

## Vincent Van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Materials:

Blue starry cape

Star garland to wear on the head

Color wheel

Board Book and Art Activity Pack

Art project available

The docent wears a blue shirt or dress.

From what I am wearing can you guess what the title or subject of today's painting? (*Stars or night*) Many poets and artists have loved writing about night or painting or drawing it. The title of today's painting is "Starry Night" (*turn the painting*) by Vincent van Gogh. What kind of man do you think would have painted this kind of picture? (*Let them guess, intense, or happy-go-lucky or serious or emotional*)

While Van Gogh is now one of the world's most famous artists during his life he had some serious problems. He was tormented by severe mental instability most of his life.

### Artist Background

Vincent Van Gogh was born in 1853 in Groot-Zundert, south of Netherlands. His father was a preacher and his mother was a talented watercolorist. He was given the name of a stillborn brother before him and as a very young child he had the grisly experience of visiting a grave with his name on it. Perhaps this was the beginning of his insanity. He was the oldest of 6 children and was particularly close with his brother Theo who truly sustained him both emotionally and physically throughout Vincent's short life.

When he was 15 years old he got a job with the art dealer [Goupil & Cie](#) through his uncle. He was sent to Brussels, Belgium and then London and for a while he was successful and happy. But he finally left in depression because the girl he fell in love with was engaged to someone else. For a while he then tried teaching and then working at a book shop and after that he decided he wanted to be a pastor but he failed the schooling for pastors. So he took a post as a missionary in a small, poor mining town. During this time he was able to identify with the miners, their lifestyles, and their families and later he depicts this in his paintings.

Thus at the age of 27 he began to seriously devote himself to his art at his brother Theo's suggestion. (*Here you could ask the students if they remember the name of another FAME artist who was also very close to his brother : Winslow Homer*) He fell in love again and again he was rejected. (*At this point you may choose to relate the story of how he pleaded with the girl's family to convince her to see him and stuck his hand in the flame saying, "Let me see her for as long as I can hold my hand in this flame!"*)

Van Gogh's early painting was of sombre earth tones, too dark and not in line with the style of that time which was bright Impressionist and post-Impressionist paintings. His life was difficult he was not able to sell enough paintings and so depended on Theo for money. He ate poorly and had poor habits which took a toll on his health.

In 1886 he moved to Paris and lived with Theo. Here he was surrounded by Impressionist artists and he was influenced by them. He came in contact with several artists Paul Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, George Monet and Seurat. Here his paintings became more brighter in color. He moved to Arles next and he painted one of his famous paintings “Sunflowers”. (*Show the board book with the Sunflowers on the cover. You can pass the book around to let the children have a look at all the paintings*) He invited Paul Gauguin to Arles to live with him. This is where the famous “ear incident” happened. Paul Gauguin and Van Gogh started have lots of artistic disagreements and got into several arguments. At the end of one very serious argument Van Gogh cut off a part of his ear.

His final days he spent at a mental asylum and painted furiously between bouts of depression. In 1890 in a fit of depression he took his own life. In the short 37 years he produced 2,000 works, including around 900 paintings and 1,100 drawings! In his last year and a half itself he painted 200 paintings and 100 drawings and watercolors. During his lifetime he never sold any of his works yet in 1987 his “Sunflowers” sold for \$39 Million!

### The Painting: **Starry Night**

Van Gogh had always been fascinated with the night skies. The “Starry Night” was not Van Gogh’s first depiction of a night sky. In Arles, he had painted the “Starry Night Over the Rhone”. In fact for the “Starry Night Over the Rhone” he devised an interesting method of illuminating his canvas so he could paint outdoors at night. A cap with candles affixed to it like a birthday cake and a canvas bordered by blazing candles!

What kind of colors did Van Gogh use here? Look at the COLOR WHEEL. (*Show the color wheels*) Are the colors next to each other in the color wheel or opposite to each other? When we want a painting to look exciting and call out to us, we use colors that are on the opposite sides of the color wheel. These colors are called **complementary colors**. Colors that are close to each other on the color wheel are called **analogous colors**. Van Gogh used complementary colors.

Are his colors wild or calm? Moving or still? What else about this painting, besides the color makes it look kind of wild? (*The thick swooping texture of the paint. The lines also give movement. Show picture 1 in the Art Activity Pack. Also show picture 2, “Self Portrait” another example of the brush strokes.*) So the texture and line also help to make Starry Night look active.

This painting is probably Van Gogh’s most famous painting and is displayed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Art Activity: Show the children the Art Activity Pack and ask them to use similar brush strokes with crayons on the outline of “Starry Nights”.