



# Art History

## English Lessons



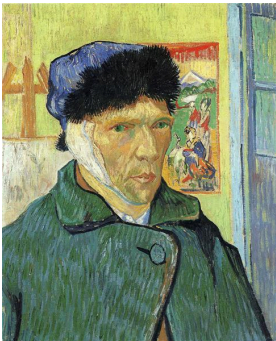
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# Vincent Van Gogh

Vincent van Gogh was a Dutch painter born on March 30, 1853, in Zundert, a small village in the Netherlands. He is one of the most famous and influential artists in history, though he was not well-known during his lifetime. In just over a decade he created about 2,100 works of art which include landscapes, still life, portraits. He was the eldest of six children, and his early life was marked by difficulty and instability. He had various jobs before becoming an artist, including working as a teacher, a preacher, and an art dealer. However, none of these careers made him happy, and he eventually decided to focus on art.

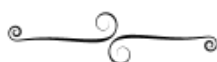
Van Gogh began painting seriously in his late twenties. In 1886, he moved to Paris, where he was influenced by the work of other artists, including Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists. In Paris, he met artists like Paul Gauguin and began using brighter colors and bolder techniques in his paintings. Van Gogh is best known for his unique style, characterized by expressive brushstrokes and vivid colors. Some of his most famous works include *The Starry Night*, *Sunflowers*, *Irises*, and *The Bedroom*.



Despite his artistic talent, Van Gogh struggled with mental health issues throughout his life. He suffered from severe depression and anxiety, which led him to spend time in mental hospitals. One of the most famous events in Van Gogh's life occurred in 1888, when he cut off part of his own ear after an argument with his friend, the painter Paul Gauguin. This event highlighted the extent of his mental health struggles.

Van Gogh continued to paint, even during his time in the hospital, and some of his best work was created during this period. Sadly, his mental health continued to deteriorate, and on July 29, 1890, at the age of 37, Van Gogh died by suicide. He had sold very few paintings during his life, and he was not widely recognized as an important artist until after his death.

Today, he is celebrated as one of the greatest artists of all time and he is thought to be one of the founders of modern art. His paintings are valued at millions of dollars, and his influence can be seen in the work of many artists who came after him. His story is one of incredible talent and tragic struggle, and his art continues to inspire people all over the world.





**After reading the text, answer the questions below:**

- 1. What are the general characteristics of Van Gogh's paintings?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. What happened between Van Gogh and Gauguin?**



**Now read another online article from the BBC and answer the questions that follow:**

**“Van Gogh and the decision that changed art history”**

**<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150127-the-decision-that-changed-art>**

- 1. Why did his family give up on him?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. How was life and work in Borinage for Vincent?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3. Despite the difficulties from this period of his life, what was the element that influenced his painting the most?**





These are four of the most famous paintings by Van Gogh. Which is your favourite one and why? Taking into account everything you read about his life and works of art, write a paragraph expressing and justifying your ideas and feelings.



Van Gogh had a very close relationship with his brother Theo, who supported him financially. They exchanged letters very frequently and in these texts we can see how the artist felt about the world and his works of art. You can have a look at some of the letters here:

[https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/highlights/letters?fbclid=IwAR1HGITcP\\_hdwygUfAorEkJ0A5y1Mi6134EBqvFt\\_e9jcFuEGHv3woPxoxA&v=1](https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/highlights/letters?fbclid=IwAR1HGITcP_hdwygUfAorEkJ0A5y1Mi6134EBqvFt_e9jcFuEGHv3woPxoxA&v=1)

Van Gogh's museum in Amsterdam is one of the most popular museums in the world, you can see it here and explore their vast collection. The letters play an important role in the experience the visitor has in the museum:

<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en>



## FIRST TEXT

### **1. What are the general characteristics of Van Gogh's paintings?**

expressive brushstrokes and vivid colors

### **2. What happened between Van Gogh and Gauguin?**

In 1888 Van Gogh cut off part of his own ear after an argument with his friend, the painter Paul Gauguin. This event highlighted the extent of his mental health struggles.

## SECOND TEXT

### **1. Why did his family give up on him?**

By his 25 birthday, Van Gogh's family was beginning to despair. He had not curbed his socially inept and awkward manner, which was exacerbated by an eccentric tendency to dress in a deliberately unkempt fashion. How could an oddball like Vincent ever hope to scrape a living? His father was beginning to wonder whether his eldest son should be admitted to a mental hospital.

### **2. How was life and work in Borinage for Vincent?**

True to form, life for Van Gogh in the Borinage was not straightforward. He lived in a humble hut, gave away much of his money, and swapped his smart clothes for the practical work-wear of the 'Borins'. Unfortunately, he was not a gifted orator, so his meetings were sparsely attended. His inability to connect with the local coalminers was compounded by a practical, linguistic difficulty: he couldn't make head or tail of their quick-fire patois known as 'Walloon French', while they were mystified by his own attempts at French, which to their ears sounded overly formal and fussy. In July 1879, only half a year after he had arrived in the region, he received another setback: the authorities terminated his trial appointment as an evangelist, precipitating a crisis of self-doubt.

### **3. Despite the difficulties from this period of his life, what was the element that influenced his painting the most?**

For one thing, he felt sympathy for the working-class miners. The people were poor and illiterate, and their work was hard and dangerous. Yet for Van Gogh, there was some kind of bigger truth in their simple way of life. After he became an artist, he chose to find his subject matter there. Like artists that he admired, such as Jean-François Millet, he wanted to portray the life of working-class people, and he remained interested in doing so certainly for the first half of his career. In addition to this general concern for everyday reality and the rural poor, particular motifs that Van Gogh encountered in the Borinage would later feature prominently in his art. As he once put it in a letter: "It was in the Borinage that I began to work from nature for the first time." Another noticeable echo recalls the way that Van Gogh trained himself to draw in the Borinage by copying black-and-white prints after famous works of art





For more ideas on how to use masterpieces of Art to teach critical thinking, you can read my blog post here:

<https://www.ruthlessteacher.com/how-to-use-works-of-arts-to-teach-critical-thinking/>

And about the use of images in the language classroom, another of my blog posts here:

<https://www.ruthlessteacher.com/the-use-of-images-in-language-learning/>

I have made a pdf with a set of questions that I use a lot with my students when we study all types of images, you can download it here:

<https://www.ruthlessteacher.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Questions-about-images-in-class.pdf>





## Painter

**Van Gogh** is generally considered the greatest after Rembrandt, and one of the greatest of the Post-Impressionists. The striking colour, emphatic brushwork, and contoured forms of his work powerfully influenced the current of Expressionism in modern art. (information from Wikiart).

## Paintings

You can see Van Gogh's work online here:

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/vincent-van-gogh/all-works#!#filterName:all-paintings-chronologically.resultType:masonry>

The painting inside the text is called "Self portrait with bandaged ear" (1889) and you can find it in the *Courtauld Institute of Art*, in London:

[https://courtauld.ac.uk/highlights/self-portrait-with-bandaged-ear/?gad\\_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwiOy1BhDCARIsADGvQnAmjpUT5Rxr2iROQNscSQUVcB5Q1LfVvO8UHDNE3q15h6gvky9q3DYAuYSEALw\\_wcB](https://courtauld.ac.uk/highlights/self-portrait-with-bandaged-ear/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwiOy1BhDCARIsADGvQnAmjpUT5Rxr2iROQNscSQUVcB5Q1LfVvO8UHDNE3q15h6gvky9q3DYAuYSEALw_wcB)

The first painting of the writing activity is called "Still life with sunflowers" (1888) and you can find it in the *National Gallery of London*:

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/vincent-van-gogh-sunflowers>

The second painting of the writing activity is called "The Starry Night" (1889) and you can find it in the *MoMA museum*, in New York:

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79802>

The third painting of the writing activity is called "The potato eaters" (1885) and you can find it in the *Van Gogh Museum* in Amsterdam:

<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0005V1962>

The fourth painting of the writing activity is called "Vincent's bedroom in Arles" (1888) and you can find it in the *Van Gogh Museum* in Amsterdam:

<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0047V1962>



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**Major thanks to:** Canva, Wikipedia and Wikiart, Pixabay, Pexels, Google Fonts and all the museums that host the works of art.

For any questions you may have you can message me at [info@ruthlessteacher.com](mailto:info@ruthlessteacher.com)

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