he went to Paris to live with his brother Theo. Paris was the center of the art world and Vincent’s art changed quickly after moving there.

**POPPY FIELDS NEAR GIVERNY**  CLAUDE MONET, 1885, OIL
The artist Claude Monet did this painting. He was one of a group of French painters known as the Impressionists. They had changed the old ideas about what a painting should be, and Vincent was interested in their new ideas about color and light in painting. They painted pictures of people doing everyday things and the beautiful things they saw in nature, like flowers, trees, and gardens. Vincent borrowed some of their ideas, but did not paint in exactly the same style as the Impressionists.

**FIELD WITH POPPIES**  1889, OIL, 28” x 36”
This is Vincent’s painting of a field with poppies. Look how his painting changed! How is it different from his earlier work of the peasant family? *(He began to use more brilliant colors and brushstrokes in his work.)*

Here is what he said about his paintings –“I want to reach so far that people will say of my work: he feels deeply, he feels tenderly”.

One of the main reasons Vincent loved painting was for his own self-expression. He wanted to show people what he was feeling through the pictures he painted. He was a man who often had very strong feelings about things and did not always know how to deal with his emotions. Painting was a way for him to express all those emotions.
**SUNFLOWERS** 1887, *oil, 17” x 24”*
Vincent started putting so much paint on his canvas, it would create a bumpy **texture** on the surface of the painting that you could actually feel and see. **Actual texture** is what you feel when you touch things. All things have **texture**. Say **texture** with me. **Repeat “texture.”** What are some words that describe **actual texture** or the way things feel when you touch them? (*Rough, smooth, prickly, soft, furry, hard, sticky, velvety….*)

Can you see any places in this painting where it looks like there are thick layers of paint that would create **texture**? (*In the blue background, parts of the sunflowers.*)

The word artists use to describe this thick layer of paint is **impasto**. Say that with me – **“impasto.”** Now, turn to your neighbor and tell them the word that describes paint that is put on very thickly.

**MEMORY OF THE GARDEN AT ETTEN** 1888, *oil, 29 X 36”*
Let’s look at one more painting to see if we can find where the artist used **impasto** paint to create **actual texture**. Look carefully at this painting.

**MEMORY OF THE GARDEN AT ETTEN** DETAIL, 1888, *oil, 29 X 36”*
Here is a close-up of the painting that will help you see the **textures**.

**THE POSTMAN ROULIN**
1888 *oil, 26” x 21”*
After a few years in Paris, Vincent moved to the south of France. He rented a small house that he painted yellow and then called it “The Yellow House.” Mr. Roulin, the postman pictured here, became a good friend to Vincent. Vincent did not take very good care of himself and his health was not good. Mr. Roulin was a

FVI The information contained in a box in this lesson is added for the adult volunteer’s enrichment (think of it as a giant parenthesis in the middle of the lesson). Generally, the information is not intended for inclusion in the classroom presentation. However, if appropriate, you may wish to present some of this information to the students.

For months Van Gogh urged Paul Gauguin to come and be the leader of a community of colorists that he envisioned living together in The Yellow House.

Fortunately for Vincent, his brother, Theo, was Gauguin’s art dealer and he arranged for the money-starved Gauguin to spend time with Vincent free of charge, in exchange for a few of Gauguin’s paintings.

The relationship started out well enough, but both had volatile personalities. After a heated exchange one night, Van Gogh, seized with momentary madness, confronted Gauguin in an alley wielding a razor. He stopped short of attacking Gauguin and ran away distraught. Gauguin spent the night in a hotel and returned to learn Van Gogh had cut off a piece of his right ear, had gone to a local brothel and given a prostitute his ear asking her to “keep it carefully”.

Van Gogh was admitted to the hospital for two weeks. Gauguin moved out, leaving Vincent alone once again.
trusted friend who looked in on Vincent when he delivered the mail. Vincent painted portraits of all the members of the postman’s family. He often signed his paintings using only his first name.

He loved the sun here, the light and the countryside. He would spend hours outside, painting what he saw. His brother sent him money and paid his bills. He had no money of his own since no one wanted to buy his paintings. (He sadly sold only one painting during his entire life - Red Vineyard for $80.) He and his brother wrote letters back and forth to each other almost every day.

**IRIS BED** 1889, OIL, 28” X 36”
In spite of his illness, Vincent managed to do his best work during the last two years of his life. He always felt a strong love of nature and found he could best capture the beauty he saw in his brushstrokes, so **line** became a very important part of his paintings.

You can see many different kinds of **line** in his work. **Lines** can be all shapes, sizes and directions. Some **lines** are thick, some thin, others short or wide. **Lines** may be curved, straight, long, and short or even zigzag. All these **lines** helped him to express feelings and emotions in his paintings. How many different kinds of **lines** can you see here?

**CRITICISM**

**STARRY NIGHT** 1889, OIL, 29” X 36”
Look at this painting and see how many different kinds of **lines** and **textures** you can find.

**Sensory Properties:** What do you see?
1. Where do you see places that look like there might be smooth **textures**? (There really aren't any smooth areas in this painting.)
2. Rough or bumpy **textures** created by impasto paint? (Most of the painting is covered with texture, especially the sky.)
3. Describe some of the different kinds of **lines** you can see and show us where they are. (Thick, short, thin, curved, straight, long…)

**Formal Properties:** How is it arranged?
1. When you look at a painting, your eye is looking for the most interesting places to see first. When you look at this painting, which part do you notice first, the sky or the town? (The sky.)
2. What part of the painting has the most interesting **lines** and **textures**? (The sky.)
3. **Lines** are important in an artwork because they can help move your eye around the picture. How does your eye follow the **lines** created in this
painting? *(The large swirling shape in the center attracts your eye first, moving to the left and the dark cypress tree shape pulls your eye into the sky which follows the swirling lines and circles across the sky to the moon, down to the light streak running across the horizon to the church steeple and to the village, back to the cypress and up to the sky again.)*

**Technical Properties:** What media, tools and techniques were used?
1. Vincent often finished a painting in a day and sometimes he put so much paint on the canvas it would take the painting a year to dry! Looking at his brushstrokes, do you think he worked slowly and carefully or quickly? *(He often worked without stopping all day, and would squeeze the paint right out of the tube onto the canvas.)*
2. Look at the brushstrokes in this painting. Pretend you are painting this picture. Show me how you would be moving your paintbrush.

**Expressive Properties:** What mood or idea does it express?
1. Vincent Van Gogh was an artist who painted to show his feelings in his paintings or for *self-expression*. He didn’t worry if his picture didn’t look exactly like things did in nature. He was one of the first artists to begin to do that. He created pictures that changed the way people saw the world. What do you think he wanted us to feel when we look at this painting?

**AESTHETICS**

*Note to volunteers* These questions are meant to be open-ended; there is no right or wrong answer.

**STILL LIFE: VASE WITH SUNFLOWERS** 1888, oil, 36” x 28”
Yellow became Vincent’s favorite color and sunflowers were one of his favorite and most famous subjects to paint.

In 1987, over 20 years ago, this painting sold at an auction for almost $40 million dollars. *(Vincent had hoped to sell it for $125 when he painted it.)* Why do you think someone was willing to pay so much money for a painting?

**HISTORY (cont.)**

**PORTRAIT OF DR. GACHET** 1890, oil, 27” x 22”
Many people cared for Vincent during his times of illness and Dr. Gachet was one of them. He agreed to take care of Vincent and the two men became close friends.
**Wheatfield with Crows** 1890, oil, 20” x 39-1/2”
This was one of Vincent’s last paintings. He died when he was only 37 years old. (Probably from an infection). Shortly after his death, his paintings finally began to get attention and praise. It made his brother very sad to think that Vincent never knew his work was finally becoming well known and people were buying his paintings.

Vincent painted in a style that was unlike any other artist. He borrowed ideas from the Impressionist artists and put them together in a way that no one else did. He used bright colors, swirling lines and texture to create paintings that were an expression of his feelings, mystery and imagination.

Van Gogh was living in Auvers, under the care of Dr. Gachet in the spring of 1890. He and Gachet became friends and companions. Gachet reveres Van Gogh’s talent and sees to his well being throughout the next three months. Van Gogh spends his days visiting with Gachet, writing letters and painting. Having taken lodging in the attic of a local inn, Van Gogh is persistently troubled by the question of what to do with his paintings, which the dealer, Tanguy is storing for him in Paris.

He becomes increasingly distressed over the storage of his art, which he considers inadequate. Tension and anxiety continue to grow, and on July 27, Van Gogh carries his easel out to a field, props it against a haystack and shoots himself in the chest. He manages to drag himself back to the inn, where he is found by Dr. Gachet, who summons Theo from Paris.

When Theo arrives, he finds Vincent to be in better shape than expected (evidence suggests the wound was not fatal, but that Van Gogh died of infection from the unremoved bullet). Theo remains at his brother’s side until he dies two days later. Vincent’s death devastates Theo, whose frail health collapses and he dies six months later. He is buried next to his brother in Auvers.

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**Production**

Criteria:
1. Students will create a landscape or still life painting that has actual texture.
2. Actual texture in the painting was created with impasto paint.

Materials:
- Tempera paints – blue, yellow, magenta, green, black, white
  (about 2-3 jars of each color, 2 of black and white)
- Dry laundry detergent - least expensive brand you can find
- Q-tips
- Elmer’s Glue or liquid starch - add about a tablespoon per cup of paint to work as a binder after the work has dried.
- Six 4 C. disposable plastic containers for storing paint mixture
- Wax paper or other paint palette
- 5” x 7” mat board, foam core or canvas boards, 1 per student
- Pencils
- Wet wipes, optional
Silk or real flowers, optional

(You will need to mix the paint, detergent, and glue mixture ahead of time. It may be stored in plastic containers and scooped out onto the student palettes as needed.)

Instructions:

1. Students write names on the back of their boards. Ask them to think about the sunflower, landscape or sky paintings Van Gogh did and to choose one to paint today.
2. They will be using very thick paint (impasto) so their drawing should not have small details and it should fill up the space. (A large sunflower will be more successful than a whole garden of small ones.)
3. Tell them to lightly and quickly sketch their idea onto their boards using their pencils.
4. Demonstrate how to use the q-tips to scoop up the paint and add it to their picture. They can layer the paint on their pictures to build up the impasto texture on them.
5. If they need additional colors, they can be mixed. Orange=magenta + yellow, Violet=magenta + blue. They will also achieve an interesting look by layering some colors on top of one another.
6. Students will need to fill the entire space with paint.

Jill Bogle, 2004