

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Great Minds: Vincent van Gogh

by Lydia Lukidis

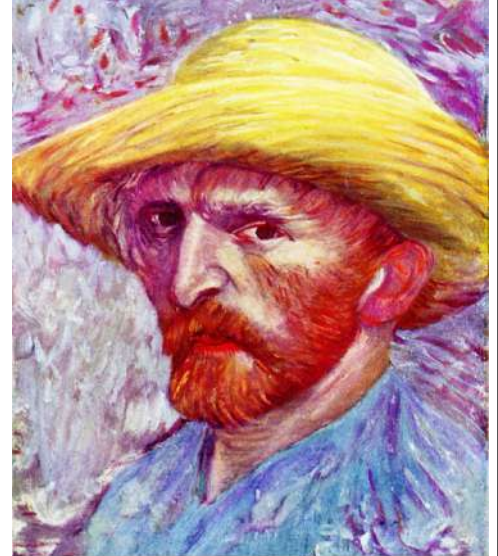
Vincent van Gogh was a famous artist and painter. Today, he is known for such paintings as "The Starry Night" and "Sunflowers." But the funny thing about fame is that sometimes you don't get appreciated while you're alive. Such is the case with Van Gogh. He wasn't recognized for this great work until after his death.

He was born in 1830 in the Netherlands. He had two brothers and three sisters. His father and grandfather were ministers while his mom took care of the family and household duties. Some other members of his family worked in the arts, like his younger brother Theo. Theo worked in an art gallery in Paris. He supported Van Gogh's art career and the two were close.

When he was young, Van Gogh enjoyed drawing but never considered it as a career. In fact, he had many other jobs before becoming a full time artist. For example, he worked as a teacher, a sales clerk in a bookstore, and followed his father's footsteps as a minister and missionary.

But at the age of 27, he decided to follow his heart and pursue art full time. His first drawings were made using pencils, charcoal sticks, and watercolors. He preferred to draw pictures of middle class and poor people. One of his earliest famous paintings was called "The Potato Eaters." It showed a peasant family chowing down on some potatoes for dinner.

Soon after, Van Gogh started using oil paints. In the beginning, he liked darker colors. Not only that, but his paintings were often sad and a bit gloomy. His brother Theo tried to sell his paintings, but nobody wanted to buy them. Then Theo introduced him to a new style of painting called Impressionism. This style is not about painting something realistic. It's more about capturing a moment in time or an "impression" of something.



**"If you hear a voice within you say,  
'You cannot paint,' then by all means  
paint, and that voice will be silenced."  
-Vincent van Gogh**

Van Gogh eventually moved to Paris to learn more about this style. His work was influenced by such painters as Claude Monet and Paul Gauguin. He started to use brighter colors and changed the way he used his paint brush. He was also passionate about painting portraits of people. When he couldn't find someone to model for him, he would practice by painting himself. He painted many self-portraits over the years.

Though he was inspired by the Impressionist painters, he developed his own version. For example, he started painting with small stripes and swirls instead of dots. He was considered a "Post-impressionist" painter. Sometimes he would dump a lot of paint onto the canvas and make a few rough brush strokes. It would take weeks for some paintings to dry.

In the last few years of his life, he painted hundreds of pictures. Many of these became his best work. He was obsessed with his art. Some days, he would barely eat. He never got married or had children, and became the stereotypical "crazy and intense artist." One night, he had an argument with his friend Paul Gauguin. Right after that, he cut off part of his ear lobe in a fit of passion. He's seen wearing a bandage over his ear in some of his self-portraits.



**Van Gogh's famous "The Starry Night" painting**

Soon after, he checked himself into a mental health hospital. It is said that he suffered from mental illness and depression. He also had epilepsy. But he continued to paint. In fact, he created one of his life's masterpieces, a painting called "The Starry Night," while in the hospital. In 1890, he took his life at only 37 years old.

Today, he's considered one of the greatest painters of all time. And as you can imagine, some of his paintings sell for millions of dollars. "Portrait of Doctor Gachet" was sold for \$82.5 million. That's a world record! There are still about 800 of his oil paintings and over a thousand water colors and sketches of his work.

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1. Based on the information in the article, who was an important supporter of Van Gogh's art career?
  - a. His fellow painter, Paul Gauguin
  - b. His brother, Theo
  - c. His father and mother
  - d. He did not have any supporters of his art career during his lifetime.
2. All of the following are famous paintings by Vincent van Gogh, except...
  - a. "Sunflowers"
  - b. "Water Lilies"
  - c. "Portrait of Doctor Gachet"
  - d. "The Potato Eaters"
3. What did Van Gogh do when he couldn't find anyone to model for his artwork?

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4. Describe one of the struggles that Van Gogh had during his life.

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5. What kind of painter was Van Gogh? What was this artistic movement all about?

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The following terms are vocabulary words from the article.  
Match the vocabulary word with its correct definition by writing the corresponding letter on the line.



1. \_\_\_\_\_ peasant                      a. accurately depicting real life
2. \_\_\_\_\_ portraits                    b. an artist's best pieces of art
3. \_\_\_\_\_ canvas                      c. a drawing pencil that is made from a black solid form of carbon
4. \_\_\_\_\_ masterpieces              d. dreary; cheerless
5. \_\_\_\_\_ epilepsy                    e. a poor farmer having a low social status
6. \_\_\_\_\_ gloomy                      f. a piece of coarse cloth used as the surface for an oil painting
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Impressionism            g. a person who works at an office, bank, or store who keeps records and does other administrative duties
8. \_\_\_\_\_ realistic                    h. drawings, paintings, or sketches of a person, usually showing only the person's face or head and shoulders
9. \_\_\_\_\_ clerk                        i. a physical disorder of the brain that causes seizures
10. \_\_\_\_\_ charcoal                j. a style of painting that became popular in the 1860s; it focused on capturing a momentary impression

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In the article, "Great Minds: Vincent van Gogh," you learned that Vincent van Gogh did not achieve fame as an artist until after he died. For most of his life, Van Gogh faced many challenges, and he was unsuccessful in getting people to appreciate his artwork. Years after he died, people now recognize Van Gogh as an exceptionally talented artist.



On the lines below, write about another artist who became famous after he or she died. With an adult's permission, use the Internet to research your artist. Tell who he or she was, what kind of artwork the artist did, and why he or she wasn't appreciated as an artist when alive. Include the name of the website you used as a source at the bottom of this page.

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Website I used: \_\_\_\_\_

## ANSWER KEY

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  - c. "Portrait of Doctor Gachet"
  - d. "The Potato Eaters"
3. What did Van Gogh do when he couldn't find anyone to model for his artwork?

**He would practice painting himself.**

4. Describe one of the struggles that Van Gogh had during his life.

**Acceptable answers:**

**Van Gogh was an unpopular artist who struggled to sell his work.**

**Van Gogh had physical problems including epilepsy and mental illnesses.**

**Van Gogh became so unwell that he took his own life at the age of 37.**

5. What kind of painter was Van Gogh? What was this artistic movement all about?

**Van Gogh was considered a "Post-impressionist" painter. Impressionism is about painting a passing moment in time or an "impression" of something.**

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| 2.  | <u>h</u> | portraits     | b. an artist's best pieces of art   |
| 3.  | <u>f</u> | canvas        | c. a drawing pencil that is made from a black solid form of carbon  |
| 4.  | <u>b</u> | masterpieces  | d. dreary; cheerless  |
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