

# Vincent Van Gogh

(1853-1890)



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When Vincent van Gogh was a young boy he lived in the countryside of Holland. He liked to play outside and run through the fields filled with beautiful flowers. When he was tired he would stop to listen to the birds singing happily in the trees. Vincent often picked as many flowers as he could carry home for his mother.



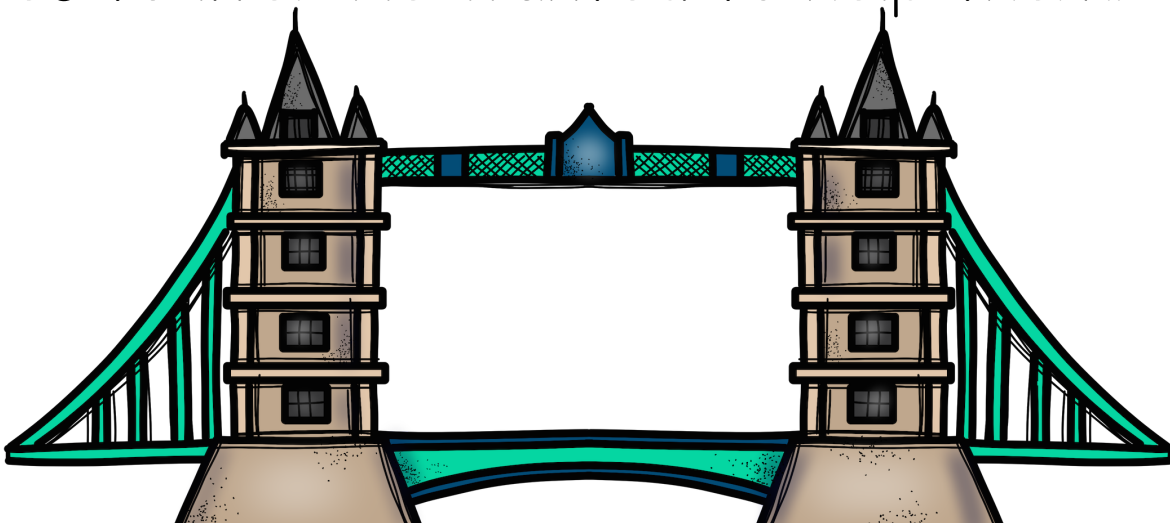
Vincent was born on March 30, 1853 into a Dutch family. They loved him very much. His father was the minister of a church in a Dutch village near Belgium. He had five brothers and sisters and he was the oldest. His brother, Theo, was his very best friend all of his life. Vincent went to a little school in their village when he was young. When he was sixteen years old he started working for his uncle who was a businessman. He sold paintings in art galleries in Holland, England and France.



Vincent grew up speaking Dutch. While he was working for his uncle in England and France he learned to speak English and French as well.

Vincent also liked studying the different kinds of art he saw in these countries.

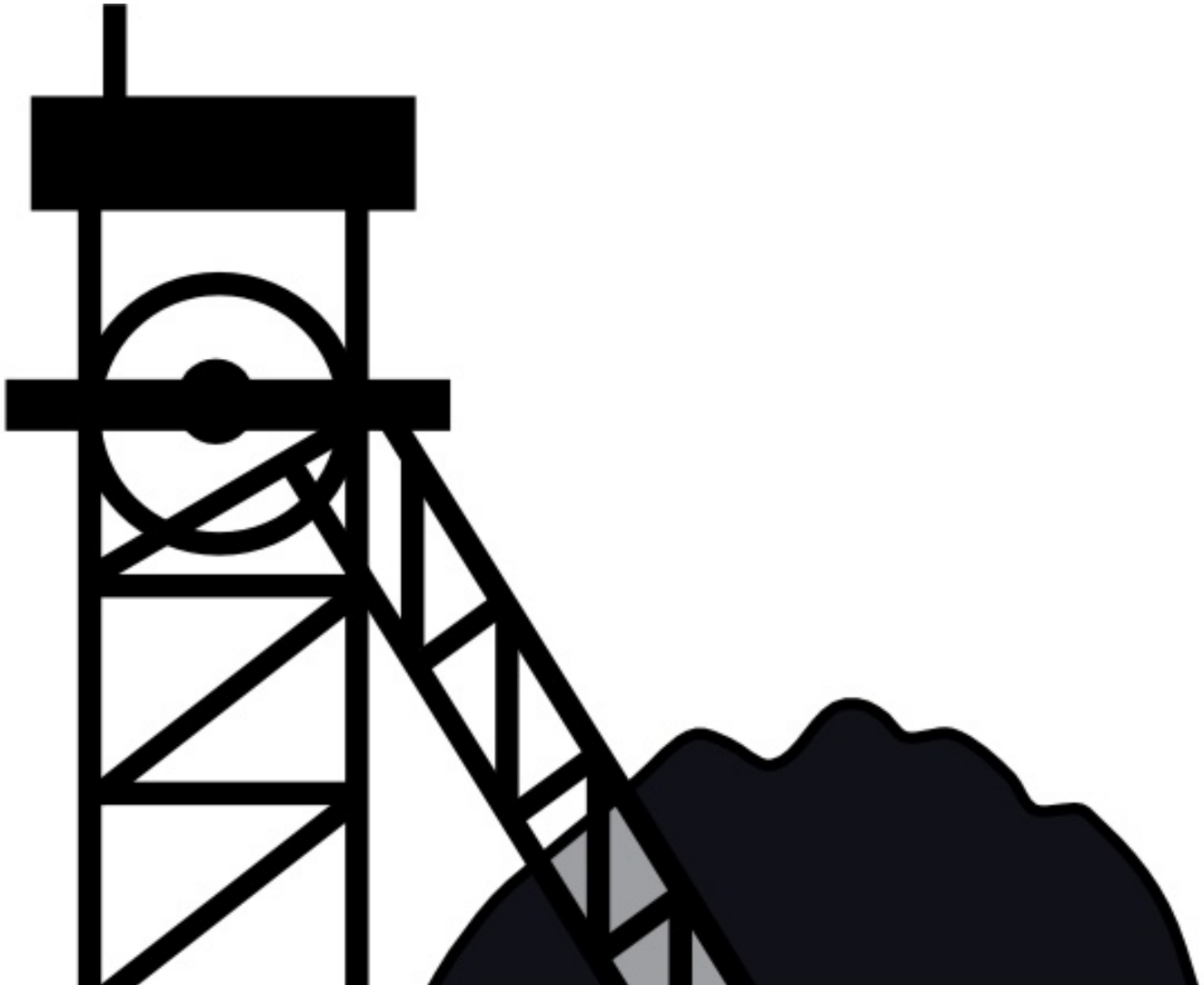
After a while, Vincent wanted to do something different. He became a teacher and taught in the big city of London. Vincent lived in a very poor part of London. Every day he saw many people who did not have enough money or nice places to live. He wanted to help them.



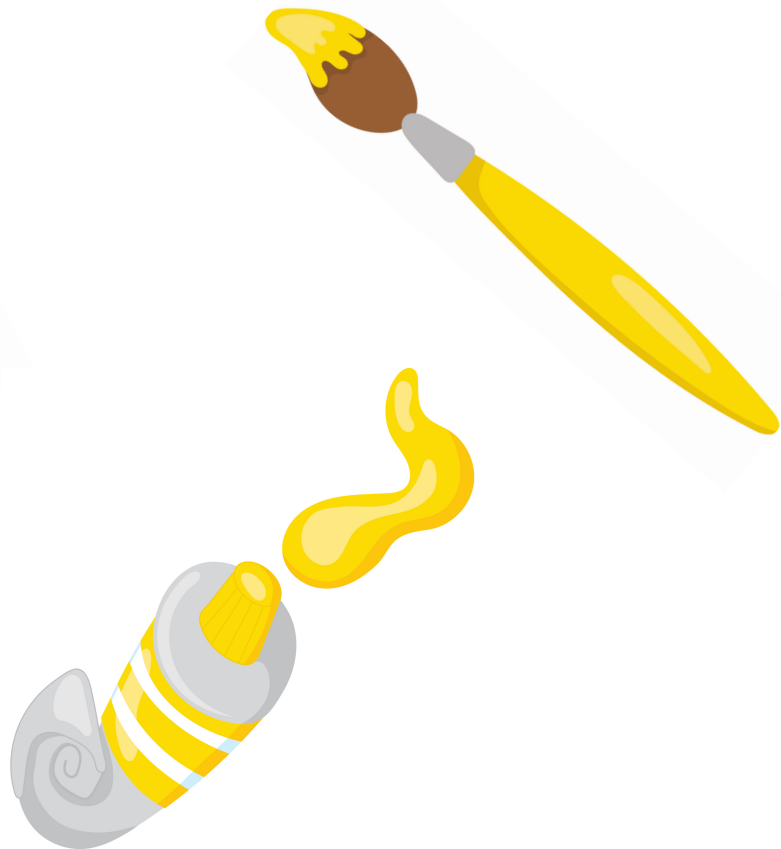


Soon Vincent decided he wanted to work as a minister in a church. But first he had to go back to school to study about God and the Bible. His family gave him the money he needed to do that. While Vincent was in school he missed being with the poor. He wished he could become a missionary and live with people who needed help.

Vincent left school and went to be the minister of a church in a mining village in Belgium. The people of the village were very poor. It was a hard place to live. The villagers worked underground in dark caverns mining coal. Vincent visited them while they worked. He told them about God's love for them.



During this time Vincent was very poor like the people he was helping. He began to draw pictures of them. Vincent discovered he had a gift for painting. He was 27 years old when he realized he wanted to be a painter. Vincent only lived ten more years, but during that time he created over one thousand seven hundred drawings and paintings.



Vincent's first paintings were of poor people. The colors in his early paintings are dark and sad. He wanted to show how hard the lives of poor people were. His first masterpiece is called *The Potato Eaters*. It is a painting of some of his friends, the De Groot family. The De Groot family were peasants. They did not have a lot of money. But they often invited Vincent over to their little cottage to eat potatoes and drink coffee together.



Vincent decided to paint their whole family sitting around the table eating potatoes and drinking coffee. They look tired from working. The only light in this dark painting is the gas light above the table. The light lit up each of their faces. Vincent especially loved painting their faces. He showed their love for each other in their eyes, which look happy.



Vincent lived nearby the De Groot family while he was working on this painting. He rented a small place from the local church. He set up his studio where he painted in a small bedroom. And he slept in an even smaller space in an attic. His studio was a dark room like the room in the painting.



Before Vincent started his painting he drew many pictures of the De Groot's. One day while he was trying to paint the gas light in the cottage he could not remember exactly what it looked like. Since he lived right nearby he went over to visit. He drew a quick picture of the light and then went back to finish painting it. The De Groot's were always happy to see him. And they were glad he was painting a picture of them.



Vincent wanted to create art that spoke without words. He used his paintbrush to speak with lines and colors. He wanted to speak to ordinary people and be a part of their lives.

Another artist who also did this is his painting was Rembrandt. He lived in Holland many years before Vincent was even born. Vincent loved the way Rembrandt painted ordinary people.

Just like Rembrandt, Vincent tried to show people's feelings, whether they were happy or sad, through his artwork.



Soon after Vincent finished the painting called *The Potato Eaters* he met some other painters who used a lot of light and color in their art. He also liked the bright colors and strong lines he saw in art from Japan





After a couple years, during the winter of 1888, Vincent moved to the south of France. He wanted to live somewhere that was warmer and where the sun shined more. Vincent settled in a village called Arles. While he was there he painted more than ever before in his life. He wrote many letters to his brother Theo during this time. Vincent told Theo about the pretty sky and fields that he saw where he was living. He said he thought God combined the blue sky with the yellow fields very beautifully.

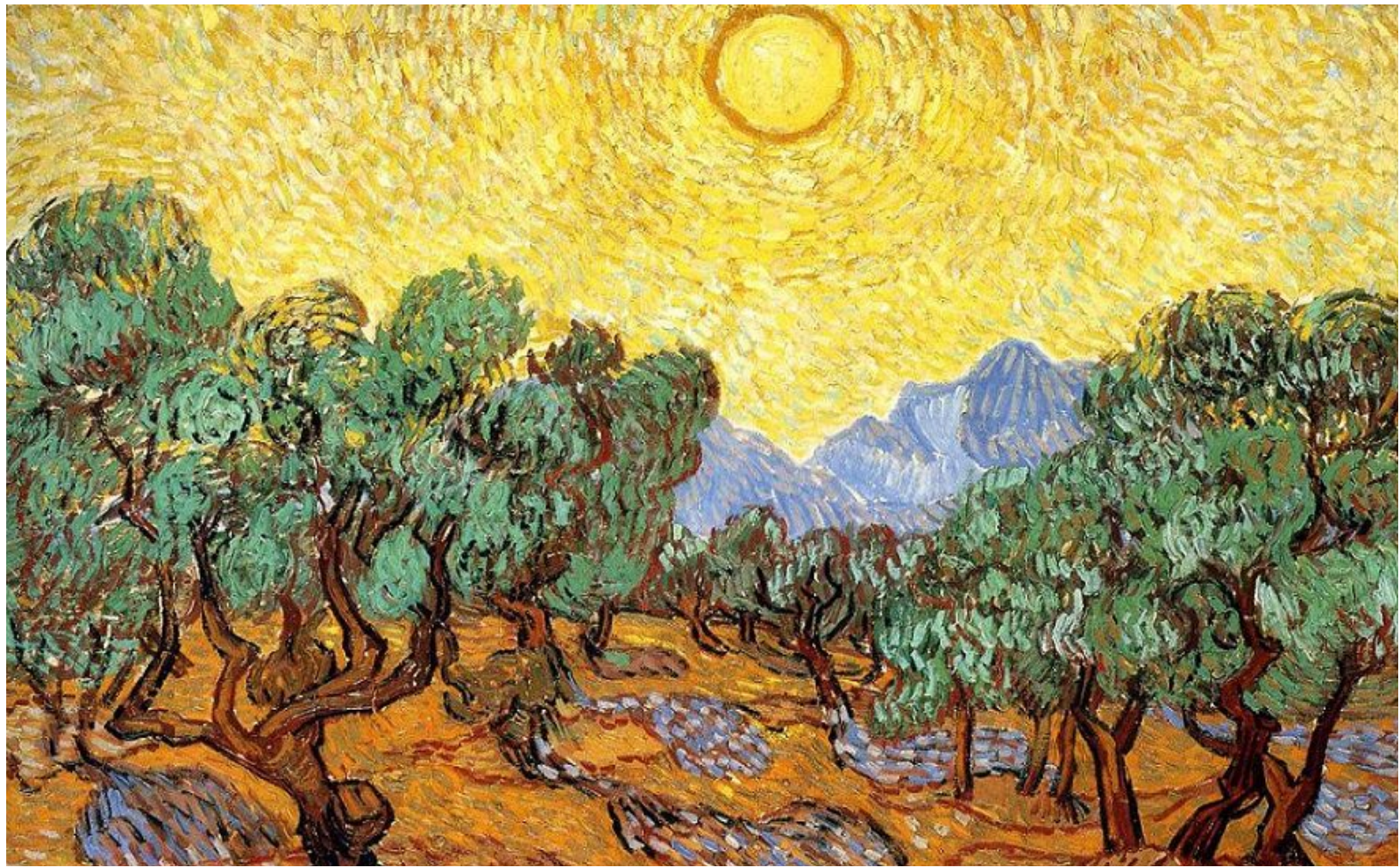
One day Vincent went for a walk in his new village. He went out his door and down the road to the railway tracks. There he found a big field full of sunflowers. Vincent loved to look at the bright colors he saw. He decided he wanted to decorate his new house with paintings of sunflowers. So he picked the prettiest sunflowers he could find. Then he took them home and put them in a vase.



He knew one of his friends, Paul Gauguin from Paris, was coming to visit him soon. He planned to hang some of his sunflower paintings in the room where Paul would be staying.







The sunflowers reminded Vincent of a lot of things he was thankful for. He was thankful to his brother for sending him money so he could paint. He was thankful to God for the sun that gave him light and warmth. And he was thankful that his friend Paul was coming to visit him soon.

In his painting called *Sunflowers* you can see fifteen sunflowers. Each one has a different size and shape. The curled and jagged lines make the flowers look like they are moving. The colors he used are very bright and beautiful. You can almost smell the flowers he painted. And the yellow color he used to paint looks like the sun when it is hot outside. Vincent's friend Paul really liked his paintings of the sunflowers. He was also an artist so he painted a picture of Vincent painting these pretty yellow flowers.



But Vincent did not always feel happy. He sometimes felt very sad. Painting helped him feel better. In 1889 Vincent did a painting called the *Pieta*. A pieta is a painting of Mary, the mother of Jesus, holding him after his death. If you look closely at the face of Jesus you will see Vincent's own face. He often felt like he was suffering like Jesus. While he was working on this painting he was living in a special hospital. He hoped this hospital would help him get better and not feel so sad inside.

Vincent painted Jesus' clothes yellow. The color yellow reminded him of the warm sun and pretty sunflowers. It made him feel happy. Jesus' mother is wearing the same kind of clothes that the nurses in the hospital wore when they were taking care of him.



Another famous painting of Vincent's is called the *Starry Night*. He was looking out his hospital window at night when he painted this. Vincent loved music and he liked to make his paintings look like they are moving to music. This painting shows a sky that looks like it is in motion. There are eleven large stars swirling and shining. In the top right corner you can see the moon covering part of the sun. He may have gotten the idea to paint this from the story in the Bible of Joseph, who dreamed he saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon bowing down to him.



Vincent wrote to his brother Theo, "The sight of the stars always makes me dream."

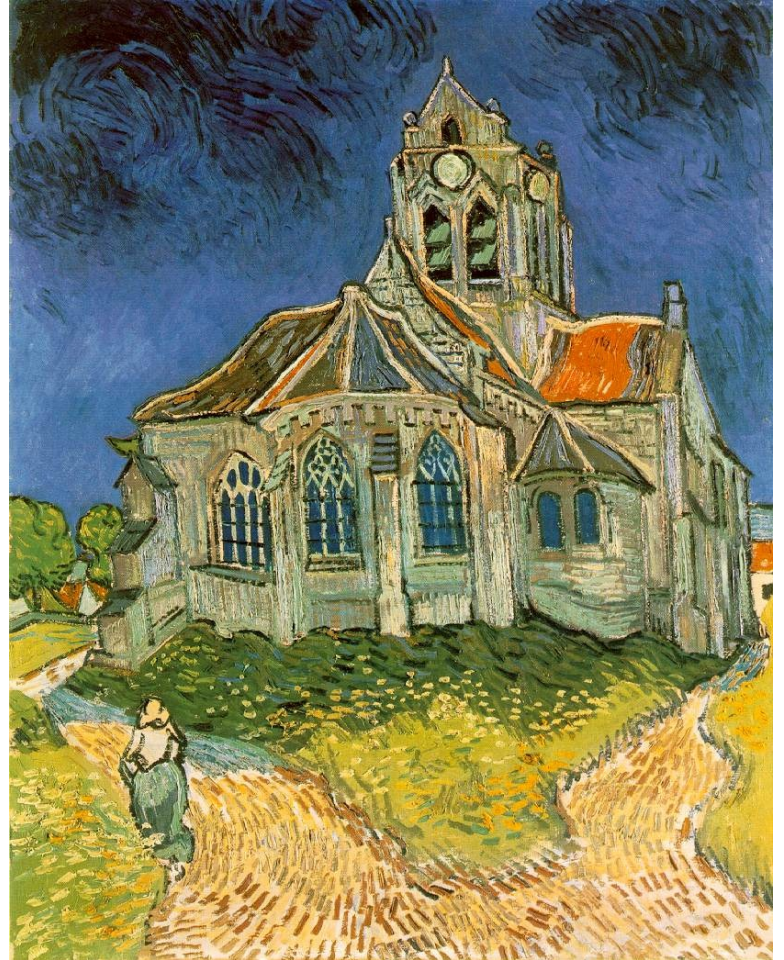
Vincent liked to describe himself as a traveler going somewhere. The following year Vincent travelled north to Paris to visit Theo. He then moved to a city just outside Paris called Auvers where he became sick again. Here he met a friend who was a doctor. He helped take care of Vincent.





Vincent continued painting until he died that summer. He died on July 29, 1890 in his brother's arms.

Not many people were interested in Vincent's drawings or paintings while he was alive. He only sold one painting and a few drawings.



People did not understand what a special talent God had given Vincent to paint and to create beauty. Today people realize how great his gift really was. His paintings are some of the most popular in the world.